Freedom dreaming futures for Black youth: Exploring meanings of liberation in education and psychology research

Edited by
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Freedom dreaming futures for Black youth: Exploring meanings of liberation in education and psychology research

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Editorial: Freedom dreaming futures for Black youth: exploring meanings of liberation in education and psychology research

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KEYWORDS

Black youth, education, freedom, liberation psychology, developmental science

Editorial on the Research Topic
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How do Black youth claim their humanity and dignity within educational settings? How do we nurture and promote Black youths' capacity for joy, love, and creativity in educational settings? How have Black youth, Black families, and Black educators found ways to matter within educational settings that threaten to devalue and demean us?

In Dr. Love's (2019) call for educational freedom, she states,

"[t]he practice of abolitionist teaching is rooted in the internal desire we all have for freedom, joy, restorative justice (restoring humanity, not just rules), and to matter to ourselves, our community, our family, and our country with the profound understanding that we must 'demand the impossible' by refusing injustice and the disposability of dark children." (p. 7)

In the current Research Topic, "*Freedom Dreaming Futures for Black Youth: Exploring Meanings of Liberation in Education and Psychology Research*," we join broader scholarly conversations on racial justice and radical healing (Kelley, 2002) by actively uplifting the complex lives and stories of Black children and youth in educational settings. We received an array of conceptual, qualitative, and quantitative articles, which collectively, offer a **CREED** around freedom dreaming for Black youth's educational futures:

1) **C**ultivating safe and brave spaces for Black youth in education,
2) **(RE)**envisioning education to center Black joy, creativity, and imagination
3) **E**mbracing Black youth's ideas about their education, and
4) **D**isrupting normative research practices.

(1) Cultivating Safe and Brave Spaces for Black Youth in Education: Four articles in this topic address how Black youth and their communities resist anti-Black educational violence and disempowering experiences in school settings (Kubi et al.; Luney; Mathews et al.; Mayes et al.). For instance, Kubi et al. drew upon a Black life-making framework

(Mustaffa, 2017) to examine ethnic-racial socialization, critical consciousness, and critical action as key features of Black adolescents' sociopolitical development. Their results highlight the importance of examining Black youth's resistance to socialization experiences amidst school policies that center whiteness in day-to-day school practices. Relatedly, Mayes et al. provide a comprehensive overview of how school counselors can merge healing-centered engagement (Ginwright, 2018) with freedom dreaming to address the lack of culturally responsive and anti-racist practices in school counseling programming. They discuss healing-centered and Indigenous educational practices (Gee et al., 2014), critical hip-hop approaches (Levy and Adjapong, 2020), and Youth Participatory Action Research (Langhout and Thomas, 2010) as tools that can support Black youths' ability to experience joy, embrace creativity, resist systems of oppression, and lean into their power.

(2) (Re)Envisioning Education to Center Black Joy, Creativity, and Imagination: How do we transform the field of education in ways that honor Black youths' joy, imagination, and creativity? Five studies (Fearon; Kaler-Jones; LeBlanc and Loyd; Mathews et al.; Scott et al.) aim to respond to this question by identifying the ways that scholars and educators can build on the legacy of abolitionist teaching (Love, 2019) and Afrofuturistic pedagogy (Dando et al., 2019; Boyd Acuff, 2020) to remap Black youths' educational experiences in ways that support their sociopolitical voices, visions, and agency. Scott et al. offer a conceptual piece contextualizing Black youths' imagination in relation to their sociopolitical development and transformative political action. They discuss how we can offer Black youth the necessary fugitive spaces and opportunities to envision and help create a just society, while also preserving/promoting/providing the childness of their childhood. Mathews et al. highlight curricula and pedagogical practices that normalize and celebrate Black students' success in STEM by exploring how teacher-student relationships can foster learning spaces that allow joy, creativity, and youth's personal interests to drive STEM development. They discuss how educators can cultivate Black liberatory STEM spaces by creating opportunities to link Black youth's identities to STEM success, helping youth recognize the scientific inquiry embedded in their daily lives, and embedding the legacy of Black excellence within school programming.

(3) Embracing Black Students' Ideas about their Education: Five articles in this topic used qualitative or participatory action approaches to foreground Black youths' experiences and freedom dreams within education (Burnett et al.; Duane and Mims; Kaler-Jones; Luney; Stewart). Kaler-Jones integrated theoretical perspectives on abolitionist teaching and critical race feminism (Evans-Winters and Esposito, 2010) to explore how Black adolescent girls leveraged creative expression to reclaim personal and historical narratives, dream new worlds, and use art as activism within a virtual summer arts program. Her study demonstrates how educators and researchers can employ creative, participatory, and arts-based practices and methodologies to explore how Black girls write themselves and their existence into the future. While most studies focused on Black adolescents or children, Luney explored the resistance strategies that Black womxn and femme college students practiced in response to gendered racism and misogynoir

(i.e., anti-Black misogyny; Bailey and Trudy, 2018). Luney found that self-education, direct confrontation with aggressors, and communal humor with other Black students helped them cope with racism on campus, and Luney discusses how we can be accountable in sustaining transformative changes in educational settings.

(4) Disrupting Dominant Research Practices: Across studies, scholars in the current Research Topic demonstrate the importance of disrupting dominant research practices that misrepresent and marginalize Black youths' experiences. This includes reflecting on our positionality in relation to our work, integrating research with creative practice, and valuing Black youth as co-creators during the research process. For instance, Fearon used endarkened feminist epistemology (Dillard, 2000) to highlight how Black mothers living in Toronto came together to reimagine their children's learning experiences and establish alternative sites of learning and community. Fearon challenges traditional methodological approaches that valorize objectivity in the research process and separate the researcher and researched (Toliver, 2021) through a short story and arts-informed approach (Cole and Knowles, 2008). Kaler-Jones worked alongside eight Black adolescent girls to create a performance ethnography. Throughout data collection, Kaler-Jones disrupted normative power dynamics by recognizing the girls' contributions as co-researchers who were involved in the training, data collection, analysis, and artmaking. Black girls' voices were front and center throughout the research process, including displaying their artwork. Collectively, these scholars point to promising avenues for future interdisciplinary research, wherein we work alongside Black youth, families, and broader communities about what it means to dream, imagine, and work toward socially just, responsive, and loving educational contexts.

Author contributions

All authors listed have made a substantial, direct, and intellectual contribution to the work and approved it for publication.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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Corrigendum: Editorial: Freedom dreaming futures for Black youth: exploring meanings of liberation in education and psychology research

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A corrigendum on

Editorial: Freedom dreaming futures for Black youth: exploring meanings of liberation in education and psychology research

by Leath, S. C., Mims, L., and Inniss-Thompson, M. N. (2023). *Front. Educ.* 8:1215719. doi: 10.3389/feduc.2023.1215719

In the published article, there was an error in the numbered list on page 1: two words were missing from point 1, "1) **C**ultivating safe and brave spaces for in education". This should have been written as "1) **C**ultivating safe and brave spaces for Black youth in education".

The authors apologize for this error and state that this does not change the scientific conclusions of the article in any way. The original article has been updated.

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"When I Think of Black Girls, I Think of Opportunities": Black Girls' Identity Development and the Protective Role of Parental Socialization in Educational Settings

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While educational settings may be envisioned as safe spaces that facilitate learning, foster creativity, and promote healthy development for youth, research has found that this is not always true for Black girls. Their negative experiences within educational settings are both gendered and racialized, often communicating broader societal perceptions of Black girls that ultimately shape their identity development. Utilizing semi-structured interviews with adolescent Black girls ($n = 12$), the current investigation explored Black girls' educational experiences, their meaning making of Black girlhood, and the role of parents in their positive development. By centering Black girls' voices, this study illuminated how Black girls negotiate their multiple marginalized identities and how their identities are shaped by their home and school environments. Findings revealed that Black girls are aware of the difficulties in navigating educational settings for Black girls, but this awareness was coupled with parental support that promoted positive gendered racial identities for Black girls in middle school and high school. This investigation advanced current knowledge of Black girls' identity development and highlighted the protective role of parental socialization. Future research directions and implications are also discussed.

Keywords: Black girls, parental socialization, schools, identity, adolescent development

INTRODUCTION

> "When I think of Black girls, I think of opportunities. And I think of options. And I think of possibilities. But I also think of harder workers and having more to do and not a fair playing field."
>
> Ruth, 8th grade, 13 years old

Empirical and theoretical research highlights that Black girls' experiences within educational settings are both gendered and racialized, including interactions with peers, teachers, as well as broader systemic school policies (Chavous and Cogburn, 2007; Evans-Winters and Esposito, 2010; Evans-Winters, 2014; Morris and Perry, 2017; Neal-Jackson, 2018). For example, compared to students of other races, research has found that teachers and counselors report lower educational expectations

and perceptions of academic engagement and motivation for Black girls (West-Olatunji et al., 2010; Archer-Banks and Behar-Horenstein, 2012; Pringle et al., 2012; Neal-Jackson, 2018; Carter Andrews et al., 2019). Further, Pringle et al. (2012) found that teachers expressed lower educational expectations of Black girls, especially when positioned as math and science learners. Instead, research conducted by Francis (2012) indicated that teachers were more likely to perceive middle school aged Black girls as more disruptive than their White, Asian, and Hispanic peers even after controlling for academic performance and socioeconomic status. According to Epstein and colleagues (2020) report, Black girls are 4.19 times more likely to be suspended and 3.99 times more likely to be expelled compared to White girls. Studies have linked the prevalence and subsequent implications of teacher-based discrimination and disproportionate discipline policies on Black girls' academic and psychosocial adjustment (Blake et al., 2011; Bryan et al., 2018; Leath et al., 2019; Butler-Barnes and Inniss-Thompson, 2020; Hines-Datiri and Carter Andrews, 2020; Cooper et al., 2022).

While educational spaces may be envisioned as safe spaces for many youth, studies specific to Black girls have found that Black girls experience discrimination in their school and classroom contexts (Morris, 2007; Morris and Perry, 2017; Nunn, 2018; Carter Andrews et al., 2019). These experiences communicate broader societal perceptions of Black girls' academic abilities and inform their identity development. Using a qualitative framework, Mims and Williams (2020) found that Black girls reported experiencing bullying by their peers that often invoke stereotypical language and imagery learned within the classroom (i.e., being called slaves during history lessons). Archer-Banks and Behar-Horenstein (2012) suggest that Black girls' academic identity is molded by their experiences in the classroom and broader school context, underscoring how school contexts may be "racially stigmatizing." As Black girls begin to recognize the ways their lives are dually gendered and racialized, they often seek the guidance of additional socialization agents, such as their parents, to process these experiences and seek adaptive ways to cope and navigate school settings. This is particularly true during adolescence, which is a developmental period often marked by increasing awareness of bias and experiences of racism and discrimination (Seaton and Tyson, 2019; English et al., 2020; Tynes et al., 2020). Umaña-Taylor et al. (2014) explain that this greater awareness emerges as result of increased social-cognitive maturity which can (1) lead adolescents to merge their personal sense of self with their racial group and (2) explore different meanings of race beyond what their parents tell them. Thus, racial socialization remains valuable during adolescence as Black girls experience a new racial reality, but it is also complicated by normative shifts in identity development when youth become more autonomous and potentially less receptive to their parents' socialization efforts (Smetana et al., 2015).

Nonetheless, parents cannot shield their Black daughters from the realities of individual and structural level discrimination. Studies have, however, highlighted the ways Black mothers and fathers have supported their children in ways that are promotive of healthy identities and protect against the negative effects of discrimination (Murry et al., 2018; Anderson and Stevenson, 2019; Cooper et al., 2020; Umaña-Taylor and Hill, 2020; Jones et al., 2021). Noting the historical context of the Black experience in the United States, many Black parents engage in conversations with their children that reflect race-related concerns and expectations, which is defined as parental ethnic-racial socialization (Hughes et al., 2006; Anderson and Stevenson, 2019; Cooper et al., 2020; Jones et al., 2021). There is a robust body of research that positions parental ethnic-racial socialization as beneficial for Black youth. The current study expands this work by considering concurrently communicated dimensions of ethnic-racial socialization at the intersections of gender and academic socialization (Cooper and Smalls, 2010; Stokes et al., 2020; Cunningham, 2021; Huguley et al., 2021).

Seeking to provide a comprehensive approach and further appraise the study of positive development among Black girls, this investigation centers Black girls' voices as they articulate their own educational experiences and how they have informed their understanding of Black girlhood. As part of this broader landscape, we also contend that Black parents utilize a variety of messages and strategies to actively resist the negative portrayals of Black girls (e.g., disengaged; disruptive) and combat inequitable practices in K-12 school settings. Leveraging qualitative methods, the current study expands our understanding of the tools and strategies Black parents equip their daughters with to facilitate healthy identity development while also promoting academic engagement. Together, this study demonstrates the collective influence of home and school contexts in the development of Black girls.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Ethnic-Racial Socialization

Ethnic-racial socialization (ERS) encompasses the messages, behaviors, and strategies parents share with children regarding race and culture (Hughes et al., 2006; Brown et al., 2010). Scholars have highlighted the multidimensional nature of ERS (Hughes et al., 2006) and the literature emphasizes key dimensions such as egalitarian (strategies that emphasize the individual over groups due to the belief that all groups are equal, often paired with color-evasive perspectives), racial pride (the teaching of cultural knowledge, values, customs, and traditions), preparation for bias (preparing youth for racism/discrimination and providing strategies to cope) and promotion of mistrust (Hughes et al., 2006; Umaña-Taylor and Hill, 2020; messages that emphasize distrusting other ethnic-racial groups). Research has found that ERS messages are often promotive and protective and lead to a positive impact on a variety of psychosocial and academic outcomes in Black youth (Neblett et al., 2006; Wang and Huguley, 2012; Varner et al., 2018; Anderson and Stevenson, 2019; Umaña-Taylor and Hill, 2020). For example, Wang and Huguley (2012) found that cultural socialization messages (positive messages about one's racial group related to pride, history and tradition) attenuated the negative effect of teacher and peer discrimination on Black youth's educational aspirations and GPA. Banerjee et al. (2018) found that when adolescents reported high levels

of preparation for bias and cultural socialization messages from their parents, ERS acted as a buffer against the effects of peer discrimination on Black youth's academic persistence, self-efficacy, and self-concept. However, when low levels of ERS messages were reported, peer discrimination was associated with less favorable outcomes (Banerjee et al., 2018). It is important to note that additional studies have found no significant relationship or, in some cases, a negative relationship, between ERS messages and both psychosocial and academic outcomes depending on the ERS dimension (McHale et al., 2006; Neblett et al., 2006; Smalls, 2009; Umaña-Taylor and Hill, 2020). The equivocal nature of this literature has pointed to the importance of considering the frequency and intensity of ERS messages as well as the broader relational context between a parent and child (Coard et al., 2004; Cooper and McLoyd, 2011; Umaña-Taylor and Hill, 2020).

Research has also suggested that parents' ERS messages and motivations for employing these messages may differ based upon parent and child gender (Bowman and Howard, 1985; Thomas and Speight, 1999; Brown et al., 2010; Caughy et al., 2011; Cooper et al., 2020). For instance, Brown et al. (2010) found that, though both mothers and fathers engaged in ERS messaging, adolescents reported that maternal caregivers engaged in more ERS messaging across dimensions. Additionally, compared to the adolescent boys in this sample, the adolescent girls reported receiving more ERS messaging from their parents (Brown et al., 2010). Bowman and Howard (1985) found that girls received more racial pride messaging, whereas boys reported more egalitarian and racial barrier (preparation for bias) messages from their parents. Studies which highlight Black parents' differential motivations and messaging for their sons and daughters, provides some support for gendered ERS (Bowman and Howard, 1985; Thomas and Speight, 1999; Hughes et al., 2006; Cooper et al., 2020). For instance, Cooper et al. (2020) qualitative investigation found that Black fathers had distinct gendered ERS motivations, including catalysts and strategies for supporting their daughters' and sons' development. For example, fathers in this sample emphasized messages around education and positive self-image with their daughters compared to messages about personal safety with their sons. Collectively, these studies suggest the need to capture motivations and catalysts for ethnic-racial socialization.

Gendered Racial Socialization

Compared to their sons, research indicates that Black parents communicate distinct types of ERS messages to their daughters. Thomas and Speight (1999) work helped to ground later exploration into gendered racial socialization of Black girls as they found that Black girls received messaging focusing on education, beauty, sex, relationships, racial pride, and independence compared to boys' messaging regarding the awareness of and overcoming racial barriers and egalitarianism. Building on these findings, Thomas and King (2007) employed a mixed-method design to understand gendered racial socialization among Black mother-daughter dyads. Findings revealed that coded themes were similar between mothers and daughters, including a joint emphasis on messages around self-determination, self-pride, racial pride, and spirituality. Overall, themes from this investigation suggested that, as a *double minority*, Black girls share a unique developmental context and

socialization may help them navigate and cope with gendered racism (Lewis et al., 2013). Parents then often engage in gendered racial socialization, sharing messages with their daughters that prepare them for these realities and provide strategies to ensure that their daughters are still able to develop a healthy and positive self-image in the face of gendered racism.

Using a sample of college-aged Black women, Brown et al. (2017) developed a gendered racial socialization measure (Gendered Racial-Ethnic Socialization Scale for Black Women; GRESS-BW) to retroactively capture the frequency of gendered racial socialization messages women received from their parents. The exploratory factor analysis revealed nine factors across 63 items: gendered racial pride and empowerment; family expectations and responsibilities; internalized gendered racial oppression; independence, career, and educational success; sexual behavior; oppression awareness; sisterhood; religious faith and spirituality; gendered racial hardship. Additional validation will be required, but the initial development of the GRESS-BW is a promising advancement in understanding the messages that Black girls receive from their parents that will ultimately shape their identity. Though little work has yet to use this scale with adolescent girls, Stokes et al. (2020) recent investigation, the first of its kind to use (GRESS-BW) with adolescents, confirms that subscales of GRESS-BW are reliable among a sample of adolescent Black girls. Girls reported receiving a high frequency of gendered racial pride and empowerment messages and far fewer messages regarding internalized gendered racial oppression. Both tested dimensions of gendered racial socialization were positively associated with girls' racial identity. This is particularly important to note as racial identity was indirectly and directly associated with Black girls' depressive symptoms. This novel study underscores the necessity of considering how gendered racial socialization may shape Black girls' identity and reflect their lived experiences.

Academic Socialization

One common theme in the gendered racial socialization literature is the emphasis that Black parents of girls place on the importance of academic achievement for advancement (Thomas and Speight, 1999; Brown et al., 2017; Cooper et al., 2020). Collectively, these studies suggest the need to explore the content and frequency of parents' discussion of academics with their Black daughters through academic socialization. Academic socialization can be defined as the messages, behaviors, and expectations that parents share with their children to encourage and foster academic development and adjustment (Taylor et al., 2004). Black parents' school involvement extends beyond the classroom, as they often participate in a variety of activities that promote academic interest and engagement with their children (Martin, 2006; Cooper and Smalls, 2010; Archer-Banks and Behar-Horenstein, 2012; Latunde and Clark-Louque, 2016). For instance, Latunde and Clark-Louque (2016) found that 60% of Black parents engaged in educational activities, such as visiting museums and attending weekly educational-based camps. Utilizing individual interview and focus group data, Archer-Banks and Behar-Horenstein (2012) revealed that Black girls received various academic socialization messages from their parents, ranging from monitoring academic

progress and homework completion to encouraging enrollment in advanced rigorous courses. Additionally, girls mentioned the roles of parents and grandparents as a place of support as they encouraged them to persevere despite obstacles that they were facing within school contexts (Archer-Banks and Behar-Horenstein, 2012).

Huguley et al. (2021) contend that previous research on parental involvement (home and school-based) and academic socialization centers the lived experiences of White and middle-class families, ignoring critical cultural and developmental contexts and misses the ways Black parents facilitate the educational advancement of their children through culturally relevant strategies such as how to cope with school-based discrimination (Huguley et al., 2021). Themes derived from focus groups and interviews with Black parents suggested two domains of racialized academic socialization: cultural academic socialization and racial bias academic socialization. *Cultural academic socialization* was defined as "socializing activities at home that were designed to promote positive racial identities and academic motivation simultaneously." Racial bias academic socialization incorporated the ways parents helped their children cope with implicit and overt discrimination experiences that could impede their academic progress and success (Huguley et al., 2021). Similar to the benefits of ERS, previous research has found that academic socialization is linked to positive academic outcomes among Black youth (Cooper and Smalls, 2010; Metzger et al., 2020). For example, Cooper and Smalls (2010) found that increased academic involvement and educational encouragement (academic socialization) from parents were associated with greater academic engagement and higher academic self-esteem in Black middle school-aged youth. Recent work by Metzger et al. (2020) further explores how socialization practices influence Black youths' academic development and adjustment by identifying various socialization profiles at the intersection of race and academic socialization. The most common profile of the sample was of parents who were multifaceted socializers. These parents reported moderate academic involvement, educational encouragement, racial pride, preparation for bias, and egalitarian messages. Results found that adolescents whose parents were classified as multifaceted socializers reported significantly greater academic self-beliefs than those whose parents were in the preparation for bias socializers group. These findings further confirm the need for future studies exploring academic socialization through a culturally situated lens.

Theoretical Foundations and Goals of the Study

Acknowledging the need for a model that considers how Black children process and make meaning of their lived experiences, Spencer proposed a model called the Phenomenological Variant of Ecological Systems Theory (PVEST). Within the Spencer (1995) model, PVEST begins with acknowledging the effects of self-other appraisals—how one perceives how others view them with special consideration to both biases and stereotypes in a host of domains (e.g., race, gender, and socioeconomic status).

PVEST posits that how someone makes meaning of these self-other appraisals also impacts their stress engagement which leads to their reactive coping strategies. It is through these reactive coping strategies—adaptive and/or maladaptive, through which stable identities begin to emerge. Among the multiple identities that can emerge, Spencer (1995) highlights how people identify who they are regarding their culture and ethnicity, gender role identities, and even their own self-efficacy. Lastly, these emerged identities consequently lead to select health and behavioral related outcomes. In this model, Spencer (1995) emphasizes that these outcomes can both be adverse (e.g., deviance, poor health) or productive (e.g., competence, healthy relationships). The emphasis on meaning-making within PVEST is relevant to this study as we seek to understand *how* Black girls' identity development is shaped by the home and academic context. This investigation is especially interested in exploring the adaptive strategies Black parents employ to help their daughters navigate their educational experiences and maintain a healthy sense of self. Further evaluation into Black girls' negotiation of their multiple identities in relation to their educational experiences is needed.

Building upon this theoretical foundation, the proposed study employs a theoretical thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006) to understand how various forms of parental socialization may contextualize and influence Black adolescent girls' identity development. Our use of this approach is strengthened by PVEST, which emphasizes youths' own meaning-making processes and recognizes their critical role as interpreters of their own experiences. The proposed research has two main research questions: (1) How are Black girls making meaning of Black girlhood and in what ways might their identity processing be related to parental socialization? and (2) Are there differences in the identity processing and the content of reported parental socialization of Black girls in middle school compared to Black girls in high school?

METHODS

Participants

Thirteen adolescents who self-identified as Black girls agreed to participate in the current investigation. One participant chose to end the interview during the first question and has been excluded from the analysis, resulting in a final sample of 12 adolescent Black girls (Mage = 13.66). Recent studies focused on Black girls' identity development and school experiences have been published with samples of a comparable size (Mims and Williams, 2020; Mayes et al., 2021; Rogers and Butler-Barnes, 2022), which further illustrates that this sample size ($n = 12$) is effective for examining our research aims. This investigation had an even split in which six of the participants were currently in middle school and six participants were currently in high school. Seven girls resided in or attended school in City 1 while five girls resided in or attended school in City 2. In the current sample, 11 of the participants attended a public school and one participant attended a private religious-based school. For girls in this sample, the percentage of Black students at their schools ranged from 3.4 to 78.2% (NCES, 2022). Additionally, the percentage of students in their school that were eligible to receive free or reduced

TABLE 1 | Participant demographics.

Pseudonym	Age	City	Grade level	School racial demographics	Free/reduced lunch
Dorothy	16	City 2	10th	36% Black	47.9%
Marie	12	City 2	7th	41.6% Black	51.2%
Alexa	11	City 1	6th	46.0.% Black	53.0%
Shirley	11	City 1	6th	41.3% Black	51.4%
Margaret	14	City 2	9th	37.8% Black	35.9%
Mary	12	City 1	7th	48.2% Black	30.8%
Katherine	16	City 2	11th	43.4% Black	38.9%
Marsha	17	City 1	12th	3.4% Black	N/A
Patricia	13	City 1	8th	48.2% Black	30.8%
Ruth	13	City 1	8th	48.2% Black	30.8%
Gladys	15	City 1	9th	27.9% Black	19.7%
Mae	14	City 2	9th	78.2% Black	99.8%

lunch ranged from 19.7 to 99.8% (NCES, 2022). All participants were assigned a pseudonym to protect their confidentiality. Full participant demographics can be found in **Table 1**.

Procedure

After receiving approval from the [University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Institution Review Board] Institution Review Board, Black adolescent girls were recruited for individual interviews. The current study employed targeted online efforts to reach Black parents of middle and high school girls living in or attending school in two cities in the Southeastern region of the United States. Also, participants were given a flier at time of recruitment to share with anyone in their network that was also eligible to participate in the study. Due to similar demographic make-ups and vast school choice alternatives, the two cities were intentionally selected for targeted recruitment. Both cities were racially diverse with median household incomes of $52,106 and $45,787 in city 1 and city 2, respectively. Though variation within school resources, course offerings, and teacher qualifications exists, the opportunity for students to attend magnet schools outside of their residential zone was available in both counties.

In the current investigation, 12 semi-structured interviews were conducted with adolescent Black girls. Interviews had an average duration of 32 min. However, there was variability in interview duration, with interviews lasting between 23 and 42 min. Before beginning the interview, participants were reminded of the study's goals, the researcher's responsibility in protecting their privacy and confidentiality, and potential risks and benefits of the study. Participants also were told that they could refuse to answer any questions or conclude participation in the interview at any time. All interviews began with an initial rapport building discussion. The developed interview protocol used a variety of prompts to discuss three topics: (1) understanding of and meaning making around Black girlhood, (2) general attitudes and experiences regarding school and STEM, and (3) messaging received from parental figures. A full list of the structured questions asked during the interview can be found in the **Supplementary Materials**.

Positionality Statements

The lead author is a Black woman who grew up in the South. Though my parents did not have many explicit conversations about what it means to be Black, I was always surrounded by Black families, culture, and traditions. I grew up in the Black church and was born in a city rich with a history of activism. I was always proud to be Black. I grew up in the free and reduced-price lunch program and attended public schools that were lower resourced. Through my parents' advocacy, I was eventually placed on an academic track that granted me access to honors and advanced courses throughout my K-12 education. My parents always made sure that I knew that I was smart and capable, immersing me in messages around the importance of education. They maintained high academic expectations. College was never a choice. My research is grounded in resilience frameworks (Spencer, 1995; Garcia Coll et al., 1996) that acknowledge cultural assets and multifaceted supports that facilitate Black girls' positive development. Through my work, I strive to honor and accurately represent Black girls' emerging identities and lived experiences as they navigate their social and academic contexts.

The second author is a Black woman who was raised in the North. I grew up in an under-resourced, Black neighborhood and had a racially and economically-diverse extended family, which made my understanding of race and class more apparent from a young age. My awareness of my race, class, size, and gender led to many conversations from my parents about how to navigate our neighborhood, city, country, and world. My parents not only made sure that I was aware of why it was beautiful to be Black, but also discussed the historical and contemporary barriers that Black people have to face. They value education, community, and integrity. I have experience in my mostly Black neighborhood elementary school (Pre-K; 2–5th grade), a mostly White gifted/talented elementary school briefly (K, 1st grade), and a racially diverse gifted/talented program for middle and high school. For my secondary education, I attended Predominately White Institutions and led a Black women focused organization on campus. My work involves telling authentic and dynamic stories about Black families and neighborhoods in a way that acknowledges the

adversity and uplifts the processes and factors that keep us here today.

The third author is a Multiracial-Black woman who was raised in the Western region of the United States by her single white mother. The area that I lived in was extremely rural and over 90% of the residents were white, so I was often one of the only Black children in the neighborhoods and schools that I grew up in. I was frequently stereotyped and discriminated against within these spaces based on the intersections of my race, gender, and class which resulted in me experiencing harsher disciplinary infractions and fewer academic opportunities like taking advanced placement courses than my peers. My mother did attempt to implicitly advocate on my behalf within educational spaces, but would rarely discuss matters of racism or race generally with me. My father, who is Black, lived in the Northeastern region of the U.S., so he was often unable to intervene but he did his best to expose me to positive messaging about Black people and culture to make sure that I was proud to be Black. We also talked frequently about the unique barriers, like gendered racism, that I was facing as a Black girl in my rural hometown and how I could cope with it through activism and resistance. My research now considers how these intersectional conversations about race and gender can shape the identity and wellbeing of Black and Multiracial-Black youth during critical periods of development.

The fourth author is a Black woman who was raised in the Southeastern United States. My mother is Black American. My father is Caribbean and immigrated to the United States as a young adult. I grew up in a small, agricultural town, located outside of a metro area. Several generations of my family also lived in close proximity to this area, providing connections to my large extended family and access to community and fictive kin supports. My parents, though divorced, emphasized the importance of Black cultural heritage as well as historical and present racial barriers impacting the Black community. My parents and extended family endorsed the value of education, the power of voice, and community preservation. Also, my awareness of race, equity, class, and gender was catalyzed by my own interactions and observations as a Black female residing in a predominately White community, attending overwhelmingly White schools in my K-12 education. My post-secondary educational institutions were Predominately White Institutions (PWI), though I was a member of multiple cultural and social justice organizations. Currently, as a tenured faculty at a PWI, my work has been grounded in strengths-based approaches that disrupt deficit narratives about Black families and communities, while also understanding how racism and structural inequities can subvert wellbeing across the life span.

DATA ANALYSIS

Transcription of Interviews

All video interviews were recorded, and audio files were then downloaded for transcription. Transcription was done verbatim by using the automated transcription capabilities found in Zoom. All identifying information (e.g., child's name, school, and teacher's name) was redacted from the transcripts to protect the privacy and confidentiality of each participant. Transcripts were then reviewed to correct any inaccuracies and improve the quality of the transcript in the case of inaudible instances by three self-identifying Black undergraduate research team members (one cisgender man, one cisgender woman, and one non-binary individual) and the principal investigator (Black cisgender woman).

Codebook Development and Refinement

Codes were developed in a way that closely aligned with PVEST and our research questions (Braun and Clarke, 2006). PVEST (Spencer, 1995; Spencer et al., 1997), as our guiding theoretical foundation, emphasizes youths' meaning-making about multiple aspects of their identity formation, while also considering the varied coping strategies they may employ in response to their lived experiences. As demonstrated in other investigations (Spates et al., 2020), theoretical thematic analysis provided the opportunity for study researchers to explore Black girls' processing around what it means to be a Black girl and how girls perceived their social positioning within their educational settings. Also, as the broader project sought to explore the role of parental socialization on Black girls' identity development and STEM engagement, the development of codes and the codebook were guided by existing frameworks and conceptualizations of gendered-racial identity, racial identity, ethnic-racial socialization, gendered racial socialization, academic socialization, and STEM socialization among Black families (Sellers et al., 1997; Hughes et al., 2006; Brown et al., 2017; Huguley et al., 2021; Williams and Lewis, 2021).

Building upon a qualitative protocol outlined in Cooper et al. (2020), an initial codebook was developed by the principal investigator to encompass seven overarching codes across identity and socialization: gender identity, racial identity, gendered racial identity, ethnic-racial socialization, gendered racial socialization, academic socialization, and STEM socialization. Within each of the seven general codes, subcodes were created to provide greater specificity into the ways these constructs emerged in the interviews. Subcodes were chosen based on previous theoretical and empirical literature regarding identity development and parental socialization dimensions among Black girls and Black youth, more broadly. A second member of the research team, a Black woman who is an advanced graduate student with expertise in Black family processes, reviewed the codebook, asked clarifying questions, and proposed additional subcodes to be included in the codebook. After discussion, researchers revised the codebook and agreed to continue refining the codebook as necessary throughout the coding process. The completed codebook included descriptions and example codes to ensure that coding remained consistent across participants. Below you will find a visual depiction of the main codes and subcodes related to socialization (see **Figure 1**) and identity (see **Figure 2**).

Coding Approach

After all interview transcripts had been deidentified and reviewed for accuracy, they were uploaded into the Dedoose

FIGURE 1 | Socialization codes and subcodes.

FIGURE 2 | Identity codes and subcodes.
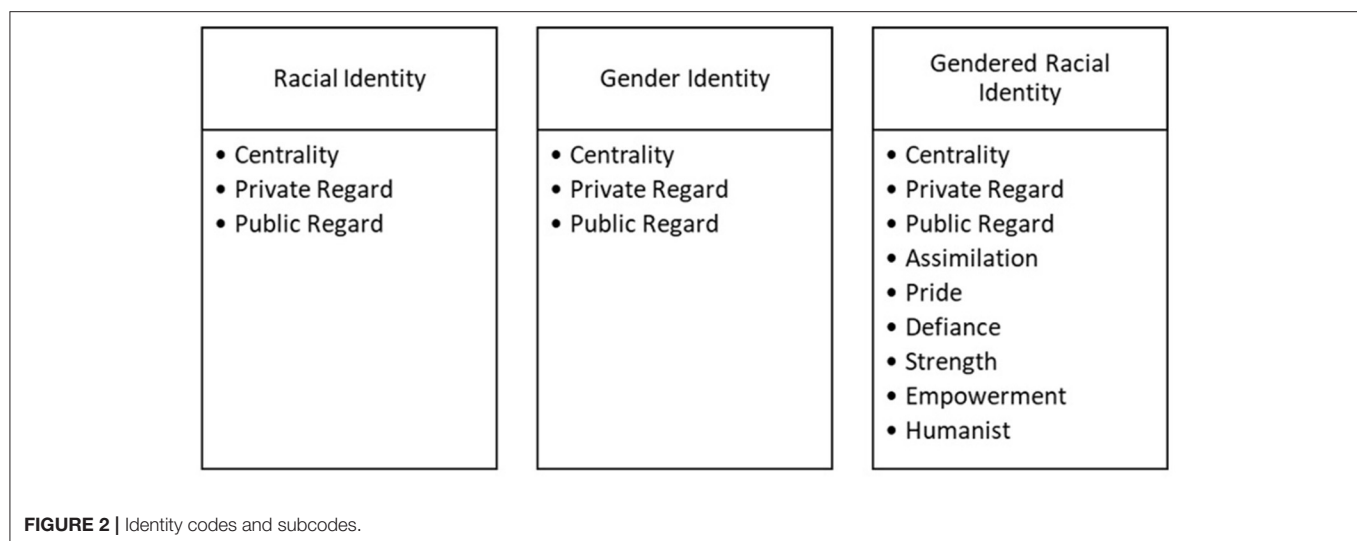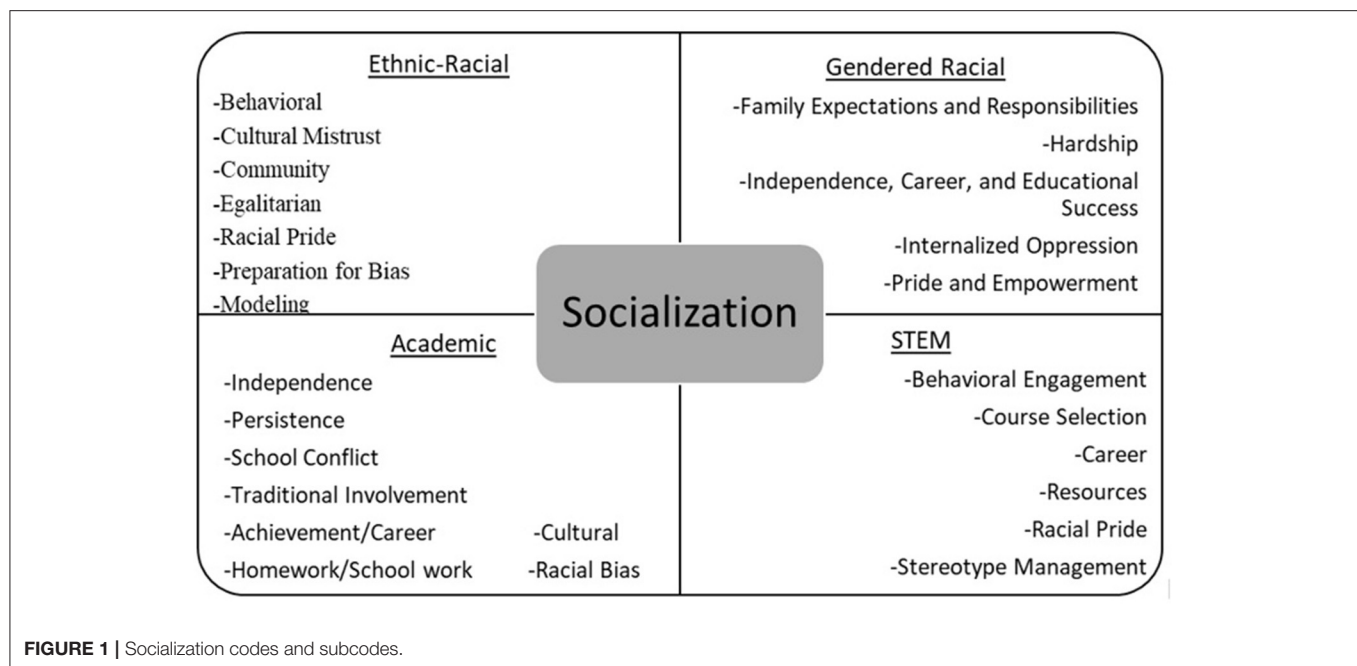
(Version 9.0.46) cloud-based data software program for coding. To ensure that the selected data codes were the best representation of the participants' voices, coding took place in multiple iterations. The lead investigator and an advanced doctoral level student completed coding. Researchers coded the full interview transcript to ensure all instances of identity development and socialization were included in analysis. As messaging around identity development and socialization practices are often happening in tandem, researchers employed the use of simultaneous coding (Saldaña, 2021).

Disagreements in the definition and application of codes were discussed and reconciled throughout the coding process to improve the quality and consistency of future coding iterations.

Coders were intentional in discussing how their lived experiences as Black women who were once Black girls as well as their own biases may shape their initial interpretations of the data. To best represent the participants' lived experiences, researchers assigned codes based on the verbatim language used by participants, always situated within the context that participants provided. To determine intercoder reliability, percent agreement between coders for all transcripts was calculated. For each coded transcript, the number of agreements were divided by the number of total codes accumulated between the two coders initially (agreements/ agreements + disagreements) and then multiplied by 100 to acquire a percentage (Miles and Huberman, 1994). For the current investigation, we had an initial percent agreement of 74.48% between coders. Guidelines

for adequate intercoder reliability estimates are mixed, however experts often recommend a coding agreement of at least 80% (Miles and Huberman, 1994; Creswell, 2014; O'Connor and Joffe, 2020). Though our agreement falls slightly below the recommended 80%, we recognize that our coding scheme was complex as it involved both a substantial number of subcodes and simultaneous coding. The lower percentage of agreement is expected as prior literature suggests that, while allowing greater specificity in codes and multiple codes per excerpt is often necessary to capture meaningful representations of data, it regularly lowers intercoder reliability (Hruschka et al., 2004; Roberts et al., 2019; O'Connor and Joffe, 2020). However, our agreement of 74.48% indicates cohesion between reviewers.

RESULTS

The current study explored the role of parental socialization on Black adolescent girls' identity development. There were two main research questions: (1) How are Black girls making meaning of Black girlhood and in what ways might their identity processing be related to parental socialization? and (2) Are there differences in the identity processing and the content of reported parental socialization of Black girls in middle school compared to Black girls in high school?

Research Question 1: How are Black girls making meaning of Black girlhood and in what ways might their identity processing be related to parental socialization?

For the first research question, four themes emerged: (1) "Not like the other girls," (2) Positive identities despite negative portrayals, (3) Awareness of stereotypes and their influence in K-12 Education, and (4) Affirmations in the face of anti-Blackness. Example quotes for each emergent theme and the subcodes associated with each quote can be found below in **Table 2**.

Not Like the *Other* Girls

Participants in this investigation emphasized their unique social positioning, being both Black and female. In fact, several girls expressed not being able to provide an answer for what being a girl meant to them generally as they only considered their experience as a Black girl, feeling that they did not share a collective experience with girls of all races.

> "I feel like it's very different from being like, a white girl, or you know, any other race or ethnicity. Um, I think that Black girls go through a lot more than any, like, than any other girl of a different race. I don't know. I just feel like we've been put down in a different way. I don't know how to explain it yeah. I think it's just different. It's very different."
>
> Marsha, 17 years old, 12th Grade

In participants' awareness of their unique social positioning, they often underscored how their identities led to experiences of marginalization or expectations that they would experience discrimination, inequity, and/or exclusion in the future due to being a Black woman. These were statements that girls expressed as a matter of fact, confident that these trials would come but also confident in their capacity to thrive anyhow.

TABLE 2 | Theme, example quotes, and subcodes for research question 1.

Theme	Example quotes	Subcodes
Not Like the *Other* Girls	"I mean, being a girl, I feel like when it comes to Black people, it's broken down into categories, in my opinion. …you have your Black males and your Black females"	• G-centrality • GRI-centrality
Positive Identities Despite Negative Portrayals	"Um what it means to be a Black girl, I feel like it means they have some sort of excellence. And we also have beauty and I feel like we are very underrated and taken advantage of."	• GRI-private regard • GRI-public regard
Awareness of Stereotypes and Their Influence in K-12 Education	"Yes, Black girls are rowdier, ratchet, or they're always talking too much. Or they're always too loud or always trying to do everything and they should sit down."	• GRI-public regard
Affirmations in the Face of Anti-Blackness	"I usually you know talk about it with my mom and certain things, but you know that was more when I'm younger, now that I'm older I kind of like tend to ignore it, or just you know, be like, I know that I look beautiful with my hair out and you have your hair out, and I can have my hair exact same way, so I just kind of like more brush it off and just like if that's what you feel then just don't look at me then."	• GRS- pride and empowerment • GRS-hardship • GRI-assimilation • AS-school conflict

G, Gender; GRI, Gendered Racial Identity; AS, Academic Socialization; GRS, Gendered Racial Socialization.

Positive Identities Despite Negative Portrayals

Despite awareness of hardships related to their group membership, participants also shared positive perceptions when asked what being a Black girl meant to them. Girls often described feeling a sense of pride in being a Black girl, highlighted their beauty, and emphasized the strength of Black girls and women.

> "I feel like being a Black girl means strongness, bravery… Strongness, bravery, smartness, everything. You're pushing through boundaries all the time. You're continuing to try to do the best that you can in order to show that we're not what the stereotypes that they put on us. We're not just oh someone who doesn't care about school and stuff like that. You have to continue to show that we are human just like everyone else, and we actually are very, very strong and not weak or all the labels that they tried to put on Black girls."
>
> Katherine, 16 years old, 11th Grade

In this example, Katherine expands on why she feels Black girls need to be strong. Her understanding of Black girlhood suggests that strength is a prerequisite to be able to maneuver a world in which Black girls are constantly fighting to disprove the negative portrayals and notions about Black girls and what they are capable of accomplishing. When asked how being a Black girl made her feel, the participant reiterated that it made her feel strong knowing what she can and has accomplished

despite the barriers experienced by Black girls. She then states with unwavering conviction that she was "just as good if not better than any other race, any other person of color, or any other person of not-color," further underscoring how girls meaning making around being a Black girl shapes their self-perceptions and motivations.

Awareness of Stereotypes and Their Influence in K-12 Education

Many participants across developmental stage spoke of the stereotypes they were aware of or had encountered that were specific to Black girls. More common stereotypes were related to vocality and loudness of Black girls, policing of their bodies or suggestions about promiscuity, and Black girls' intelligence or academic potential. Of note, the stereotypes that girls provided in this study were primarily of a negative connotation.

"Honestly in high school, like they're loud, ghetto, ratchet, very uneducated sometimes. They don't know what they're doing"
    Margaret, 14 years old, 9th Grade

"Oh, they're ghetto. Oh, they don't really care about school. All they do you know is, all they do is have kids and stuff like that...saying that Black girls, Black girls can't get through school. Black girls can't graduate. Black girls can't manage their hair. Black girls don't know how to, don't know how to be professional."
    Katherine, 16 years old, 11th Grade

Beyond girls' general awareness of these stereotypes, participants were also able to make direct connections between the negative portrayals of Black girls through stereotypes and their own negative school experiences.

"Being a Black girl has impacted... It's impacted my schooling by... Some teachers—I used to go to this all White school, right? And some teachers would give me more work or put me in different classes, just because they think I'm not as smart or they think less, or they would make their own stereotypes for me. And they would do what they thought was right for her (teacher)."
    Ruth, 13 years old, 8th Grade

In the above example, Ruth shares of her experience in a predominately white school in which she felt teachers assumed the level of her academic abilities based on her status as a Black girl. She goes on to elaborate that she believed her teachers felt she came from the "hood" so she must be "illiterate." Ruth believed stereotypes about her race directly prevented her from participating in gifted programming saying, "because I am academically intelligent, like gifted, and they would look past that because of the color of my skin." Interestingly enough, she chose not to involve her parents as she felt this was a particular problem that she wanted to overcome on her own. This choice is important to note as parents' awareness of these experiences guide their ability to intervene.

Affirmations in the Face of Anti-blackness

All 12 participants mentioned that their parents helped them to navigate classroom or school-based conflict. Parents' conflict navigation strategies were tailored for both teachers and peers. In many of these instances, participants expressed that the conflicts were based in broader anti-Black sentiments, often involving their physical appearance. Girls relied on their mothers to affirm them as they processed how to interpret what they were experiencing at school and what to do next. Earlier affirmations from their parents appeared to be a source of comfort and a useful foundation for Black girls as they navigated anti-Blackness in later years of adolescence.

"Yes, I usually you know talk about it with my mom and certain things, but you know that was more when I'm younger. Now that I'm older, I kind of like tend to ignore it, or just you know, be like, I know that I look beautiful with my hair out and you have your hair out, and I can have my hair exact same way. So, I just kind of like more brush it off and just like if that's what you feel, then just don't look at me, then."
    Katherine, 16 years old, 11th Grade

In the above example, Katherine describes her response to a group of White girls at her school that made jokes about her natural hair. In this passage, her classmates referenced her afro saying things like "Dang your hair is like crazy," "You need to do something with it," and "Why don't just slick it back or something?" In other instances, she gives the example of classmates saying, "Oh, my goodness, did you get electrocuted?" She makes mention of earlier years when she would have talked over this type of experience with her mother. However, now that she is older, she expressed a sense of agency and empowerment, attributed to those prior discussions. Instead of feeling the need to conform to the Eurocentric beauty standards of her peers, Katherine articulated confidence in her own beauty.

"Being a Black girl makes me feel empowered but also... Less than almost, in society's views. I feel like I have the—just because how I was raised, I feel like I have the entire world open to me, and that I can do anything that I put my mind to, and I really work to do, but I am definitely going to have to work harder and knowing that just makes me feel a little bit stumped, but I still can go for whatever I want to go for."
    Ruth, 13 years old, 8th Grade

The above example illustrates Black girls' awareness and processing of the juxtaposition between negative societal views of Black girls and strong positive gendered racial identities. Further, this quote suggests that there may be an emotional toll associated with this awareness. When asked what being a Black girl means to her she says, "it will land me in a very low situation, because not only am I an African American, I'm also a female which is like double." However, we see that even with this understanding of Black girlhood, she still maintains some feeling of empowerment. This participant credited her parents for this perspective, specifically believing that she can accomplish anything through perseverance. Though the participant acknowledges that her circumstances may be more difficult than others, she articulates her position that there are no limits to her success. This underscores how parental socialization

TABLE 3 | Theme, example quotes, and subcodes for research question 2.

Theme	Example quotes	Subcodes
(Dis)engagement with traditional gender roles	"I like to indulge in my more feminine side, so that means that I'll like more girly things. Or I like wearing dresses more and I like light airy colors. And I want this nice little house where I can do all my little things. I just find that really desirable"	G-private regard
A culture of overcoming	"Like the main thing about being Black to me is the culture because we have, we have like music, food, and cooking and dancing and holidays. And other things like that. So, it's good that you have all those things that you can like celebrate about being Black."	R-private regard
Silence as a survival strategy	"My mom tells me to not talk back to her, but to at least explain to her the situation. And as long as I get good– as long as I did well in her class there shouldn't be any problems."	AS-school conflict

G, Gender Identity; R, Racial Identity; AS, Academic Socialization.

both prepares youth for these experiences but also affirms them in ways that shape girls' negotiation of their multiple identities.

Research Question 2: Are there differences in the identity processing and the content of reported parental socialization of Black girls in middle school compared to Black girls in high school?

Three main themes emerged in our analysis of research question 2: (1) "(Dis)engagement with Traditional Gender Roles," (2) "A Culture of Overcoming:" (3) "Silence as a Survival Strategy." Example quotes for each emergent theme and the subcodes associated with each quote can be found below in **Table 3**.

(Dis)engagement With Traditional Gender Roles

While much of what participants described of their identities throughout the interviews were related to their racial or gendered racial identity, there was a difference between middle and high school girls' choice to engage or disengage with traditional gender roles. Girls in middle school appeared to hold more closely to traditional gender roles and notions of femininity. For instance, middle school girls made mention of physical appearance such as wearing dresses, being more "emotional" than boys, and having to be creative in order to help others. However, girls in high school distanced themselves from these ideals, emphasizing that they did not need to conform to or participate in traditional gendered norms. Additionally, girls in high school described hardship and expectations that came from being a female compared to middle school girls.

> "I mean that we all have different sides of us different gender sides of us and for me personally, I like to indulge in my more feminine side, so that means that, I'll like more girly things or I like wearing

dresses more and I like light airy colors and I want this nice little house where I can do all my little things. I just find that really… desirable, should I say."
    Ruth, 13 years old, 8th Grade

When first asked what being a girl means to her, Ruth responded that it means that she chooses to be feminine and that she must indulge in more of a feminine side. In the above excerpt she expands on this response by defining what encompasses a feminine side (dress, colors, connection to the home). Her understanding of girlhood was overwhelmingly positive, and she looked forward to the opportunity to perform girlhood and femininity in the ways she had been socialized. This was different from how Black girls in high school discussed girlhood, who more often emphasized that gendered expectations are something one must resist and fight against.

> "I feel like being a girl is being set to higher standards, high standards "Oh, you have to be, you have to do this, you can't do this" it's you have to go on a straight trail, but I feel like you don't have to though. You're put as to that you have to go on this trail. This how you have to have life. This has—how you have to get married. This is what you have to do when you get married. But I feel like that's not what you really have to do. You have to, you have to do anything you can do, and I feel like you, you have to try to stand– look at yourself as better than what people put on you. The labels that people put on you. You have to be continuing to be strong, also."
    Katherine, 16 years old, 11th Grade

In the above example, Katherine describes being a girl as being set to a higher standard that required compliance and left no room for variation in one's life path. Of particular importance were marital expectations and assumptions about how one must act as a wife. Disagreeing with more traditional ideals, this participant asserts that girls should feel comfortable deviating from these ideals and instead defy gender labels.

A Culture of Overcoming

Participants in this study had meaningful and complex understandings of Blackness and more specifically what being Black meant to them. Within their varied responses to these questions, we find that middle school girls often referenced culture (which included things such as food, music, and familial gatherings). To them, Blackness is community driven and celebratory.

> "So, being Black means to me like… like the main thing about being Black to me is the culture. Because we have, we have like music, food, and cooking and dancing and holidays and other things like that. So, it's good that you have all those things that you can like celebrate about being Black."
    Shirley, 11 years old, 6th Grade

In contrast, high school participants reflected more on the individual efforts they must make to disprove negative portrayals of the collective. Their responses emphasized the desire to overcome and in fact, an urgency to do so as they considered the historical context. For example, one participant said "Remember,

as you go through life because of the fact that that's something that keeps on pushing us, because we want to do better, for what our ancestors went through." While girls noted the disadvantages and challenges that arise from responding to this call to action, girls reflected positively on the individual and collective strength exhibited by Black people.

> "Being Black to me, I feel like it means you have to…how do I want to word this? You have to show up and show out because most people think less of us so when you get in wherever you're going, whether it be an interview or sport. And you show them like that you actually know what you're doing then they be surprised. Then they know that Black people aren't what the stereotype of Black people are."
> Mae, 14 years old, 9th Grade

In this excerpt, we see that Mae believes that Blackness requires one to meet or exceed expectations in professional and leisure settings. This quote suggests that, because of her awareness of societal views about Black people, there is an internal pressure to outperform, guiding their interactions and experiences in school and professional settings.

Silence as a Survival Strategy

As previously mentioned, all participants in this investigation ($n = 12$) discussed the ways they have sought support from their parents after experiencing conflict in schools, which were commonly a result of racism and/or sexism. Black parents consistently advised their daughters to ignore or not engage with teachers and classmates in these instances as a strategy to protect their daughters regardless of whether they were in middle school or high school.

> "They just said um that's how people…just how being a Black are. You're gonna have to deal with that for the rest of your life. So, they're just like this. It's okay. Just deal with it."
> Gladys, 15 years old, 9th Grade

In the above excerpt, Gladys describes her parents' strategy for responding to racist remarks from her classmates. During the interview she recalls how in middle school she often experienced her peers asking questions such as "Do you love fried chicken and watermelon?" and making mentions of her hair. Here her parents are attempting to prepare her for the bias and discrimination that she will encounter throughout her lifetime because she is Black. By telling her to "just deal with it," they are diffusing the situation, asking her to not escalate it further.

> Participant: My science teacher she's okay. She teaches us what we need to learn. It's just… it's just what's the time… it's like she says that I'm talking, but I'm not talking at all and it's the other people. And she can't tell if somebody's talking or not because the masks. And it gets on my last nerve.
> Interviewer: So, what do you do about that?
> Participant: I just have to roll with it because I don't want to get written up or get called home.
> Interviewer: Hmm… Have you ever talked to your parents about that?

> Participant: Yes, I've talked about that to my mom and my father.
> Interviewer: What kind of advice do they give you?
> Participant: My mom tells me to not talk back to her, but to at least explain the situation to her. And as long as I get good– as long as I did well in her class there shouldn't be any problems.
> Alexa, 11 years old, 6th Grade

In the above example, Alexa recalls an experience in class in which she is consistently called out and verbally reprimanded for talking in class even though she was not talking. Though she knows she is being singled out unjustly, she acknowledged that, for Black girls, an act as small as talking during class can be escalated to more serious disciplinary action. This was also evident in her mother's advisement that her daughter should not argue with the teacher. Instead, she suggests that her daughter discuss this with the teacher at another time. In this example, staying silent means that her daughter stays in the classroom and continues receiving science instruction instead of being sent outside of class as a disciplinary response. Silence in this example is strategic.

DISCUSSION

Using semi-structured interviews, this investigation explored the role of parental socialization on Black girls' identity development. Collectively, this investigation highlights how Black girls process their multiple marginalized identities. Notably, this investigation emphasized the role that parents play in helping their children navigate school conflict. Two key themes emerged from our findings—(1) Black girls' identity development and meaning making of Black girlhood and (2) the protective role of parental socialization.

Black Girls' Identity Development and Meaning Making of Black Girlhood

Participants in this investigation shared thoughtful reflections on what it means to be a Black girl while also demonstrating a complex understanding of how their multiple social identities shape their lived experiences and future. Black girls reported that their Blackness was a central part of their identity and discussions of race guided much of their discussions on who they are. Of note, there were qualitative differences in girls' responses to what being Black meant to them for girls in middle and high school. Girls in middle school emphasized cultural tradition (e.g., music, foods, and community), while high school girls often highlighted the disadvantages faced by the Black community and the need to prove negative stereotypes wrong. Research indicates that as Black youth transition into adolescence, they become increasingly aware of differential treatment due to their race and report personally experiencing discrimination (Seaton et al., 2008; Hope et al., 2015; English et al., 2020; Tynes et al., 2020). Also, previous literature has indicated that Black youth are not only aware of academic race stereotypes but begin to endorse stereotypes at increasing rates across adolescence (Burnett et al., 2020). Black girls in this sample were highly motivated to resist stereotypes. This finding is supported by previous studies (e.g.,

McGee and Martin, 2011), which indicated that Black students were often focused on proving stereotypes wrong and sought the acceptance of those who thought less than of Black students in STEM contexts. As students grew older, McGee and Martin (2011) found that their focus shifted from proving stereotypes wrong for the approval of others to stereotype management in which they are internally motivated to succeed for themselves. Stereotype management can be defined as "a tactical toolkit for asserting their academic excellence in the face of being stereotyped" (p. 1,363). Future studies should examine Black girls' understanding of stereotypes, particularly as they transition into middle and high school and how it may motivate their academic decision making.

Contrary to the salience of Blackness, gender identity alone was not as central to participants' sense of self as they cited the vast differences in the experiences of Black girls compared to girls of other races. Thomas et al. (2011) found that when asking young Black adolescent girls and young adult women about their racial and gender identity separately, they often responded in a way that emphasized the complexity of their gendered racial identity status. The present study found qualitative differences. High school participants thought critically about society's perceptions of girlhood and vehemently sought to counter gendered expectations of how to perform girlhood. In contrast, girls in middle school spoke about gendered expectations and norms (e.g., clothing, colors, and homemaking). This difference may be in part to the high school girls' own lived experience as they described more hardship as a result of being a girl compared to middle school girls in this sample. Further, reflecting developmentally and life stage informed identity processes outlined in PVEST (e.g., Spencer et al., 2019), high school girls reported an awareness of norms and perceptions as well as developed response strategies.

Relatedly, participants often discussed expectations that they would encounter hardships at the intersection of racism and sexism. They often connected these expectations for hardship to their knowledge of stereotypes and lower educational expectations for Black girls and women. When participants were asked to share what stereotypes they believed existed about Black girls, they expressed that people described Black girls as being "loud, ghetto, extra, rowdy, uneducated, and unable to graduate." The stereotypes that participants named are aligned with the decades of scholarship that highlighted the negative stereotypes of Black girls often held by teachers and school support staff (Morris, 2007; Archer-Banks and Behar-Horenstein, 2012; Neal-Jackson, 2018; Annamma et al., 2019; Carter Andrews et al., 2019; Gadson and Lewis, 2021).

Despite the awareness of these negative portrayals, girls in this sample overwhelmingly had positive feelings about being a Black girl and expressed what this means from an identity perspective. PVEST provides a lens to interpret these findings, emphasizing the need to understand the varied ways that youth may respond positively, even in the face of inequality (Spencer, 2006). Participants were proud to be a Black girl and described Black girlhood in ways that highlighted their beauty (e.g., natural hair), emphasized their strengths, and celebrated their

contributions to the culture. Recent work by Rogers and Butler-Barnes (2022) found that adolescent Black girls' perceptions of their hair were an important part of their identity development, highlighting that hair was a vehicle of empowerment and resistance to Eurocentric beauty standards (Rogers et al., 2021), much like the girls in the present investigation. In our sample, feelings of empowerment were coupled with their desire to overcome barriers associated with their multiple marginalized identities. This aligns with previous research suggesting that persistence and heightened motivation to succeed, particularly in spaces where they feel devalued and underestimated, are adaptive responses by Black girls (e.g., Thomas et al., 2011; Archer-Banks and Behar-Horenstein, 2012). Additional scholarship is needed to discern how Black girls' persistence in these unwelcoming spaces impacts their career aspirations, educational attainment, and wellbeing.

The Protective Role of Parental Socialization

Participants in this investigation often sought affirmation and support from their parents after experiencing instances of racism and/or discrimination from peers or teachers. For instance, one participant shared experiences of race-related bullying from classmates and how difficult it was for her to understand why she was being bullied. This participant goes on to discuss how conversations with her mom helped her to see that her Blackness may mean that she will experience racism but also provided her with strategies for how to cope when she does experience it. This parenting strategy maps onto the *preparation for bias* dimension of ERS. ERS is a parenting approach that seeks to prepare children for the potential of experiencing racism while still helping to cultivate a positive and healthy racial identity. In the current investigation, girls shared that the conversations with their parents earlier in life had aided in their confidence such that now when they encounter mistreatment due to their race in schools, they are still able to maintain a positive self-image. For the older children, they noted feeling empowered to disengage and not internalize the negative words and imagery. Research has found that in practice, Black families often use a mixture of socialization dimensions in tandem in which they both prepare children for discriminatory experiences (preparation for bias) and affirm their identity (racial pride; Harris-Britt et al., 2007).

A common theme in the parental messaging received from our participants was that silence and disengagement was the best survival strategy, especially in schools, when dealing with discriminatory encounters as well as racist teachers and students. Girls voiced not wanting to be written up or receive a call home as a reason for not engaging. This is not surprising as statistics indicate that Black girls have the fastest growing suspension rates and have rates higher than 67% of boys, which directly impacts their educational trajectories (Morris and Perry, 2016; Annamma et al., 2019; Ibrahim et al., 2021). Black girls are 4.19 times more likely to be suspended, 3.99 times more likely to be expelled, and 3.66 times more likely to be arrested compared to White girls (Epstein et al., 2020). Thus, when parents are suggesting silence as a strategy for navigating conflict in schools, they are

also protecting their Black daughters from decreased classroom instruction time which impedes their academic progress and the potential of escalation of conflict that leads to involvement in the criminal justice system. Our study finding is in contrast to Smith-Bynum et al. (2016) investigation in which scholars explored Black mothers' responses and expressed strategies regarding their child experiencing discrimination perpetrated by a teacher compared to a store clerk. In this particular study, researchers found that mothers responded with more statements about intervening and advocating for their child when regarding teacher discrimination compared to if their child experienced discrimination at a mall. Additionally, mothers of daughters were more likely to deliver messages about advocacy compared to mothers of sons. This difference in parenting responses and strategies exhibited in the Smith-Bynum et al. (2016) investigation compared to the current study highlights the need for continued study into the antecedents and consequences of these two approaches to socialization. Lastly, much of our understanding of ERS in Black families has been in relation to retroactive discussions, meaning that it was in direct response to an encounter their child has already had or a racialized event that is widely discussed in their community or in the news (e.g., police sanctioned violence; protest). Work by Anderson and Stevenson (2019) notes the ways these conversations often lack discussion of how best to help children regulate their emotions in the moment and provide explicit coping skills. This is particularly important as we consider future work that explores how best to help Black girls navigate the racial stress and trauma they experience in educational contexts.

STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS

There were several strengths of this investigation. First, the current study extends previous literature by centering Black girls' voices in an in-depth exploration into Black girls' meaning making of their identity and how their parents support their healthy development. Using a developmental lens, the current study was able to appraise whether there are qualitative differences in identity processing between Black girls in middle school and Black girls in high school. Though there were many important strengths of this investigation, there were also a few limitations. First, participants' reports of parental socialization messages and behaviors, while informative, also are girls' *received* messaging and doesn't necessarily guarantee that it fully represented all that parents expressed. Instead, what girls reported is more so the messaging they have deemed important, interpreted, and now integrated into their toolkit to navigate their various environments. Future research should consider the use of dyadic data collection to examine consistency in messaging and differences in interpretation of parental socialization messaging. Also, except for one participant, girls in this investigation attended a school that was at least 25% Black and over 50% ethnic-racial minorities. Thus, their experiences may be quite different from Black girls who attend schools that are predominately white. Additional research should be done to explore how school racial composition may influence girls' meaning making of Black girlhood.

IMPLICATIONS

The current study has implications for the growing body of literature that seeks to center the voices of Black girls as their experiences are too often overshadowed and ignored. By further contextualizing their identity development in the broader academic context, this study provides meaningful suggestions for ways to better engage Black girls and their families in schools. Schools should seek to find additional ways to include parents and aim to strengthen family-school-community partnerships.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The datasets presented in this article are not readily available because of the use of personal stories and narratives of minors. Requests to access the datasets should be directed to marketab@mailbox.sc.edu.

ETHICS STATEMENT

The studies involving human participants were reviewed and approved by University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Institutional Review Board. Written informed consent to participate in this study was provided by the participants' legal guardian/next of kin.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

MB contributed to the conceptualization, data collection, analysis, writing, reviewing, and editing of the manuscript. MM contributed to the analysis, review, and editing of the manuscript. MG and SC contributed to the review and editing of the manuscript. All authors contributed to the article and approved the submitted version.

SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL

The Supplementary Material for this article can be found online at: https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.933476/full#supplementary-material

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"Listen when I come to the table": Reimagining education with and for Black elementary-aged youth and their mothers

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Much of the literature regarding Black youth experiences in schools considers the effects of racism and takes up inquiry through deficit views. Yet, to understand how to shift the system of schooling to provide equitable, liberatory learning experiences, it is critical to center Black children's voices and perspectives. In the current study, we partnered with eleven Black elementary youth and their mothers to explore their dreams for re-imagining schools. We identified four themes related to school improvement from a child-centered, abolitionist lens. Our findings highlight the need to increase opportunities for youth voice in scholarship and practice, and join existing conversations that see education as the practice of liberation and freedom.

KEYWORDS

abolition, Black youth, education, asset-based, freedom dreaming

Introduction

> "I wish you know the schools would be, you know, the space will be created with the child ***at the table*** to be able to vocalize and say "hey, this is what I would like to see in my classroom" right?" Aja, mother and research participant

As the first Black woman to be elected to the U.S. Congress, Shirley Chisholm once said, "If they don't give you a seat at the table, bring a folding chair" (Edward M. Kennedy Institute, 2022). In the 50 years since she spoke these words, we have repeatedly seen Black individuals, particularly youth, respond to Chisholm's clarion call. In particular, Black children's imaginations and courageous acts have laid the groundwork for various historical movements (Mims and Kaler-Jones, 2020; Anderson, 2021) because children are "evolutionary problem solvers with audacious imagination" (Grace Lee Boggs as

quoted in Shalaby, 2017). Recently, for example, Black children have organized for police free schools (Welton and Harris, 2022), more COVID-19 safety protocols (Meckler and Natanson, 2022), and the elimination of racist and sexist dress codes (Bakuli, 2022) in schools.

However, Black families have been systematically excluded from school decision making tables and subjected to centuries of systemic state-sanctioned oppression (Jones and Reddick, 2017; Bennett, 2020). Moreover, given the prevalence of racial discrimination and harrassment in schools for Black children (e.g., Anderson and Stevenson, 2019; Basile et al., 2019; Posey-Maddox et al., 2021), much of the existing literature regarding Black children's educational experiences focuses on establishing and addressing problems (e.g., documenting rates of discipline and expulsion and providing recommendations; Morris, 2016; U.S. Office for Civil Rights [OCR], 2018). Yet, the process of documenting and addressing racism and discrimination through research, policy, and practice often omits Black families' voices and dreams (Green, 2020). In *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination* (2002), Robin D. G. Kelley asks the following questions: "What are today's young activists dreaming about? We know what they are fighting against, but what are they fighting for?" (2002, p. 8). In the current study, we drew upon Yosso's (2005) Community Cultural Wealth and Kelley's freedom dreaming (2002) to center the ways that Black youth and their mothers' re-imagined educational settings that promoted positive learning experiences. In the section below, we outline the theoretical framework, highlighting four specific tenets we utilized in the present study, and situate our asset-based approach within the concepts of freedom dreaming and school abolition.

Community Cultural Wealth as a framework for Black children and their mothers' abolitionist freedom dreams

Community Cultural Wealth (CCW) (Yosso, 2005; Yosso and Burciaga, 2016) is an asset-based model that allows scholars to envision a kaleidoscope "of knowledge, skills, abilities, and contacts possessed and used by communities of color to survive and resist racism and other forms of oppression" (Yosso and García, 2007). In relation to the education of Black children, Black youth must frequently cope with experiences of racism and discrimination in their schooling environments. A recent meta-analysis, for example, found that Black students across all K-12 grade levels are more than twice as likely to incur school discipline actions and were also more likely to receive harsher discipline compared to White students (e.g., Black students were suspended while White students were given detention) (Young and Butler, 2018). A study by Jackson et al. (2019), for instance, found that Black youth who encounter police at school exhibit more trauma responses

(e.g., heightened emotional distress and post-traumatic stress symptoms) compared to those who encounter law enforcement outside of school.

Thus, we used CCW, specifically the conceptualization of aspirational, resistant, familial, and navigational capital, to highlight how Black children and their families have resisted racism and subordination in schooling environments, and we prioritized the voices and perspectives of Black children.

Aspirational, resistant, navigational, and familial capital

Community Cultural Wealth posits that children of color possess multiple forms of capital. Aspirational capital, or the ability to "dream of possibilities beyond their present circumstances" (Yosso, 2005, p. 78), takes shape through hopes and dreams, thus nurturing a culture of possibility (Yosso, 2005). Second, resistant capital refers to the knowledge and skills an individual fosters through oppositional behaviors that challenge inequality (Yosso, 2005). This form of capital aligns with what Shalaby (2017) refers to as fearlessness in the face of inequity. Combining all other forms of capital with a recognition of structures of oppression allows for what Solórzano and Yosso (2002) name as transformative resistance, where people of color reimagine spaces to empower and honor legacies of resistance. A study by Morgan and Stahmer (2020), for example, found that single Black mothers relied on their resistant capital to fight for their autistic children to receive appropriate diagnoses and support. Resistant capital also includes caregivers consciously teaching behaviors that challenge the *status quo*; children are taught how to be oppositional with their bodies, minds, and spirits in the face of inequality (p. 81). Additionally, navigational capital refers to one's ability to maneuver through institutions, while highlighting the strength it takes to move successfully through institutions "not created with Communities of Color in mind" (Yosso, 2005, p. 80). A 2018 study by Allen and White-Smith, for instance, found that Black parents of young boys used this form of capital to navigate systems related to schooling (e.g., housing zones and school enrollment rules) as well as racist experiences to support the racial socialization of their boys. Finally, familial capital is the knowledge nurtured by kin that "carry a sentence of community history, memory, and cultural intuition" (Yosso, 2005, p. 79). The concept of "family" also refers to extended and chosen family, including living or deceased relatives, friends, and anyone else considered kin. Thus, given the robust history of these specific forms of capital connected to Black children and their communities, we anticipated that participants would draw on their capital to re-imagine children's educational experiences. In all, we utilized these overlapping and interconnected forms of capital to understand the collective dreams of mothers and their Black elementary-aged children.

Dreaming with and for Black children

In the present study, we also drew upon Kelley's definition of freedom dreams as, "visions fashioned mainly by those marginalized Black activists who proposed a different way out of our constrictions (2002, p. xii). In *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination*, Kelley begins by centering the dreams of his mother:

> So with her eyes wide open my mother dreamed and dreamed some more, describing what life could be for us. She wasn't talking about a postmortem world, some kind of heaven or afterlife; and she was not speaking of reincarnation (which she believes in, by the way). She dreamed of land, a spacious house, fresh air, organic food, and endless meadows without boundaries, free of evil and violence, free of toxins and environmental hazards, free of poverty, racism, and sexism. just free. (p. 2)

Kelley describes how his mother "convinced" (p. 2) his family that change was always possible, which served as an impetus for his own political engagement. Through dreaming, Kelley argues that past and present activists envision new worlds. In this spirit, we wanted to explore how Black children and their mothers in our study dreamed about a different way out of discriminatory schooling —of environments where Black children flourished.

This notion of flourishing, or thriving, through freedom dreaming connects not only to CCW, but to school abolition, and the broader network of abolitionist movements. School abolition builds on the cultural wealth of student communities (Love, 2019) through the facilitation of interactions where "people matter to each other fight together in the pursuit of creating a homeplace that represents their hopes and dreams, and resist oppression all while building a new future" (Love, 2019, p. 68). Meiners (2011) notes that abolition does not mean reform; drawing such a parallel would obfuscate the goals of those advancing abolition work. Instead, school abolitionists envision a world in which schools collectively seek to understand and embody the belief that "no one is disposable" (Barrie, 2020), and work to build conditions that create institutions that are just, loving, equitable, and center Black, Brown, and Indigenous lives (Dunn et al., 2021).

Black mothers' abolitionist freedom dreaming

Throughout history, Black mothers have advocated for their children's education (e.g., Allen and White-Smith, 2018; Leath et al., 2020; Lucas, 2022). For example, Mary Jane Bethune founded the Daytona Beach Literary and Industrial School for Training Negro Girls in 1904 after being the first and only child in her family to go to school and discovering that "the whole world opened up" when she learned to read (Long, 2011). As another example, in 1957, 3 years after

the landmark school desegregation lawsuit, *Brown v Board of Education of Topeka*, the Harlem Nine (i.e., nine mothers residing in Harlem) filed suit against the New York City Board of Education for operating "separate and unequal schools in Harlem" (Watson, 2021). Specifically, they challenged the zoning policies that prevented their children from attending better resourced schools and learning about their culture and heritage, which negatively impacted their children's overall learning and schooling experience. And recently, Black mothers continue to advocate for their children during the COVID-19 pandemic by engaging in activities such as advocating for educational resources for their children, staying in contact with their children's teacher, seeking additional resources for their children, and, in some cases, deciding to homeschool their children (Parks, 2021; Woldeyohannes, 2021; Lucas, 2022). These three examples illustrate a larger pattern of Black mothers' re-imagining schools beyond their current conditions.

Materials and methods

In the present study, we used qualitative inquiry through community-based research, semi-structured interviews, and narrative thematic analysis to center youth and mother perspectives of their dreams for education.

Community-based methods

We employed a community-based collaborative approach (Denzin, 2015) to our research design by applying Strand et al.'s (2003) three principles of community-based research: (1) research that is a collaborative enterprise, (2) research that validates multiple sources of knowledge and promotes the use of multiple methods of discovery and dissemination of the knowledge produced, and (3) research with a goal of social action and social change to achieve social justice (p. 8). First, the present study represented a collective exploration of freedom dreams, anchored by our existing relationship with families engaging in a longstanding university-community partnership. To date, we have collaborated on research, policy, and programming aimed to support Black families thriving in and around the city. In particular, the first author joined the partnership as an apprentice, shadowing and learning from those within the partnership, supporting administrative efforts, connecting with community members frequently, and later moved to co-facilitating free workshops for families based on the community's identified needs (e.g., online learning, stress and trauma, grief and loss) and conducting research alongside staff and community members.

Second, we prioritized multiple sources of knowledge by learning from children and their mothers separately through varied methods of interviewing. Additionally, in order to

amplify, highlight, and validate children's knowledge and contributions, we established a Student Advisory Board (SAB) composed of child participants. During the recruitment phase, we asked parents if they would be open to having their children participate in a student group. For those who indicated "yes," we provided information about the Student Advisory Board at the close of those child interviews and invited students to join based on parent responses. Board participation came with additional digital gift card incentives. Four enrolled students in the board: three girls and one boy across 5th and 6th grade (ages 10–11). On the suggestion of the students, we decided to meet every 2 weeks for the duration of the study to give the group ample time to work with the data, work together, and work on sharing ideas for change. Although no data was collected or analyzed from the meetings, we incorporated the content of our collaboration to inform analysis and dissemination with their permission. And, finally, we pursued our goal of social action by engaging in processes such as debriefing with members of the community, presenting our findings to stakeholders, and working directly with members of the SAB to bring thoughtfulness to dissemination and change-making ideas.

Participants

The present sample included 11 Black elementary school students (ages 7–11 years, $M = 9.6$ years) and 11 Black mothers (see **Table 1**) recruited from a larger on-going study exploring family processes and mental health (Duane, 2022). At the time of interviews, children were enrolled in grades second through sixth grade. All children attended a mix of public and charter elementary schools within the large urban midwestern city.

Procedure

During the summer of 2021, families enrolled in larger on-going study (Duane, 2022) who had children between the ages of 7–12 ($N = 68$) were sent a Google form via email, using contact information previously obtained. The first author emailed those who responded to the Google form to schedule a time for both an adult and child interview via Zoom. A total of 31 caregivers expressed interest in participating in interviews. During the recruitment phase, we also asked parents if their child would be interested in participating in a Student Advisory Board, which we elaborate below. We selected families to enroll and created a waitlist based on timestamps of enrollment. Importantly, when selecting participants, we purposefully enrolled fifteen unique families, rather than interviewing multiple children from the same family. While we additionally recruited and interviewed fifteen families in the summer of 2021, when the fall began and school started, four of the families were unable to schedule child interviews, given the on-going stress of the pandemic, family

TABLE 1 Participant information.

Mother pseudonym (m)	Child pseudonym (c)	Child's gender and age
Jenna	Jamal	Boy, age 7
Aniyah	Willow	Girl, age 8
Nia	Niles	Boy, age 8
Aja	Christian	Boy, age 9
Whitney	Jayden	Boy, age 9
Dominique	Onika	Girl, age 10
Tamara	Cassandra	Girl, age 11
Kaleyn	Drake	Boy, age 11
Journee	Kyion	Boy, age 11
Zoe	Sarah	Girl, age 11
Imani	Jasmine	Girl, age 11

loss and grief, and the stress of shifting between virtual and in-person learning. As a result, the first author interviewed eleven child and adult participants. Parent interviews lasted between 45 min to 1 h, and child interviews lasted between 20 and 50 min, with the average interview being 37 min long. Once interviews were scheduled, child participants were sent a box of supplies to support the virtual interview process (see **Figure 1**). Participants were compensated with $50 digital gift cards for participation in the adult interview and $15 for participation in the child interview portion.

Interview protocol

The authors designed an interview protocol with the goal of learning more about students' experiences of school-based

FIGURE 1
Virtual interview kit.

trauma, their forms of coping, and their re-imagining of new educational experiences. In relation to the present study, adult participants responded to the following questions: "Let's dream together. If you could completely reimagine education for your child, what would it be like? What about specific dream learning experiences?" (Duane, 2022). The semi-structured, participant-centered data collection protocol allowed for strategic follow up and conversation.

Included in the virtual interview kit sent to children was a small magic wand. With this, child participants were invited to use this magic wand to create a brand-new school. Then, they were asked to describe this new school. Specifically, child participants were invited to respond to the following prompt:

> *Once upon a time, there was a magic kid who could fly and used this wand [children received a magic wand prop to aid in imagining] to make things disappear and create new things. One day, they flew to the grocery store and made it disappear. When they waved their magic wand, they brought back the grocery store but it was different and better! Everything was rainbow colored and all the food was free. If you had this magic wand and could make your school disappear then bring it back better, what would it be like?* (Duane, 2022).

The child-led data collection protocol allowed for strategic follow-up about school-specific categories including teachers, students, classrooms, lessons, rules, and school staff.

Epistemological orientation

Historically, Black children's voices have not been at the forefront of research narratives. We draw from the work of scholars Gloria Ladson-Billings who defines voice as "naming one's own reality" (1998, p. 13), and Edwards et al. (2016) who establish centering as creating opportunities for individuals to tell their own stories from their own perspectives, making space for listening and sharing experiences, resisting deficit narratives, and developing a thorough understanding of individual points of view (p. 434). To these definitions, we also add that in centering voices, we position children as experts, build reciprocal relationships, and work collaboratively with and for youth. By centering Black children's voices in particular, we can learn with and from them about how they make meaning of their experiences and their visions for systemic change. Centering narratives does not mean 'giving' children a voice; all children have voices. Yet their voices often go unheard because they are systematically minoritized based on age, race, class, gender identity, ability, and more. By highlighting children's narrative through an explicit community-based methodology, we co-created spaces for children to represent themselves, identify priorities, and ultimately, formulate action plans to advance true liberatory work in schools, thus providing opportunities for

children to embody their inherent power, rather than 'give' voice. By working in community with children and their families, we generated ideas and suggestions for advancing social justice and abolitionist initiatives within schools and communities.

Researcher positionality statement

As scholars, teachers, thinkers, collaborators, and friends, we too are dreamers. We dream separately and together about a world where education is equitable and liberatory for Black youth. These dreams continue to evolve, and are informed by our positionalities. The first author is a White, cisgender, middle-class, non-disabled woman, who carries her own school-based trauma to this work. As an elementary teacher turned research fellow with a Ph.D. in Educational Psychology, she continues to work in concert with families, colleagues, mentors, and community members to actively unlearn harmful practices, dismantle internalized White supremacy characteristics (Okun, 2021), and interrupt systemic inequities through deep community-based, reciprocal relationships. Dr. Duane takes seriously the work of understanding and interrogating Whiteness, and her "intersections of privilege" to "stand in solidarity and confront anti-Blackness" (Love, 2019, p. 117).

The second author is a Black, cisgender, middle-class, non-disabled woman whose mother and grandmothers convinced her that change was always possible for Black people. As an assistant professor of Applied Psychology, the ultimate goal of Dr. Mims' research is to freedom dream with Black children and their families, and then use that brilliance to guide the development of new research, policies, practices, and narratives. For over a decade, Dr. Mims has worked to center the dreams of Black children and their families in her research and teaching. She is passionate about working with her students to "pick up the battle and make it a better world just where you are," as Maya Angelou charges.

Analytic approach

After the interviews, the Zoom videos were transcribed by the first author and two graduate students. Then, the transcripts were de-identified. The coding analysis was guided by narrative thematic analysis (Riessman, 2008) of both sets of interviews iteratively in two phases: descriptive and interpretive (Murray, 2009). First, we engaged in a descriptive stage that involved immersion in the data. Then, with two other members of the research team, a Black counseling psychology doctoral student and White counseling psychology master's student, read and re-read transcripts to identify and familiarize ourselves with the content of narratives provided by children and their mothers (Riessman, 2008; Smith, 2016). We noted thoughts regarding the data each time we visit the transcripts, during which time the focus will be to identify what is said and generate early

common themes of stories being told, which differs greatly from how stories are told and how individuals make meaning of experiences (Smith, 2016). In this phase, analysis also involved inductive/open coding, developing themes and subthemes (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Together, we met frequently to confer codes generated and check for consistencies in our processes. Instead of focusing on mini-units or fragments, the initial phase of analysis focused on the overarching stories told.

In the second interpretative phase of analysis, the first author worked with the Student Advisory Board (SAB), to connect themes across the narratives to the theoretical frameworks and conceptual model (Murray, 2009). The SAB was instrumental during this phase, often talking about patterns and themes in ways the adults had not considered. These child perspectives mattered greatly and took priority in the data analysis phase. We also explored the settings, contexts, and processes surrounding the child. Thus, data collected from parents served not as a means to triangulate (Flick, 2018) or validate child experiences but instead to invite multiple views and perspectives to explore the idea of re-imagining. We saw the data collection and analyses as iterative and holistic, where one set of interviews informs the other.

We also shared the sources and analysis of de-identified data with the Student Advisory Board to enhance reciprocity. We demonstrated goodwill by honoring the brilliance that children bring (Bullock et al., 2012) to each aspect of the research project. This also meant centering the project around respect for children's competence as a methodological technique, which cannot be stressed enough. Simply put, children were the best witnesses to their own experiences; they were change agents in the process with distinct abilities and capabilities to understand, interpret, and interrogate events.

Finally, the coding team, in consultation with peer and subject matter experts, determined that there were four categories of *re-imagining*, specifically: learning opportunities, family engagement, infrastructure and resources, and culture.

Ethical considerations

Given that this study centered the experiences of children, it was important for us to name the ethical considerations associated with working with young children. The authors also underscore the need to understand research ethics with children as far more than a set of standards or skills, but an overall approach to research in general, from planning to presenting data. Specifically in this study, we incorporate the calls to consider "How will the findings benefit children?" and "Are the basic assumptions about children underlying the research positive?" [see Alderson and Morrow (2011) for a more extensive discussion of conducting ethical research with children]. In aiming to center, amplify, and highlight Black children's voices, we explicitly served children while

contributing to a positive process of critiquing systems, not students. Flipping the lens and urging scholars and practitioners to interrogate systemic inequities rather than pathologize and blame individual children and their communities (Goldin and Khasnabis, 2020; Petrone and Stanton, 2021), is one piece of how we take up abolitionist, child-centered stances in our work.

Findings

Both the mothers and the children provided rich descriptions of the schooling environments they envisioned. Mothers often rooted their reimagining in their knowledge of their children's strengths, interests, talents, and learning needs. Children spoke from experiences they had in elementary school thus far while drawing on their radical imaginations (Kelley, 2002). The re-imaginings of the children (c) and the mothers (m) will be presented as a collective re-imagination, rather than as separate children and/or mothers' vision because they represent a world where Black children experience educational freedom rooted in generational ways of knowing and dreaming. There were four themes for Black children and mothers' re-imagining: learning opportunities, family engagement, infrastructure and resources, educators, and culture (see **Table 2** for the complete list with definitions and illustrative quotes).

Theme 1: Imagining schools as a space to learn new and different things

Learning opportunities was the most frequently cited request among mothers and children. A majority of participants felt that society needs to re-imagine *what* and *how* children learn. With respect to *what* children learn, participants explored dreams for content taught and learned. Participants also discussed *how* children could learn, dreaming about pedagogical approaches that facilitate learning. Each will be discussed in greater detail below.

The design to change what they learn

Most children and their parents discussed their desire for elementary students to learn more about science, technology, art, math, and literacy. Cassandra (c) talked about how she wanted to learn most about "science … lots about science." Kyion (c) wanted to have "chemicals" and more scientific learning opportunities, while Jayden dreamed about reading books about "garbage" and "science." Christian (c) integrated his curiosity around science and technology to dream about learning. He said, "[I'd learn about] designing and rockets too and science. I love science. And robots." Niles (c) talked about wanting schools to "pass out MacBooks" to learn about computers and how to do "like YouTube and stuff." Drake (c) was also interested in robotics and wanted to learn about how "we could do robotics." Jamal (c) also wanted to learn

TABLE 2   Study themes, subthemes, and illustrative quotes.

THEME 1: IMAGINING SCHOOLS AS A SPACE TO LEARN NEW AND DIFFERENT THINGS

Black children and their mother's collective re-imagination about learning

Subtheme 1: The Design to Change What they Learn The content taught and learned	"There needs to be more activity. They don't have physical activity anymore in these schools. You know, they don't have music, we had music class, we had, they don't have any of that anymore, so that would be perfect" (Kaylen) (m)
Subtheme 2: The Desire to Change How they Learn (and Don't) Pedagogical approaches to facilitate learning	"We'd learn from the teachers of course but maybe there could be videos explaining it better? Because today we actually did a video and it helped the class more… We were learning about glaciers and how most of the lakes like Lake Michigan how they were formed and the glaciers melted and moved back and [the videos] show, like pictures of the glaciers moving back." (Dominique) (c)
Subtheme 3: Eliminating Homework Altogether. Doing away with tasks assigned by teachers that must be carried out during non-school hours (Cooper, 1989)	"If I really just make a main thing disappear, it would have to be all that homework!" (Sarah) (c)

THEME 2: FAMILY ENGAGEMENT AS A MEANS TO BRING SAFETY TO SCHOOL

The "investments families make into their children's education" (e.g., material resources, time, and energy), and also mutual relationships between parents and school

	"So creating a new space, comfortable, you know, comfortable with their leader, with their teacher, knowing that they can go and talk to them and asking different questions." (Aja) (m)

THEME 3: INCREASED AND IMPROVED INFRASTRUCTURE AND RESOURCES TO FACILITATE LEARNING

The tools, technologies, and facilities of the school

Subtheme 1: Increasing Recess Time and Activities Structured opportunities for play, often outside	"recess all day long" (Willow) (c)
Subtheme 2: Improving Lunch *Food served in cafeterias*	"make food that we like" (Cassandra) (c)
Subtheme 3: Bettering the Built Learning Environment How classrooms are set up and what they include (e.g., light, temperature, desk setup)	"basketball [posters] on one side, hockey on the other side." (Jayden) (c)
Subtheme 4: Providing School Supplies Tools provided and used for teaching and learning	"[school] will get us supplies instead of us buying a bunch of random stuff." (Kyion) (c)

THEME 4: CULTIVATING CHILD-CENTERED POSITIVE SCHOOL CULTURE

All beliefs, values, attitudes, and expected behaviors that are evident in the way a school operates (Fullan, 2007)

Subtheme 1: Implementing and Increasing Inclusivity and Accessibility Serving students with a full range of abilities and disabilities (Berlach and Chambers, 2011), and accessibility, the broad range of constantly changing tools and features that support the learning of students with disabilities (McAlvage and Rice, 2018).	"You need the book and if you don't have the book, then it needs to be accessible at any time, at any given time. So if it has to be on the computer, cool. But it needs to be also be available in audio…audio version." (Journee) (m)
Subtheme 2: Reframing and Re-imagining Safety Individual's perception of how safe school is (Shumow and Lomax, 2001)	"Where it's like, let's see what's going on with the child, you know? Let's get the parents involved. Do we have to have a meeting, you know? Can we email? Can we talk, whatever? Just to get to the root of the problem because they're thinking about the overall health. [Safety is] mentally, emotionally, physically of the child, so that's, that's all." (Aniyah) (m)
Subtheme 3: Eliminating Carceral Discipline Structures Rules and strategies employed to promote learning and safety	"The only rules I would have would be like no fighting, or running, or hitting people." (Niles) (c)

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more about technology, placing a particular emphasis on video gaming and hoping he could 1 day learn "um, how to beat a video game." Finally, Jayden (c) wanted to learn more about "TVs, PS4s, and Xbox."

Integrating art was another aspect of learning opportunities that participants discussed. For example, Sarah (c), whose mother described her as a brilliant artist, wanted to learn about art, and specifically anime art because she is "really big on anime, and I'm really big on art." Christian (c) and Niles (c) both wanted to learn about "design." Kyion (c), too, wanted to "have art." When asked about what she wanted her daughter to learn about, Aniyah (m) talked

at length about bringing all aspects of art (e.g., visual, music, illustration) back into learning to create "well rounded teaching":

> Like, bringing in that art, bringing in the illustrations, bringing in the sound, bringing in a hands on, things that they get [to] touch with their hands to remember. You know, so things like that. I would love to see more. More just well-rounded teaching. (Aniyah) (m)

Kaylen (m) discussed bringing back physical activity, and the importance of music:

> There needs to be more activity. They don't have physical activity anymore in these schools. You know, they don't have music, we had music class, we had, they don't have any of that anymore, so that would be perfect (Kaylen).

Dominique (m) spoke at length about Onika's (c) incredible art skills and how she wished that her learning was more arts-based:

> I would want something extremely artistic like. [Tells Onika to go get one of her drawings]. She's extremely good with drawing and she has to get this from her dad because I can't draw things. And he's okay with drawing, but I think she surpasses him but she's extremely good. She loves painting and she loves creating. So if I could just reimagine, it would definitely be artistic-based. She's so much of a free spirit . . . I guess more so not the math reading science space, but more so than that I want that to still be in there, because I want her to have, you know, the general understanding, but more so that artistic side you know what she gravitates more toward.

Finally, mothers talked about the importance of learning literacy skills (e.g., reading, writing, speaking, and listening) that will both help them succeed academically, and in life. Imani dreamed about students learning more reading to "be success[ful] for in life." Whitney (m) wanted to see more "literacy programs within schools," and noted a serious discrepancy between what she sees in her son's reading at home, and what the schools claim to be his literacy progress.

> They stated that he, um, is still scoring below average in reading and math, reading and math. . . . So, but then it just really baffles me because, when he sits here with me the boy can read me a whole book. . . . The boy he's reading, I see his elevation. So how are you going to tell me that" (Whitney) (m).

Whitney (m) also emphasized how the current method of teaching literacy feels like "few people [in schools] are really serious about trying to get these kids where they should be reading level wise." Additionally, Kyion (c) centered literacy in his learning opportunities; talking at length about using books to learn about different subjects like social studies and science, and dreamed about having "books about the world and then, occasionally you will read the book and write down what it was about." Drake (c) wanted more literacy, too, specifically, "like more stories about like, myths and stuff." Onika (c) talked about being really into "wizarding stuff . . . like magic," and wanted to see more chapter books and "books that we'd actually be interested in, not just like what's that they could find in like, a local library. In all, participants named how much they would re-imagine what students learn about.

The desire to change how they learn (and don't)

Participants also talked at length about re-imagining how children learn. Participants named components of humanizing pedagogy, a form of teaching that both respects and uses the reality and perspectives of students (Salazar, 2013). For example, Tamara had "different dreams" for each of her children and wanted to speak about each dream separately, centering each child's strengths and interests. Aja (m) talked at length about wanting learning opportunities to include children:

> I wish you know the schools would be, you know, the space will be created with the child at the table to be able to vocalize and say "hey, this is what I would like to see in my classroom" right? . . . And it won't seem like "oh he's bad because he wants to build," because by him wanting to build, you can incorporate reading and math into that. And he's learning, you know. (Aja) (m)

Jenna (m) talked about a particular method of teaching where educators "observe the kid and teach them what they're interested in." She went on to describe her son's interests and how his love of nature could be woven into how he learns. Jenna described the importance of starting with his interests to keep Jamal both engaged and learning.

> I love that he loves nature, he [goes] on nature walks. And like be out. . .he has a metal detector that he uses. He has a little thing where he picks up bugs he created. [Laughs] One of these days, he created a book and put different kind of leaves in it and wrote a sentence about it so he likes that type of [thing] . . . Of course if that's something he's interested in, he likes it, he's going to learn, he's going to pay attention, he's not going to get bored. . . . Or just something that will get him interested in something like, something that will kinda, I guess fuel his learning. And not necessarily, you know, and he won't be bored. (Jenna)

Zoe (m) also focused on learning opportunities that start with her daughter Sarah's input, with Sarah driving the design "so that she can guide as to what would keep her attention." For Zoe, having Sarah (c) create her "own space" and designing it "in the way that [she was] hoping" was an important element to re-imagining how her daughter learns. Children participants, too, named having their ideas and voices be part of the conversation about how they learn. Kyion (c) talked about how he did not want the teachers to present "just a bunch of math problems and you'd be like 'solve this,'" but instead work with students to best understand how to find answers to math problems and putting problems "in different expressions" based on what students need in that moment of instruction. Dominique (c) appreciates different modes of instruction and

dreamed about teachers who saw that and integrated more videos in learning.

> We'd learn from the teachers of course but maybe there could be videos explaining it better? Because today we actually did a video and it helped the class more . . . We were learning about glaciers and how most of the lakes like Lake Michigan how they were formed and the glaciers melted and moved back and [the videos] show, like pictures of the glaciers moving back. (Dominique)

Tamara (m) also talked about wanting to center student perspectives and future career dreams in how students learn. For example, if a child is interested in being a chef, she said, the instruction would focus on "saying, oh, you're going to be a chef. Oh, so then it should be like, you know, focused around that. That's what I think. That would be my perfect world." Other participants, like Aja (m), talked about the child driving the inquiry and lessons, and having variation in how learning occurs.

> The child should be able to say, like, "can we learn about this today?" or on this day, lead up to it, you know, "I would like to learn about this, can we pick a day, where we can learn about that?" Not "we're going to open this book or I'm going to play this YouTube video and then we're going to do the problem." It was a lot of that I saw it in their school like YouTube was playing, and then the teacher came and did a problem on the board, and then the child was expected to sit down and do the worksheet. I would like to see more small groups and that doesn't mean secluding one from the others in the classroom. And you know, there are kids who are comfortable working by themselves. I would like for that to be okay. (Aja) (m)

Eliminating homework altogether

Another sub-theme within the learning opportunities we identified was around eliminating homework; almost every participant, parent and child, talked about a world where homework no longer existed. This connects to how and what children learn, in that most participants did not see the merit of homework at the elementary level. For participants, homework took away the joy of learning, while also placing unrealistic burdens on parents and students. When asked about a dream school, Willow (c) quickly replied "no homework." Sarah (c) was excited at the prompt to imagine eradicating the system completely, especially as it related to homework: "If I really just make a main thing disappear, it would have to be all that homework!" When asked a follow up question later about changing school, she was certain to re-emphasize her point about eliminating homework, stating

"I'd rather just get rid of homework" (Sarah). Jamal (c) also advocated for "no homework" when he was dreaming about education.

Mothers, too, felt strongly about removing homework from their newly imagined educational spaces. Given the age of their children, many parents felt responsible for assisting with homework completion, and the added pressure of making sure it was completed correctly. Aja (m) shared how homework, for her family, "wasn't logical and it wasn't realistic." She elaborated on how didn't see the necessity for it, and the discrepancies she saw between her children's schools and other districts.

> But it was like, [my kids' teachers] were like a stickler for that a lot of times. And I didn't understand like why there wasn't any um. . . I can't think of the word, but why are you being so stern on this? Like, why is this a deal breaker? Like you ready to really fail my baby, a first grader, about some homework assignments? You look at other schools, you know, especially in the suburbs and they don't even have homework? And they tell you like homework is not necessarily, like, it's not the go-to to measure a child's intelligence. (Aja) (m)

Dominique (m), too, had strong feelings about removing homework from educational spaces.

> I would not wish this on my worst enemy to be sitting at home with their child trying to do homework. It seems like it might be kind of easy and she always got good grades so it's not an issue of, like, that. Some stuff she didn't understand and some stuff I couldn't explain either like, so I will be googling assignments trying to figure out how do you figure it, but I don't know and I'd be like wait till you get in school tomorrow to ask and. I don't know. It was not a good experience. (Dominique)

Tamara (m) also felt that homework was inessential to her children's learning, especially after being in school for so long.

> [School starts at] like 7 am. I think it's ridiculous that they have to come home and do homework. I just, it just really ruffles my feathers like they're in school all day. Like, constantly. They go from one class to the next class. And then you know, from that class to the next class all day, so basically like a one to seven [period], from like, first grade up to like, 12th grade. It's ridiculous. I feel like the homework. If we live in a perfect world, I feel like the homework should just be exempt. (Tamara)

With homework off the table, participants explored more of what and how they hope students can 1 day learn.

Theme 2: Family engagement as a means to bring safety to school

Family engagement was another theme we identified in our analysis of participant interviews. When participants dreamed about increased family engagement on school campuses, they tended to dream in ways that prioritized children's strengths, comfort, safety, and acts of resistance. Family engagement, for them, was much more than parents attending parent–teacher conferences and supporting fundraising efforts. It became an opportunity to bring the safety of home to school. Jenna (m) talked about how she is already planning to seek out ways to get involved to "have a presence" and "see what's going on in school," describing her desire to be more active for the sake of her son's learning experiences and as a form of resistance to future school-based trauma:

> I really want to figure out a way to kind of insert myself in a school. . . . Kind of try to find a way to, to make sure I'm involved. And they know I'm involved and they get to know [my son] and they get to see his strengths and they try to help build his strength instead of just kind of pushing him aside (Jenna) (m).

Willow (c) wanted her educational space to include families, too: "I want the parents to be able to come. And that babies will be allowed, parents will be allowed. Because Mommy's fun." Sarah (c) also wanted her family to be present, especially during lunch. She spent a few minutes explaining to me how bad the current cafeteria food is, and how her dreams to fix it include "just [bringing the] entire family instead." But she did not just want her own family present, but rather, to open the invitation to everyone, stating, "I will let people bring their families." Aja also dreamed about more family engagement in her perfect educational world for her children, and one in which school staff saw the strengths and unique attributes parents bring to truly partner with her.

> My hope is that the administrators would be more transparent and realize that there's always, like, opportunity for growth and for teaching, you know. You don't know everything. And you can learn from a parent, I'm not an educator, I don't have a masters, but I am a parent, you know? I know my child best so listen when I come to the table with suggestions, right? (Aja) (m).

Theme 3: Increased and improved infrastructure and resources to facilitate learning

An abolitionist approach problematizes unfair school funding structures that are nested within unjust capitalist systems, or what Dunn et al. (2021) refer to as "racist education

with capitalist motives" (p. 219). Many participants re-imagined school infrastructure, including school buildings, playgrounds, classrooms, and libraries, and school resources when dreaming about change. Participants named how unequal and harmful existing school infrastructure and resources, or lack thereof, were for elementary children. For example, Dominique (c) dreamed about buildings with improved facility quality.

> The bathrooms, there are like doors missing on some of the stalls. The sinks don't work as well. . . make the bathrooms better, to make it more like, better as in like not being so cramped, there being more than 4 sinks, maybe 5 sinks. The bathroom doors being on the door still. I'd make, maybe, like, say I would redo the floors because the floors are really old and they're like different patterns and stuff. I'd fix the lights because its like pretty dark. Like when you're walking down the hallway, it's pretty dark. . . . Oh um, like brighter but like with sunlight and [the building] would be like cleaner, maybe sometimes? (Dominique) (c).

Though the concepts of infrastructure and resources are distinct entities, they are overlapping and thus, placed together in the results, because of how hard it is to disentangle the buildings and facilities from the resources. Participants dreamed about changes in: facilities, classrooms, supplies, recess, and lunch.

Increasing recess time and activities

When participants dreamed about re-imagining education, recess was often named. Kyion (c), as one example, dreamed about fifth graders (who are considered middle schoolers at his school) having recess:

> Oh yeah and the middle schoolers would get recess! . . . There's usually no break until lunchtime, usually there will be like a "special" like gym, art or.swim? Usually that would be like the somewhat recess but its not like everybody else below [fifth who get recess] (Kyion) (c).

Willow (c) was adamant about having "recess all day long" but still learning to "still be smart," while Niles (c) explained methodically that, in his dream space, there would be a total of "four recesses." When asked what he might do during those recesses, he explained that he would "play monopoly, football, and drive RC cars" (Niles) (c).

Improving lunch

Lunch, too, was another area that participants wanted to see major shifts in. Like other entities funded by the government, lunch funding has fluctuated, historically. Research has named lunch funding as a partisan issue, with nutritional standards and money allocations shifting during each presidential administration (Kam, 2020). Participants in the study talked at length about how bad school lunch food was, and dreamed about a world where lunches were "edible." Sarah (c) spent

several minutes discussing the inedible food selection at her current cafetiera, and the need to better food:

> Better food! Yeah, I question our food over there sometimes. There is this one time when they made macaroni and cheese, and the cheese was very. Brick like. . . . The cheese didn't even taste like cheese, it just tasted like overdue milk. And so, I mostly just get pizza because I don't trust anything over there anymore, because there was another time where they made breakfast for lunch and everything looked so dry. The bacon, the quote-unquote bacon that they had, looked like jerky! (Sarah)

Similarly, Jamal (c) discussed how "hot lunches" were not hot and he therefore didn't eat them. In his magic school, he would "make hot lunch have stuff that's actually meant to be hot" (Jamal). In the same way that Niles (c) advocated for four recesses, he also hoped for a world with "two lunches" to accompany those recesses. Cassandra (c) dreamed about opportunities for students to "make food that we like," instead of what has traditionally been served. Finally, Dominique (c) would create a magic school where there is "no silent lunch." When I asked if there was anything else she'd want at her magic school, she replied "That's all I can really think about" (Dominique).

Bettering the built learning environment

Participants also had a myriad of ideas about reimagining classrooms: how they are set up, and what they include, referring to the built learning environment– from desk configuration to color schemes. For example, Drake (c) discussed "bigger classrooms" that included "an area for the teacher like in the corner of something [and] a TV." Jayden (c) wanted "red and Black walls" and Christian (c) similarly hoped to create classrooms that had "all posters" on the walls, with "basketball [posters] on one side, hockey on the other side." Dominique (c) also wanted desks with seats connected to them, to provide "more room" to be able to sit down. Journee (m) shared several ideas about what a dream classroom might include because, she said, "classroom sizes aren't just proper for them," as she talked about how rooms need to be bigger. She also had ideas for classrooms to have "like library cubicles" where "you can still kinda see somebody, but you're in your own space." She also hoped to see more technology for each student, and an opportunity for children to have screens "right there" at their desks for work time that project or transfer "straight to the computer" (Journee). Finally, Sarah took dreaming a bit more literally, and imagined classrooms that had beds and clouds for desks:

> My mom gave me this one idea, probably beds. But our class would have probably been asleep for the entire day, so

that when it really work out as great. Maybe if we sat on clouds, that probably would have been better. I'd rather sit on clouds, than at a hard desk and chair. (Sarah) (c)

Providing school supplies

Participants also re-imagined what supplies would be both provided and utilized for teaching and learning. Given the disproportionate funding structures of U.S. schools, teachers are often left to fend for themselves to acquire classroom supplies (Kaufhold et al., 2006). Participants dreamed about spaces that had adequate, and ample, supplies for everyone. Table 3 details the list of supplies that participants dreamed about seeing. Several also noted that they hoped these school supplies would be "newer." As one example, Dominique (c) talked about how run down some of her current supplies were.

> [We would] have newer school supplies because we have these whiteboards, we were literally using them today, they were, like, old and broken with pieces chipping off of them, like, stains from other markers, scratches on it and stuff. . . . We can have like newer books. Like the school books that we have like, our ELA our social studies books they're really old, like they've had them since I was in kindergarten, pretty much. Like there are pieces, like pages ripping and kids have wrote in them and stuff (Dominique) (c).

Others hoped that supplies would be provided, rather than students and families, or teachers, having to purchase them. Jasmine (c) argued that teachers should not have to "pay for nothing," and Kyion (c) hoped that the school "will get us supplies instead of us buying a bunch of random stuff."

Theme 4: Cultivating child-centered positive school culture

The final theme we derived from our analysis around participants re-imagining schools as education spaces relates to

TABLE 3 List of supplies participants want included/provided.

- Enough desks for students
- Dry erase white boards
- Walls without holes
- Indestructible soap dispensers
- Books
- Chairs that roll
- More and new gym equipment
- White
- Desks with storage
- Science supplies
- Comfortable desk chairs
- A dance studio
- Fidgets (e.g., slime, poppers, finger fidgets)

aspects of school culture. Fullan (2007) defined school culture as a term that encompasses all beliefs, values, attitudes, and expected behaviors that are evident in the way a school operates. With this, participants dreamed about aspects of school culture including: inclusivity and accessibility, safety, and discipline.

Implementing and increasing inclusivity and accessibility

The first sub-theme within this category is that of inclusivity, the idea of serving students with a full range of abilities and disabilities (Berlach and Chambers, 2011), and accessibility, the notion of access to all aspects of learning (e.g., knowledge transfer, communication, class participation, designing learning, assessment) (Thurber and Bandy, 2018). Conversations about these two ideas often occurred at the same time, with participants naming how they hoped, books, for example, would be both accessible to students and inclusive of diverse identities. Journee (m) named this explicitly, talking at length about her dreams for accessible books in schools. She discussed wanting to have books that were available on the computer and in audio versions for children who may have access needs. Aniyah (m) wanted to make sure that the "educational tools" reach everybody. She hoped that educators who implement learning resources would consult with experts to ensure that everyone in class could access them. She also gave several examples of what that could look like, sharing about providing additional pictures, sounds, historical landmarks, to ensure that educators are "coming at [the learning] from every aspect" (Aniyah) (m).

With respect to inclusivity specifically, participants also talked about wanting to cultivate educational spaces where children of all identities were seen and supported. Sarah (c) told a story about her assistant principal making offensive jokes about a disabled boy and how the subsequent response from students was to "call him out" for it. In her magic school, those kinds of hurtful statements would not exist. Additionally, participants talked about inclusivity related to gender identity and sexual orientation as well. One mother has a child who identifies as part of the LGBTQIA + community. She dreamed of "some kind of system" for her child, and all children. This system, in her eyes, could include a class that supports their coping as they come "to that reality at such an early age." She also hoped for a space that teaches children of this group to "express [themselves]" and talk openly. She felt strongly that gender identity and sexual orientation "should be talked about. It's like how are you not going to talk about it when they're the ones going through it?" Other parents, too, talked about cultivating spaces where students know they can "be themselves."

Reframing and re-imagining safety

Participants in this study thought about safety in several different ways. For some, it was the absence of bullying. For others, it was the presence of kindness, compassion, and support. Drake (c), as an example, dreamed about a school

where everybody was "very kind" and "very careful" who "help each other." Others, too, talked about every member of the school community "will be friends" and "everybody will play" (Willow) (c). Some talked about safety in the context of "respect," where students and staff show respect for themselves and for each other. Jasmine (c) dreamed about feeling "positive energy" in her magic school, with positivity from teachers, students, staff, and even classrooms. When asked if her current school had positive energy, she simply replied "no." Cassandra (c) talked at length about having dogs at school because, as she said, "I love dogs... I'll pick out like, like dogs like the names of dogs. And like, the breed of the dogs. I'll pick that out too." When asked why choosing dogs was important, she replied, "like dogs help everyone feel good."

Mothers, in particular, named how important it was for their children to feel safe. They connected the idea of safety to comfort and being seen– many wanted educational spaces that truly *saw* their children for who they are, and used that knowledge to meet their children's needs, "mentally, emotionally, physically" (Aniyah) (m). Aja (m) explained that safety translated to spaces where children were "acknowledged" and "listened to." Others described dream spaces where educators intervened early and often to ensure children felt safe and comfortable. Aniyah (m) described how she wanted staff to check in with her daughter, and communicate frequently with her, inviting her for meetings, sending emails, talking after school, to stay on the same page about Willow's sense of safety. She elaborated on what she meant by safety.

> As far as the, the, the safety goes, speaking of emotional safety, yeah. When you see that need, not ignoring it . . . [mental health is] being ignored . . .And then [safety is] also getting down to the root of the problem with everything. . . . Just to get to the root of the problem because they're thinking about the overall health. Mentally, emotionally, physically of the child. (Aniyah) (m)

Participants imagined a world where educators actively see children, address needs, intervene when needed, and provide opportunities for children to "be themselves."

Eliminating carceral discipline structures

The final sub-theme around school culture relates to school discipline, and how staff support environments that are conducive to learning. This, too, was a common topic of conversation among both parents and children. In the present study, school personnel enacted harsh disciplinary actions on Black students by mandating strict rules, policing uniforms and appearance, punishing behavior, hyper-monitoring attendance, and academic performance. Given this reality, many participants spent time dreaming about spaces where policing did not exist– literally, by talking about removing police presence and metal detectors, and figuratively,

through softer rules, less discipline (e.g., less suspensions) and "kinder" educators.

Participants also spoke about eliminating uniforms. Overall, participants reported that they did not like uniforms and would do away with them in their dream scenarios. Kyion (c) talked about this, advocating for eliminating both uniforms and suspensions, with the sole caveat that "the only thing you can get suspended for" is trying to wear a uniform. When children were asked about what the rules would be in their magic schools, an overwhelming majority were in favor of "no rules." Some had stipulations that rules would exist for safety; as Niles (c) put it, "the only rules I would have would be like no fighting, or running, or hitting people." Children also talked about reducing how "strict" teachers were and replacing them with teachers who were "kind" and "helpful." In terms of broader school discipline policy, Cassandra raised an important issue around the policing of hall passes: she would eliminate this policy immediately.

> Let us walk around this school without getting without having to wear a pass or didn't have a pass. Because it's very difficult to, like, find your pass when you're out. (Cassandra) (c)

Whitney (m) and Jayden (c) were also concerned about the presence of police and metal detectors in schools, as discussed in previous sections. Participants dreamed that these forms of policing would also not exist, even though Jayden "got used to it." Overall, participants dreamed about lessening what they perceived to be harsh disciplinary measures and policies.

Discussion

> "If we could wave a magic wand and just completely reimagine schools . . . what would you want it to be like?"

> "It [*sic*] will reimagine the entire school system." Journee, mother and research participant

The present study explored how Black children and their mothers described their visions for ways out of the "constrictions" of contemporary schooling, focusing specifically on exploring how their visions aligned with ongoing abolition movements. We used elements of the community cultural wealth model (Yosso, 2005) to contextualize the families' school re-imaginings, specifically, (1) to situate their responses within existing forms of capital that contribute to Black children and their families' abilities to resist racism and subordination in schooling environments, (2) to frame their responses within an asset based framework of Black families' strengths, and (3) to center the voices of Black children and their mothers

to offer recommendations for school abolition. Combined, participant perspectives broadened conversations of building loving, equitable institutions (Love, 2019) by documenting a myriad of opportunities to re-imagine schools from the perspectives of those most affected by school –young children and their mothers. Our findings underscore the need for increased opportunities where Black youth are not simply "given a seat" at the table of educational transformation, but where we cultivate spaces for youth to build the table themselves. These findings also support new policies and practices that center freedom for Black children in schools: freedom from hyper-surveillance and racist structures, freedom to imagine, freedom to learn, and freedom to live. The following section presents a discussion related to our findings and areas for future scholarship, policy, and practice.

Decision making with Black children "at the table"

This study is one of few studies to freedom dream with Black youth. Our qualitative approach and magic wand vignette explicitly provided space for participants to dream. Findings highlight the importance of including youth in decision making across research, policy, and practice. When asked directly, the children's aspirational capital (Yosso, 2005) shines: participants in this study had many dreams about what they wanted their educational experiences to be like. Specifically, children re-imagined almost every aspect of the schooling experience–from content to curricular materials. The dreams of the Black youth, complemented by their mothers' dreams, build on the legacy of youth advocacy and further decades of research calling for increased opportunity for student voice and agency in the classroom (e.g., Cook-Sather, 2020). Excerpts also highlight the creativity, brilliance, and ingenuity of elementary-aged Black youth. For example, when children shared dreams about schools with cloud chairs and dogs in classrooms, they drew on their various and overlapping forms of community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) while extending their capital into freedom dreaming. This dreaming breaks the mold of traditional approaches to schooling, advancing the endless possibilities that exist– if only we listen to children. Though we may not, as a field, be able to realize all the dreams shared, the spirit of participants' contributions provide important insights into the role of starting with student ideas as the basis for teaching and learning in education and beyond.

Expanding academic and co-curricular offerings for Black children

Participants' dreams also revealed gaps in current offerings, both academic and non, for Black youth in schools. Their calls

for equitable resources echo the calls made by "evolutionary problem solvers with audacious imagination" (Grace Lee Boggs as quoted in Shalaby, 2017) (i.e., children) and abolitionist freedom dreaming mothers throughout history. These findings also align with the Harlem Nine's vision for equitable schooling made decades earlier, signaling that opportunity gaps are still pervasive for Black children (Milner, 2021). Countless research and lived experiences demonstrate that the American public school system is less likely to provide access to "well-prepared teachers, material resources, and [academic] instruction itself" to Black students (Smith et al., 2016, p. 21). The dearth of current opportunities underscores the importance of investing in, and expanding academic and co-curricular (e.g., sports, clubs, student groups) programming for Black youth.

The qualitative methodologies utilized in this study provided an opportunity for participants to share which opportunities they dream about in great detail. For example, children spoke about limited, or non-existent, recess time, which often accompanied school days without art and scientific inquiry. This finding is related to the dearth of current opportunities and underscores the importance of investing in, and expanding academic and co-curricular (e.g., sports, clubs, student groups) programming for Black youth. Many participants also dreamed about schooling experiences that integrated both academic and co-curricular programming into one cohesive school day. Kaylen (m) talked about seeing music and physical activity as part of the academic curriculum, as did Aniyah (m) and Kadyn (c), rather than solely providing extra curricular opportunities before and afterschool. Other participants discussed the importance of providing access to learning about future career paths, integrating identity exploration such as awareness of gender, sexual orientation, and increasing availability of mental health resources. Broadly, participants also wanted to see increased opportunities for students to access and learn in the academic content areas such as science, technology, arts, English, and math which is consistent with scholarship that explores the importance of STEAM activities for Black youth (Allen-Handy et al., 2020).

Future directions: Abolishing systems that harm to build anew

> "To choose abolition is to wonder
>   and expand
>   and imagine
>   and inquire

> and create
> and share
> *infinitely.*" (Gross, 2021, p. 179)

Findings from this study join existing conversations and future directions for research related to freedom dreaming and school abolition. However, to look toward the future, we must acknowledge that current forms of schooling cause trauma for Black youth (Duane, 2022). For example, participants frequently named the harm caused by carceral discipline structures (e.g., suspensions, silent lunches, policing uniforms, hyper surveillance, metal detectors) and dreamed about teachers who looked like them, policies that didn't police, and spaces where learning is possible. Future research can and should take up questions related to youth dreams for abolishing carceral structures. But research is not enough. We echo the call of abolitionists across networks who insist on the complete removal of police in schools (e.g., Love, 2019; Kaba, 2021; Kaler-Jones and Koppel, 2022). Only then can we honor the dreams of these and other Black students who deserve schools that affirm and uplift their humanity.

To ensure that every educational space that Black children navigate in childhood promotes healthy growth and development, scholars, practitioners, and policymakers must also continue to explore how local, statewide, and national policies and educational practices cause trauma while working to center Black youth voice. Many participants also named the lack of instructional resources (e.g., books, technology) and crumbling infrastructure, which tie directly to capitalist structures for school district funding. Abolitionists argue for completely redesigning the funding structures and divesting from racial settler capitalism (Love, 2019; Paris, 2021), though this dearth of research necessitates further exploration. Like others, we believe that a singular focus on reform is incomplete (Meiners and Winn, 2010; Meiners, 2011). Whereas reform is necessary in spaces where immediate changes are needed (e.g., school discipline), reform efforts must also, as Meiners (2011) reminds us, be connected to a larger abolitionist movement. Abolition is not simply the termination of policies and practices that harm (Stovall, 2016, 2018); it is also centered on building radical trust, joy, and imagination (Dunn et al., 2021). This approach requires that educators, policymakers, and scholars listen to *youth* to dismantle, but perhaps more importantly, work to build anew.

Finally, we encourage the field to continue to look for opportunities to support youth in "constructing their own table." Gross (2021) writes, "it's when we wonder that our freedom dreams create ever-possible futures, and it's when we ask the kids to wonder that these freedom dreams become our present realities. We owe it to them to listen." (p. 178). Through ongoing, reflexive, and adaptive processes that require robust community building, seeing children for their truths, honoring legacies of community cultural wealth

(Yosso, 2005), and taking up critical inquiry to current systems of (in)equality, we can continue to dream about possibilities in education—toward environments where Black children flourish and Black mothers see their dreams actualized.

Data availability statement

The datasets presented in this article are not readily available because this was a qualitative study that does not have a raw dataset outside of transcripts. Requests to access the datasets should be directed to AD, Addison.Duane@berkeley.edu.

Ethics statement

The studies involving human participants were reviewed and approved by Wayne State University Institutional Review Board. Informed consent to participate in this study was provided by the participants' legal guardian/next of kin.

Author contributions

Both authors listed have made a substantial, direct, and intellectual contribution to the work, and approved it for publication.

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The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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Cultivating Black liberatory spaces in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics education: What does it take?

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Black youth who reject this belief carry a heavy burden to resist anti-Black attitudes and continue to strive for excellence. As a result of this antagonistic relationship, many Black learners are led to believe that high competence in the areas of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) are beyond their grasp. Such beliefs can lead Black learners to determine that the pursuit of success in STEM is not worthwhile. In our vision for Black Liberatory STEM Spaces, the antagonistic relationship between Blackness and success in STEM is dismantled and the forms of violence that support this association are non-existent. The purpose of this paper is to highlight concrete educational practices that move us toward pedagogy that centers Black joy, creativity, imagination, and liberation within STEM education.

KEYWORDS

Black liberation, STEM, adolescence, Afrocentric pedagogy, Black joy

Introduction

Anti-Blackness is a framework that makes visible the ways in which schooling continues to be a site of suffering and marginalization for Black learners. Anti-Blackness refers to a web of attitudes, practices, and behaviors that work to oppress communities of color and foster an antagonist relationship between Blackness and humanity (Dumas and Ross, 2016; Black Liberation Collective, 2017). Though we recognize that anti-Blackness dehumanizes communities of color broadly through structural and ideological violence, this commentary specifically centers Black learners in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) disciplines. Scholars of STEM education use anti-Blackness as a lens for demonstrating how Black learners are marginalized and dehumanized within STEM learning environments (Cedillo, 2018; Martin et al., 2019). In STEM education, anti-Blackness refers to the antagonistic relationship between

Blackness and the possibility of success in STEM fields and the systemic violence that perpetuates this relation. In the United States this relationship is bolstered by structural racism and racist schooling practices that communicate to Black learners that their Blackness and associated ways of being are barriers to success in STEM (Cedillo, 2018; Martin et al., 2019).

As a result of this antagonistic relationship between Black STEM success and anti-Blackness, many Black learners are led to believe that high competence in the areas of STEM are beyond their grasp. Such beliefs can lead Black learners to determine that the pursuit of success in STEM is not worthwhile (McGee and White, 2021). Black learners who persist in STEM must do so despite the racial identity attacks they endure in these spaces, attacks that intensify as they achieve higher levels of success (Mcgee, 2020). In our vision for Black Liberatory STEM Spaces, the antagonistic relationship between Blackness and success in STEM is dismantled and the forms of violence that support this association are non-existent. The purpose of this paper is to highlight concrete educational practices that move us toward pedagogy that centers Black joy, creativity, imagination, and liberation within STEM education (**Figure 1**). First, we examine how Anti-Blackness emerges in STEM education and renders invisible the competence of Black learners. Next, we highlight critical school and classroom practices to challenge Anti-Blackness by creating visible connections between Black learners and Black historical contributions to STEM fields. Instead of focusing on deficit framings of Black children, we name and unpack individual and contextual factors that support the strengths and development of Black STEM learners. Finally, we explore the role of teacher practice and pedagogy in cultivating Black youth's interests, creativity, and joy as key ingredients to fostering liberated STEM learning spaces.

Theoretical framework: Naming anti-Blackness in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics spaces

In explicating the way anti-Blackness manifests in mathematics education, Martin and colleagues name three forms of violence that are exacted through institutionalized procedures and practices: physical, symbolic, and epistemological (Martin et al., 2019). Physical violence against Black children is explicit in the physically harmful and destructive ways it occurs in classrooms. Such violence has torn through the headlines as we bear witness to young Black girls being thrown across classrooms by law enforcement (Shakara) and arrests of those who stand up for them (Niya Kenny) (Hines and Wilmot, 2018). Symbolic violence is enacted when words, symbols, and standards are used to inflict psychological wounds (Martin et al., 2019). This violence occurs as Black

students navigate STEM learning in environments riddled with interactions that invoke racial stereotypes. Epistemological violence occurs when empirical data is interpreted in ways that construct Black learners as inferior, especially when compared to their White and Asian counterparts, when there are other equally plausible interpretations available (Martin et al., 2019). For example, notions of an "achievement gap" dominate literature that examines the differences in academic performance of Black students as compared to White students. However, this framing rarely considers the psychological and systemic barriers to achievement that Black youth have generationally faced given limited access to highly resource schools, and highly skilled and trained teachers (Ladson-Billings, 2006a,b).

Our review extends Martin and colleagues' framing of anti-Blackness to all STEM contexts. We suggest that physical, symbolic, and epistemological forms of anti-Black violence are also prevalent in science, technology, and engineering education albeit in different ways given that anti-Blackness emerges uniquely within each discipline (Mcgee, 2016, 2020; Cedillo, 2018; Jones and Melo, 2020; Nxumalo and Gitari, 2021; Holly and Quigley, 2022). While physical violence is deeply embedded in the systemic integration of anti-Blackness in policy, this commentary focuses on two implicit forms of violence: epistemological and symbolic. For example, recent calls for more inclusive hiring and training of racially minoritized groups in computer science are driven by gaps in the workforce, particularly in the development of artificial intelligence (AI) and facial recognition technologies (Nkonde, 2019; Jones and Melo, 2020). Though research funding has been dedicated to creating pipelines for students of color to enter computer science, little of these training mechanisms interrogate the problematic relationship between AI and surveillance of Black and other racially minoritized groups (Nkonde, 2019; Jones and Melo, 2020). In engineering, anti-Blackness emerges in how resources are allocated to support Black engineers across the education pipeline, but particularly in higher education. Though historically Black colleges and universities are the most successful in graduating Black engineers, they receive less than 1% of federal funds allocated to support science and engineering innovation (Holly and Quigley, 2022). Though these are only two examples of how anti-Blackness transforms across STEM disciplinary spaces, it underscores the need to interrogate the unique roots and symptoms of anti-Blackness across science, technology, and engineering in addition to mathematics. The prevalence of these forms of violence across STEM leads to a relation wherein success in STEM is equated with adopting White ways of being (Byrd and Chavous, 2011; Mcgee, 2020; McGee and White, 2021).

Black students' thriving in STEM requires that they have the choice to participate and experience success at a level similar to their non-Black peers. Offering such opportunities requires contending with how anti-Blackness is enacted through
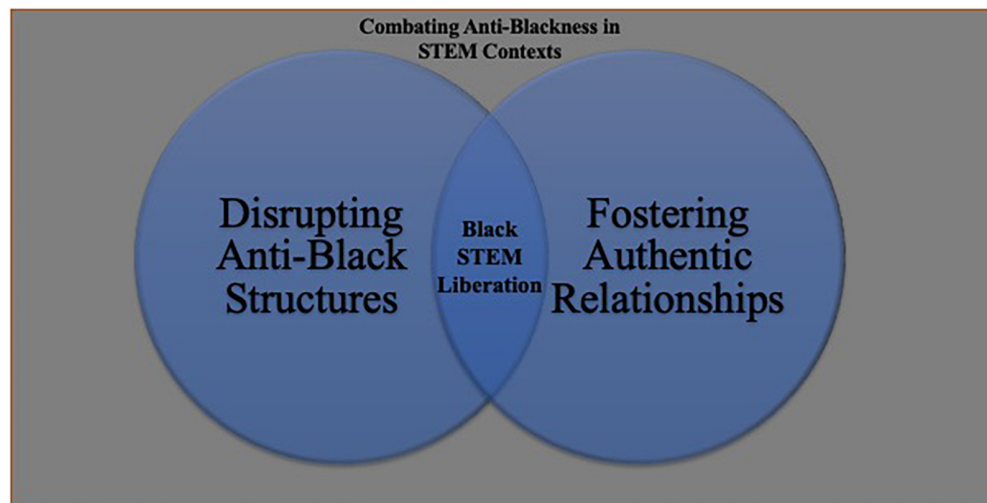
FIGURE 1
Conceptual model for combatting anti-blackness in STEM education.

systemic violence in STEM education and incorporating practices that counter its effects. Black learners need and deserve to develop their STEM competence in environments where their ability is not questioned and where they are not forced to sacrifice parts of their being to belong (Morton et al., 2019). In the remainder of this commentary, we focus on confronting epistemological and symbolic violence in STEM learning environments as these forms of anti-Blackness persist in STEM classrooms. While there are multiple dimensions to cultivating a Black liberatory STEM education, we focus on two aspects: structural and interpersonal classroom transformation. We first highlight curricula and pedagogical practices that serve to normalize and celebrate Black success in STEM. We then explore how teacher-student relationships can foster STEM spaces that allow joy, creativity, and personal interests to be the drivers of Black students' STEM development. We conclude with a call to partnership between scholars, practitioners, and community members to manifest transformative STEM learning contexts that support the brilliance of Black youth.

Disrupting curricular structures: Reimagining science, technology, engineering, and mathematics spaces for Black liberation

In his most recent book entitled *STEM, STEAM Make a Dream*, Dr. Christopher Emdin argues that we are not preparing today's youth for the STEM careers of tomorrow given that schools remove the context, emotions, and play that is needed to foster innovation within STEM careers (Emdin, 2022). This removal is a form of both epistemological and symbolic violence, given that the absence of context ignores (1) how STEM principles can be applied to solve issues related to the community and (2) how Black people have contributed to STEM innovation and development. The erasure of both application and Black innovation emphasizes deficit notions of Black intelligence and STEM capability that Black youth regularly face when entering STEM classrooms. Epistemological violence occurs through uplifting white-washed curricula as the standard for STEM innovation, explicitly casting Black contributions as inferior by excluding them from mainstream curriculum. Subsequent symbolic violence occurs as Black youth are socialized to believe that STEM learning only occurs in lab-based environments, with White men in white coats, versus understanding the community as the lab space (Carli et al., 2016; Tintori and Palomba, 2017; Morton et al., 2019; Emdin, 2022). This absence robs Black youth from making connections between themselves and STEM, both by ignoring the link between Afrocentric innovation to modern STEM technology, as well as limiting opportunities for practical application that matter for challenges Black youth may face in their communities.

To build Black liberation spaces, we must return to the often-erased link between African centered pedagogy and advancements in STEM. This reconnection addresses epistemological violence because it explicitly acknowledges Black people's contributions to STEM innovation. Afrocentric based curricula center Black learners by rooting their knowledge in African identity, values, and culture. In doing so, learners are empowered by the recognition of their own culture within the classroom and challenge deficit-based notions of Black STEM performance (Shockley and Cleveland, 2011; Van Wyk, 2014). In one Afrocentric program, youth learning in STEM is grounded

in the assumption that technology is a vessel for culture, rather than being acultural or neutral in nature (Burbanks et al., 2020). The instructors with this Afrocentric program decenter Eurocentric narratives that emphasize Greek populations and philosophers (Plato, Aristotle, etc.) as establishing the foundational principles of mathematics and physics knowledge, and instead highlight the places where such philosophers studied this knowledge, in the ancient Black civilization of Kmet. In doing so, instructors acknowledge the stolen legacy of Black intellectual contributions to STEM by emphasizing African cultures as the source of STEM knowledge, rather than being peripheral to its development (Burbanks et al., 2020).

In addition to linking historical contributions of Black people to the foundational principles of STEM, Black liberation spaces must foster the buy-in of the community, including, but not limited to the Black family (Muhammad, 2020). Centering the family challenges both epistemic and symbolic violence by highlighting that learning and knowledge is not created by individuals but are fostered in intellectual community with others. Mainstream STEM pedagogy often emphasizes the roles and contributions of individuals, particularly White men, to STEM innovation (Burbanks et al., 2020). However, families, especially parents, play a critical role in early STEM experiences, as they are often first to see and nurture burgeoning interests in math and science (Burt and Johnson, 2018; Burbanks et al., 2020). In a study of early STEM interest Black male engineering students, participants described their parents as key facilitators of their STEM interests, serving as both teachers and affirmers of their STEM journey. Further, parents contextualized the importance of education as a tool to address social and economic inequity among Black communities (Burt and Johnson, 2018). By cultivating STEM learning spaces that focus both on the student and the family, STEM becomes embedded in students as a multilayered and community practice (Burbanks et al., 2020).

As youth matriculate into higher education spaces, a continuation of this community-oriented perspective is important to fostering STEM imagination and visibility among Black youth who may not be readily exposed to early STEM learning experiences. For Black STEM innovators who return to their communities, they serve as a tangible challenge to the symbolic violence leveraged against Black youth in STEM classrooms. As STEM scholars return to their communities, they not only challenge notions of Black intellectual inferiority through their achievements, but they also serve as representations of what future generations of Black youth can dream of being in STEM. For example, the Meyerhoff Scholars Program at the University of Maryland Baltimore is a nationally acclaimed bridge program to prepare talented but often overlooked youth of color for engagement in STEM majors and future careers (Freeman and Hrabowski, 2018). In addition to integrated parental and family involvement throughout matriculation and graduation from the program, Meyerhoff scholars apply their STEM learning through STEM based

community service and engagement. Serving as tutors, teachers, and innovators, Meyerhoff scholars maintain standards of STEM excellence and culturally engaged practice by investing their talents within the community. In both the Meyerhoff Scholars Program and Afrocentric programming, youth are socialized in this community centered perspective, as they are encouraged to refer to one another as family throughout the program. Such practices underscore that STEM success is not an individual experience, but a collaborative and intergenerational mission available for all to pursue.

To cultivate Black Liberatory STEM spaces we must create opportunities to link Black youth's identities to STEM success and to recognize the scientific inquiry embedded in their daily lives (Freeman and Hrabowski, 2018; Davis, 2020). In doing so, educators disrupt traditional symbolic violence of STEM classrooms that frames Black knowledge and engagement as unscientific (Morton et al., 2022). Practitioners and scholars forge this link by helping Black youth see themselves in the curriculum, by sharing the stories of scientists who look like them. Further, teachers can serve as primary exemplars of STEM success and applied STEM pathways (Brown et al., 2017; Burt and Johnson, 2018). In a study of the institutional practices and messaging of one Afrocentric boy's school, scholars noted how the institution socialized youth to see themselves as scientists and scholars by displaying examples throughout the school such Neil DeGrasse Tyson, a notable Black astrophysicist. Additionally, the school intentionally modeled Black success through its teachers and administrators, who regularly wore or displayed regalia from their college alma-mater to underscore the expectation striving for higher education (Brown et al., 2017). In addition, the school used daily mantras to start their learning day to internalize the roles and responsibilities of being a scholar. These institutional practices are examples of how practitioners embody and convey Black history, culture, and high expectations to Black learners which they often do not experience. Further, as newly told histories such as the 1619 Project and Hidden Figures reveal, Black imagination and STEM contributions are prominent and fruitful, but are stifled because of systemic oppression (Morton et al., 2019; Emdin, 2022). Building meaningful classroom spaces for Black children requires that we show them their histories, including but not limited to the various leaders, scientists, inventors, and mathematicians who made notable contributions to American history, but whose stories are absent in traditional STEM based curricula.

For example, the framing of medical spaces has been shaped by the narratives and experiences of White men (Gewin, 2019). The image of the Black doctor has been labeled as exceptional and not traditional to a legacy of Black excellence. Further when positive images of Black medical professionals emerge within the cultural zeitgeist, they are often limited to one or two individuals that are tokenized. They are essentialized as representative of the struggle to achieve in medicine rather than being recognized

for the notable contributions that they made to the medical field. For example, Dr. Ben Carson has been widely touted as an innovator in the medical industry given his meteoric rise through pediatric neurosurgery, given his work on conjoined twins (Carson, 2011). However, prior to Dr. Carson's medical career, Dr. Vivien Thomas revolutionized pediatric surgery with his solution to blue baby syndrome (cyanosis). However, Dr. Thomas' contributions were not officially acknowledged until 1976 when he received an honorary Doctor of Laws from Johns Hopkins University, where he had been working for Dr. Alfred Blalock. Prior to Dr. Thomas's honorary doctorate, Dr. Blalock received all the credit for Dr. Thomas' contributions, due to the institutional racism that only allowed Dr. Thomas to be recognized (and paid as) a janitor and a lab technician (Joyner et al., 2015). Despite the impact of both Dr. Thomas and Dr. Carson, it is unlikely that Black youth encounter these men in their classroom's texts, but through popular media (i.e., the films Gifted Hands and Something the Lord made are two autobiographical films of Dr. Carson and Dr. Thomas respectively), if the youth are exposed to these men at all. Understanding the contributions of Black people cannot be limited to 1 month or one set of social studies courses but must traverse across all types of curricula including STEM (Akins, 2013).

However, some scholars are challenging the marginalization of Black history by highlighting how Black history knowledge has meaningful associations with academic achievement for Black youth. One study found that Black history knowledge, defined as awareness of the people, events, and achievements related to the history of the African diaspora, was associated with higher educational aspirations (Adams-Bass and Chapman-Hilliard, 2021). This association suggests that youth with knowledge of their Black history may use it as a lens to motivate their academic futures. This connection may be particularly true for Black youth who are aware of Black struggles for education during the Reconstruction and Civil Rights eras, underscoring the importance of educational access for Black youth today.

Traditional STEM courses are framed as culture absent and often ignore the historical connections of how we come to know what we know (Morton et al., 2019). Additionally, STEM narratives often center a stance of neutrality and objectivity that frames STEM as depoliticized rather than a space where power, identity, and social justice meet (Leyva et al., 2022a). In doing so, traditional STEM curricula implicitly embed symbolic and epistemic violence by failing to acknowledge the ways that (1) Black people have used STEM as a tool in service to social transformation and (2) STEM practices have been used to "prove" Black intellectual inferiority. Traditional STEM pedagogy is absent of meaningful contextualization; youth rarely get the opportunity to apply STEM concepts to real life scenarios, nor are they offered multiple opportunities to discover such concepts beyond the classroom through play. However, it is through these applied opportunities that Black

youth can reignite their imagination and boldly envision how STEM can have a meaningful role in their lives. For example, a longitudinal study of Black girls' exposure and engagement with gaming design suggested that an important link to bolstering Black girls' interest in technology was producing technology in service of salient social issues (Joseph and Thomas, 2020). Nasir highlighted the importance of contextualizing mathematical concepts through her analysis of Black middle and high school basketball players' mathematical thinking. She found that the link between statistics associated with game play (total score, number of rebounds and assists, average points per game) and evaluation of who is or is not a strong basketball player became increasingly salient as youth matured. Middle school players were less likely to use multiple mathematical calculations to evaluate game play, whereas high school students employed multiple statistical indicators to evaluate the strength of the player (Nasir, 2000). Yet, despite the contextualized use of mathematics, this form of mathematical inquiry is often made invisible given the salience of Black youth as anything but mathematicians (Gholson and Wilkes, 2017). A longitudinal study of Black girls' exposure and engagement with gaming design suggested that an important link to bolstering Black girls' interest in technology was producing technology in service of salient social issues.

Leyva and colleagues build upon this principle of contextualization in a study of Black queer undergraduate STEM majors. Students remarked that the issues of equity related to their salient and intersectional social identities (i.e., Black and queer) were motivators to persist in STEM. However, these students highlighted having to move outside of STEM spaces to study connections between STEM (particularly engineering) and issues of equity, especially those related to the interaction between the social and built environments. Though students had the agency to marry their STEM interests with coursework in the humanities to explore the intersection of STEM and equity, the fact that they were not able to meet their needs within STEM highlights the hypocrisy of STEM as a neutral or objective space (Harding, 2020; Leyva et al., 2022a,b). Contextualizing STEM within issues of equity and social justice can serve to draw Black students into STEM classrooms, by bridging the ways that STEM skills can help them to solve challenges related to their multiple communities. Thus, multiple scholars are challenging the field to pivot toward multimodal STEM engagement that allows for students, particularly those from marginalized groups to engage in STEM experiences.

Increasing participation in STEM requires that we center students' interests, by teaching STEM in the context of real-world scenarios salient to Black students. Such STEM learning may occur in relation to social and environmental justice issues that are national or specific to their immediate communities. By teaching STEM in context, students can see themselves within the discipline and forge a STEM identity that is compatible with their racial identity, which encourages STEM

persistence (McGee, 2021). Further, students learn discipline specific content and practices in a contextualized way, rather than through rote memorization, allowing youth to form a deeper network of connections between theory and practice. Mathematics education researchers have provided examples of this link by examining mortgage rates, using mathematics to support individuals with disabilities, and using statistics to see the frequency of which Black people are pulled over by police officers. Science educators highlight important topics such as recycling, renewable energy, and health disparities (Emdin, 2016, 2022). Although we center social and environmental justice as part of liberation, it is also important to center student interests that are not directly connected to social or environmental justice. For example, some students may enjoy the theoretical and abstract aspects of STEM disciplines without the context of practical application. This interest is important as well, as Black youth can build and test foundational theories that broaden scientific perspectives beyond the narratives of White men. However, there is often a tension between theoretical or pure science and applied sciences. Often pursuing theoretical and abstract STEM disciplines is seen as "elite," whereas practical and application is seen as inferior (Gutierrez, 2018). Here we make no evaluative distinction between the two, instead we see both as critical and important options for the liberation of Black learners.

Fostering authentic relationships: Enabling joy, creativity, and imagination through teaching

Enabling joy, creativity, and imagination in a liberatory education requires effective teaching that demands powerful interactions between and among teachers and students. These interactions disrupt both epistemological and symbolic violence by acknowledging and accepting Black learners' ways of knowing and being. This acceptance allows Black learner's experiences to be co-constructed with their teachers and peers in ways that center them. Interactions occur in classrooms through whole group, small group, and one-on-one structures. Positive interactions demonstrate love, care, and joy that foster a supportive and thriving learning context for all students. In contrast, negative interactions are often the source of dismissiveness, harm and hate for Black learners. Thus, we must envision teacher-student interactions, as well as student-student interactions as key opportunities to leverage and cultivate Black joy, creativity, and imagination to challenge both epistemological and symbolic violence.

Teachers promote positive interactions through several practices including: conversations that value students' disciplinary thinking, consider students' wellbeing, and support students' development as learners. Interactions between and among students could include the following: conversations

that value one another's thinking, support one another, and center content (Kalinec-Craig, 2017). Teachers play a critical role in promoting positive interactions between and among students. For example, one study highlighted how Black girls in mathematics classrooms who engaged one-on-one interactions with their teachers, had approachable teachers, and could collectively struggle with their peers (e.g., learn from one another and share power) bolstered their mathematics learning (Joseph et al., 2019). As a result of the types of interactions that could occur between and among teachers and students, we could expect outcomes such as students feeling empowered and agentic about their learning, given that they have a supportive and enjoyable work environment with both teachers and peers (Joseph et al., 2019; McKinney de Royston et al., 2021).

In addition to centering the interests of Black learners, we must nurture Black learners' creativity. Doing so requires teachers to develop opportunities for student exploration. Teachers must also develop disciplinary practices which are connected to the curriculum that students have access to and the ways in which teacher practice and implementation supports it. Focusing on teaching practice is important to ensure Black liberatory spaces are filled with teachers who see the brilliance of Black youth and maintain high expectations of them. These expectations are set by teachers having stronger cultural knowledge of the contributions of Black communities to STEM fields, as well as seeing Black youth from a strengths-based perspective (Hammond, 2014; Lee et al., 2022).

One practice that embodies strengths-based support is acknowledging the competence of Black learners through specific feedback on what or how they perform well. Acknowledging competence is an extension of assigning competence (Cohen et al., 1999). Historically and presently, Black learners have not been positioned as smart or competent in STEM classrooms. To integrate the practice of acknowledging competence the teacher must (1) understand the status of students in the classroom, (2) provide structures and activities to see what students know, with an emphasis on how their learning connects to the STEM discipline, and (3) acknowledge the competence of the students privately (individually), semi-publicly (during small group work), or publicly (during whole group discussion). This practice challenges the epistemological and symbolic violence that Black learners too often experience by concretely naming the ways in which their competence contributes to whole class learning (Wilkes, 2022).

By acknowledging the competence of Black learners, we assume they enter classrooms with valued abilities and funds of knowledge instead of as problems that need to be fixed (Shockley and Cleveland, 2011). In doing so we disrupt epistemological violence by highlighting the contributions of Black learners. When the contributions of Black learners are elevated, Black intellectual value is explicitly named and demonstrated for others. Further, seeing students' competence as something that

already exists, but needs to be both acknowledged and cultivated sets the tone for ways of being in classrooms and subsequently disrupts symbolic violence (Muhammad, 2020). Elevating Black intellectual value with fidelity requires intentionality from teachers to see potential harm in assessment practices, curricula, and policies—key sources of symbolic violence—that are problematic for Black children. Examples of this violence include current political agendas that ban the teaching of Critical Race Theory (CRT) in schools and mathematical tasks that create false narratives about Black learners as thugs, gangsters, drug dealers and pimps (Howard et al., 2012; Neal-Jackson, 2018; Morgan, 2022).

Intentionality and what Madkins and Morton (2021) identify as political clarity (i.e., the understanding of how structural and school inequalities work to (re)produce differential learning experiences for minoritized learners) are necessary to combat potential harms. Teacher intentionality that accounts for potential harm requires attention to instructional design. That is, teachers must design and modify, if necessary, lessons and select tasks that highlight the brilliance of Black learners. The type of intentionality with respect to design and in-the-moment response to students' thinking, doing, and ways of being, requires teachers to be both content and culturally competent. They must also be fluent in those competencies to acknowledge the strengths and practices that Black learners have. Being fluent in both content and cultural competence allows for teachers to make explicit connections between the STEM content and practices being taught for students. It is through teacher practices such as acknowledging competence that connect opportunities for student exploration, STEM practices, and the fostering of students' creativity. Integrating this practice means being able to see the brilliance of Black learners through how they look, what they wear, and the language they use, which has historically all been factors that have contributed to not seeing Black learners' competences, ultimately stifling their creativity.

Conclusion

Cultivating Black liberatory spaces in STEM requires many hands to dismantle violence against Black youth. As Black learners exist in a time where even the mention of race in schools can have violent repercussions, it will take all of us as teachers, mentors, and community members to reimagine and rebuild spaces that affirm and assume Black brilliance. We must recognize the cultural assets Black youth bring to classrooms and affirm those assets through our daily interactions (Kalinec-Craig, 2017; Anyiwo et al., 2018; Mathews et al., 2020). Through these concrete practices, we ensure that Black learners can use their imagination in STEM, subsequently disrupting oppressive structures that hinder their development. In this paper we challenge educators, practitioners, and community members to move beyond naming oppressive structures, but to examine how our curricular and interpersonal practices might serve as levers to support Black children's joy, creativity, interests, and imagination in STEM. Here we demonstrated how centering students' interests, nurturing Black learners' creativity, and fostering positive interactions between teachers and Black learners are key components that push back against anti-Blackness. We hope that these suggestions serve as a foundation to build a repertoire of practices that are used in service of elevating Black brilliance, joy, and imagination in STEM contexts.

Author contributions

Conflict of interest

Publisher's note

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Freedom dreaming with Black Canadian mothers

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A burgeoning body of literature explores the educational experiences of Black Canadian students. Such literature reveals Black students as disproportionately impacted by academic underachievement, discipline policies, and special education placement. Black Canadian mothers have long dreamt of and advocated for humanizing learning spaces for their children. This paper explores how a group of Black Canadian mothers partnered with one another to reimagine learning opportunities for their children. This article presents insights obtained from eight in-depth interviews with Black Canadian mothers living in Toronto. In these interviews, participants shared stories that center the following questions: (1). How do Black mothers reconceptualize their motherwork to include freedom dreams? (2). How do Black mothers partner with one another to produce a vision for their children's education? Grounded in an arts-informed narrative methodology, this study compiled findings gained from interviews into the creative non-fiction story *Set it Off. Set it Off* captures personal narratives, shared by study participants, highlighting the central role of freedom dreams and resistance as Black Canadian mothers organize for their children's education.

KEYWORDS

Black children, Black Canadian mothers, education, freedom dreaming, literacy

Introduction

Black Canadian communities are well-established and diverse, some of which stretch back to the beginning of settler colonialism on this land (James et al., 2010). For generations, Black Canadians have denounced the chronic pathologization of Black families and the underachievement of their children in public schools (Aladejebi, 2016). Personal narratives, community-led research, and data collected by public school boards (Turner Consulting Group, 2015; Toronto District School Board, 2019; Peel District School Board, 2022) reveal Black students as disproportionately impacted by academic underachievement, discipline policies, and special education placement.

Black Canadians have long reimagined education for liberation. Following public outcry and demonstrations spearheaded by Black leaders, school boards across Canada acknowledged the injustices levied against young Black children in the public education

system (Hong, 2017). Many public school boards enacted policies and implemented initiatives to redress discriminatory practices (James and Turner, 2017). Peel District School Board's *We Rise Together* and Toronto District School Board's *Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement* are examples of the actions undertaken by some Canadian school boards to identify, understand, and address the marginalization of Black children. Yet, persistent inequalities continue to hinder young Black students from realizing their full potential. Refusing the dehumanization and disposability of their children, Black mothers, throughout the country organize to redesign learning spaces where they and their children matter (Fearon, 2020).

This article centers an arts-informed study that explored the leadership experiences of eight Black mothers in Toronto. The article weaves scholarship and narratives to provide readers with a harrowing account into the ways that a group of Black mothers came together to reimagine learning opportunities for their children. I begin this article by contextualizing Black mothers' presence and leadership in public education in Canada. I, then, use a personal narrative to position myself within the research. I also provide readers with an overview of the frameworks informing the study. The article continues with a presentation of the questions and methodology that guided the study. Afterward, a creative non-fiction story presents the study findings and insights. I close the article by offering school-based educators a series of reflection questions to support Black mothers' use of alternative visions and dreams for their children's learning experiences.

Black mothers (re)visioning educational spaces in Canada: A historical and contemporary overview

Canada boasts a deeply rooted Black population. The country's relationship with Black Canadian communities is marred by practices of slavery and segregation, and racially restrictive immigration policies (Lawson, 2013; Maynard, 2018; ALADEJEBI, 2021; Litchmore, 2021). We, Black Canadian mothers, have long been at the forefront of liberation movements, most notably those pertaining to public education. For centuries, we have leveraged our dreams to assert our children's engagement and wellbeing in Canadian schools. Our stories trace the early activism of Black mothers who, in response to the rejection of their children from public schools in the 19th century, imagined and later established educational institutions with little assistance from white school officials (Aladejebi, 2016). Black mothers, like Mary Ann Shadd Cary, spearheaded social movements in the 1800s demanding Black children's full participation in public schools (Aladejebi, 2016). During this period, community mother and educator Mary Bibb also rallied

Black families to establish separate schools for excluded Black children (Aladejebi, 2016).

Maynard (2018), Walcott and Abdillahi (2019), and Brand (2020) and other Black scholars point to the ways that Atlantic chattel slavery and its afterlives continue to unfold in Canadian institutions like education. In these afterlives, anti-Black racism is endemic to Canadian public schools and profoundly shapes the lives of Black children (Maynard, 2018; Walcott and Abdillahi, 2019). Current Canadian scholarship (James and Turner, 2017), public school board reports (Toronto District School Board, 2019; Peel District School Board, 2022), and personal narratives (Turner Consulting Group, 2015) further highlight Black students' negative schooling experiences. Such accounts identify lowered academic expectations, minimal acknowledgment of Black Canadian history in the curriculum, and disproportionate suspension as plaguing public schools in the country (Peel District School Board, 2022).

Black Canadian mothers continue to reimagine and push for the transformation of their children's education. In 2019, Shada Mohamed led a group of Black mothers demanding the Alberta Ministry of Education to take action against anti-Black racism afflicting their children's schools (McGarvey, 2019). Mohamed and fellow mothers accused school officials of denying the existence of anti-Black racism in public schools and ignoring its negative impact on Black children's health and achievement. To the media, Mohamed declared, "I've been into the school every time there's been an issue, I address it right after school and address it with the principal. Nobody seems to take this seriously. It's a joke" (McGarvey, 2019). Also in 2019, Edmonton school officials called an 11-year-old Black boy a gang member because he wore a durag (Konguavi, 2019). While the boy's mother, Una Momulu, sought redress from the principal, school personnel called the police on her and later prohibited her from entering her son's school. In addition to her son being racially profiled, Momulu maintained that she was "painted as an angry Black woman" and threatened with legal action by the school board (Konguavi, 2019). At a board meeting, Momulu said, "It is time to acknowledge that this entire incident has to do with race from the very beginning" (Konguavi, 2019).

Scholarship led by Henry, 1992, 1993, 1996, 1998 and Mogadime (2000) further attest to Black Canadian mother leaders enduring commitment to uphold Black children's dignity within the education system and the larger community. By positioning Black mothers' present-day liberation work within a historical context, we better understand their experiences in the public education system as being shaped by a continuum of anti-Black racism (Henry, 1992, 1993, 1996, 1998; Mogadime, 2000). Much like Mary Ann Shadd Cary, Mary Bibb and other Black mother leaders who have come before us, Black Canadian mothers continue to use alternative visions for education to reclaim our humanity and that of our children (Henry, 1992, 1993, 1996, 1998; Mogadime, 2000; Fearon, 2020).

Situating myself within educational research on Black mothers

I am a Black Canadian mother of two young children. I grew up in an immigrant neighborhood not far from the Toronto zoo. My Jamaican-born parents, sister, and I lived in a pink-brick house a few blocks from Baker Public School. A pine tree stood at our school's back entrance and towered over the playground. Each school day began with Mr. King, our principal, leading the announcements and national anthem. One Friday morning in November, just after my class sang O'Canada, my third grade teacher summoned me to her desk. I rose from my chair and trudged toward a seated Ms. Marchant. I remember passing the room's lone window. I also recall a group of classmates giggling and my sneakers screeching against the tiled floors. Ms. Marchant slouched behind her oak desk and placed her red tipped fingers atop a dozen or so papers. She swept aside her silver bangs revealing a set of blue eyes.

"Do you know what lazy means?" the woman pursed her rouged lips.

"Yeah," I tugged one of my braids, "I know what that means."

"That's what you are," Ms. Marchant scoffed, "you're lazy."

The teacher pushed my one-paged assignment to the edge of the desk. Red rows of her handwritten words marked the sheet.

"I can tell you rushed your assignment," the teacher tapped my work.

Tears clung to my eyelashes and pooled above my cheeks.

The teacher sighed, "you need to put more effort into school."

I snatched my assignment and marched to my seat. I slumped into the chair, shoved the paper inside my desk, and peered out the window. The recess bell rang. I watched children in zipped up coats rush to the school yard and run around the pine tree.

That night, right before bed, I curled onto the couch with my mother. I recounted to Mummy the day's events. Mummy shook her head and stomped the parquet floor. "How can she teach you," Mummy wondered aloud, "If she doesn't care about you?" Mummy spent the weekend on the phone with Aunt Vee. Mummy balanced the telephone on her shoulder and twirled its white cord around her fingers. The two women rehearsed their upcoming meeting with Ms. Marchant, each taking turns role-playing the teacher. Mummy and Aunt Vee began imagining how Black children and their families could create their own educational spaces. They dared to dream of learning opportunities for me and other Black children that existed outside the confines of the school.

In her book, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Riotous Black Girls, Troublesome Women and Queer Radicals*, Hartman (2020) argues that research has long failed to uphold Black mothers as thinkers, planners, or leaders. Sociologists, historians, and other scholars, explains Hartman, "fail to discern the beauty and they see only the disorder, missing all the ways Black [mothers] create life and make bare need into an arena of elaboration" (Hartman, 2020, p. 23). A growing number of educational researchers investigate the agency, authority, and authenticity that Black Canadian mothers exercise in their children's education (Onuora, 2015; Fearon, 2020). This arts-informed study adds to educational research centering the leadership of Black Canadian mothers to reimagine learning opportunities for our children.

Underpinning frameworks

To carry out this arts-informed study, it was necessary to complete a critical review of the theories framing the research. Freedom dreams, Black motherwork scholarship, and endarkened feminist epistemology underpinned all phases of this research study.

Freedom dreams

A body of Canadian scholarship elucidates the schooling experiences of Black children and youth (e.g., Henry, 1992, 1993, 1996, 1998; Dei, 1997; James and Turner, 2017; McPherson, 2020; Litchmore, 2021). However, the notion of "freedom dreaming" in relation to Black Canadian children has received minimal attention within the fields of education. Kelley (2002, 2022) describes freedom dreaming as a process of collective radical imagining. The act of freedom dreaming conjures and sustains visions of freedom, especially in challenging times. In his book *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination*, Kelley (2002) guides readers through the histories of select social movements by centering their visions of a better future for all. According to Kelley (2002):

Progressive social movements do not simply produce statistics and narratives of oppression; rather, the best ones do what great poetry always does: transport us to another place, compel us to relive horrors and, more importantly, enable us to imagine a new society (p. 9).

Freedom dreams, concludes Kelley (2002), enables us to see beyond our immediate ordeals and produce visions grounded in love, hope, and liberation.

Love (2019) extends notions of freedom dreams to illuminate the schooling experiences of Black children and youth. In her book, *We Want to Do More Than Survive: Abolitionist Teaching and the Pursuit of Educational Freedom*, Love (2019) challenges us to "demand the impossible" and dream of the world Black students, families, and communities deserve (p. 7). Echoing Kelley (2002, 2022) and Love (2019) affirms that such dreams for a liberated future, within educational spaces and beyond, are acts of radical love,

joy, and resistance. This study used freedom dreams as a framework to investigate not simply the beliefs, actions, and structures that harm Black students. In fact, Freedom dreams allowed the study to stress Black Canadian mothers' collective visions of a liberatory educational praxis for their children. Indeed, it is not enough to imagine a world without oppression. Thinkers like Love (2019) and Kelley (2002, 2022) remind us that the process of freedom dreaming requires us to understand the mechanisms that reproduce the subjugation and exploitation of Black students in schools across Canada.

Black motherwork

The study explored how a group of Black Canadian mothers drew on their motherwork to rethink educational opportunities for their children. Rich (1986) and Ruddick (1989) have propelled the study of mothering and motherwork internationally. These American scholars explored mothering as a site that affords women opportunities for agency. Ruddick (1989) argued that the work of mothering "demands that mothers think" and "out of this need for thoughtfulness, a distinctive discipline emerges" (p. 24).

In Canada, thinkers continue to politicize mothering as work of resistance and self-determination (Henry, 1992, 1993, 1996, 1998; Mogadime, 2000). Canadian scholars such as O'Reilly (2004) and Massaquoi and Wane (2007) documented the preserving, nurturing, and healing aspects of Black motherhood. In her book *Toni Morrison and Motherhood*, O'Reilly (2004) traced Toni Morrison's theory of Black mothering as articulated in Morrison's novels, essays, speeches, and interviews. O'Reilly (2004) illustrated how Morrison (1972, 1977, 1981, 1984) builds upon Black women's experiences of and perspectives on motherhood to theorize a Black motherwork that is, in terms of maternal identity, role, and action, radically different from the motherwork prescribed in the dominant culture.

Citing Hooks (1992), Morrison (see O'Reilly, 2004) and Collins (2000) conceptualizes Black motherwork in the following dimensions: (1) communal mothering, (2) a site of power, (3) motherline, and (4) homeplace. Indeed, Black motherwork is an act of resistance, essential to Black women's fight against racism and sexism, and propels our ability to achieve wellbeing for ourselves, our children, and our community (O'Reilly, 2004). Motherline, an aspect of Black women's motherwork that centers communal learning and cultural knowledge systems, and homeplace, a site where the agency of Black mothers and their children is nurtured, are integral components of Black motherwork (Hooks, 1992; O'Reilly, 2004; Fearon, 2020). The following sections provide readers with an extended description to the four interrelated aspects of Black motherwork:

Communal mothering

Communal mothering is a formal or non-formal arrangement to care for children. Communal mothers (i.e., othermothers, community mothers, and transnational mothers) take care of children who are not necessarily biologically theirs. This form of parenting is indigenous to African communities (Wane, 2000) and remains a present-day staple practice in the African diaspora preserved through enslavement and immigration. This form of communal parenting is revolutionary as it opposes the idea that parents, especially biological mothers, should be the only child rearers. Communal mothering advocates for a form of parenting where mothering is understood as collective work.

Site of power

Site of Power is a place, spanning time and space, where Black mothers and their children come together and engage in acts of resistance (O'Reilly, 2004). Black women's motherwork provides a foundation for Black women's activism. Black women's feelings of responsibility for nurturing the children in their networks stimulate a more generalized ethic of care where Black women feel accountable to all the Black community's children.

Motherline

Motherline is an aspect of Black women's motherwork that centers communal learnings and knowledge systems. Black mothers pass on narratives about women's physical, psychological and historical triumphs. This transmission of intergenerational knowledge, values and worldviews serves to teach Black mothers and their children self-love, leadership and "an astute opposition to oppression" (King and Ferguson, 2011, p. 24).

Homeplace

This study extends motherwork scholarship by positioning the work of Black Canadian mothers to envision affirming learning spaces for their children, and act on these dreams for the future, as resistance. Hooks (1992) opens the chapter, *Homeplace as Resistance*, with a personal story recounting childhood visits to her grandmother's house. Through a series of confessional anecdotes, Hooks (1992) explores the significance of homeplace for Black mothers and their children. Homeplace, according to Hooks (1992), is a site led by Black women where their own agency, as well as that of their Black children, is nurtured. Homeplace affirms Black children's relationships, identities, and ideas. Black motherwork scholars (see: O'Reilly, 2004; Onuora, 2015; Fearon, 2020) uphold homeplace as integral to ensuring Black children's health and wellbeing in a society that "attempts to dehumanize, oppress, suppress, and annihilate Black [lives]" (Evans-Winters, 2019, p. 23).

Henry, 1992, 1993, 1996, 1998 and Mogadime (2000) document the traditions of Black women teachers drawing

on motherwork to affirm Black children within school settings. A motherwork framework is essential to this study's investigation of the work and visioning of Black Canadian mothers. A motherwork framework provided insights needed to interpret and articulate how we, Black Canadian mothers, understand, practice, and leverage motherwork to reimagine our children's education.

Endarkened feminist epistemology

Endarkened feminist epistemology (EFE) (Dillard, 2000) guides my work as a Black mother and researcher. EFE offers Black mothers opportunities to establish alternative sites of existence within educational institutions and our communities. EFE implores Black mothers to reclaim our cultural, historical, and spiritual identities (Dillard, 2000; Toliver, 2021). In so doing, we center our whole selves, heal and uplift our communities, and create new worlds in which we and our children might live life more fully. EFE beholdens us to be accountable to the Black mothers and their children in which we engage (Dillard, 2000; Toliver, 2021). Through EFE, Dillard (2000) invites Black mother scholars "to become aware of multiple ways of knowing and doing research [and it is] available to those serious enough to interrogate the epistemological, political, and ethical level of their work" (p. 663).

EFE provides us, Black mother scholars, with frameworks to reimagine the ways we engage in inquiry. EFE calls on Black mother scholars to challenge traditional ideologies that valorize objectivity in the research process, separate the researcher and researched, and recognize research participants as a bounded, autonomous individual (Toliver, 2021). Dillard challenges me and other Black mothers to center our work in a paradigm of spirituality where humanity and the self, creativity and healing, and safety and liberation (Dillard, 2006; Okpalaoka and Dillard, 2012) exist. Echoing Toliver (2021), EFE allows me to refute traditional methods of data representation and encourages space for the imaginative and cathartic use of creative non-fiction as a means to be responsible to the Black mothers I work with and for.

Guiding questions

Through a data-driven short story, this arts-informed narrative study captured the ways in which a group of Black mothers living in Toronto came together to reimagine their children's learning experiences. The following questions guided this arts-informed inquiry:

- How do Black mothers reconceptualize their motherwork to include freedom dreams?
- How do Black mothers partner with one another to produce a vision for their children's education?

The study

The purpose of this arts-informed study was to explore with eight Black mothers living in Toronto their maternal experiences of organizing educational possibilities for their children. Specifically, I sought to understand how these particular Black Canadian mothers navigated their immediate ordeals to reimagine humanizing learning sites for their children. A purposeful sampling procedure was used as it enabled me to yield the most information about the phenomenon under study. Since I sought to locate Black mothers in Toronto, a snowball sampling strategy, sometimes referred to as network or chain sampling (Miles and Huberman, 1994; Patton, 2002), was employed. Participants were asked to refer other Black mothers whom they knew to be engaged in motherwork and raising elementary-aged Black children. Study participants included: (1). women that self-identify as being of Black/African descent living in the Greater Toronto Area; (2). women who have engaged in motherwork; (3). women who have mothered elementary-aged Black children; and (4). women at least 18 years of age and competent to formally give consent for the interview.

Participants

I acknowledge the diversity within Black Canadian communities. Some African descended Canadians affirm their longstanding presence in Canada across multiple generations, whereas others (irrespective of state documentation) self-identify as immigrants, refugees, or migrant workers. In fact, I belong to a growing Black Canadian population: second and third generation Black Canadians who continue to honor ancestral bonds to our "home country," while negotiating ideas around our Canadian citizenship.

Despite the diversity within Black Canadian communities, for this arts-informed study, all 8 participants identified as cisgender women of African descent who engaged in motherwork and lived in the Greater Toronto Area. Forty percent of participants identified as second generation Canadians from the Caribbean, while 60 percent identified as first generation Canadians from the Caribbean. The stories revolve around a Scarborough cooperative housing building called, The Woods. Scarborough is a former municipality that was amalgamated to the city of Toronto in 1998. Initial recruitment for the study centered a makeshift salon located in The Woods cooperative housing building. Co-operative tenant and president, Participant A, operated the salon and had an elementary-aged daughter. Participant A distributed the recruitment flyers to her customers. Participants recruited to the study either frequented the salon or knew a mother who did. Accordingly, all study participants came from this housing co-operative or the surrounding with elementary-aged children.

By getting participants who live either in the same housing co-operative or nearby, this study was able to focus on Black mothers who drew on one another for support.

Interviews

For this study, I conducted eight in-depth interviews. These face-to-face interviews were tape recorded in their entirety. I began all interviews by self-identifying as a mother of African-Jamaican ancestry raised in east end Toronto's Caribbean community. Interviews were scheduled around participants' work and childcare responsibilities. Interviews were conducted at an agreed upon location to mitigate participant travel. All interviews took place at the participants' homes. Participants were able to move around and rearrange seating to better suit their needs. Each interview lasted approximately 45–60 min.

During the interviews, participants responded to questions relating to their conceptions of Black motherhood, their communities of support, and their relationships with their children's schools. Participants shared their understanding of Black motherhood and motherwork, and described challenges they encountered at their children's schools. In their responses, participants discussed their visions for improved learning experiences for their children and explained how they set out to achieve these goals. Throughout the interview process, participants did not explicitly use the term *freedom dreams*. Nonetheless, participants' collective visions for improved learning experiences shared during the interviews aligned with the core idea of *freedom dreams*– to see beyond our immediate ordeals and produce visions grounded in love, hope, and liberation (Kelley, 2002).

Methodology and story structure

This study intertwined "the systematic and rigorous qualities of conventional qualitative methodologies with the artistic, disciplined, and imaginative qualities of the arts" (Cole and Knowles, 2008, p. 59). Guided by an arts-informed narrative methodology, this study employed Black storytelling to investigate Black Canadian mothers' reimagining of their children's education. An arts-informed narrative methodology also rendered this scholarship accessible to multiple audiences. Black storytelling, explains Toliver (2021), focuses on how people of African descent counter society's rejection of Black life. Toliver (2021) defined Black storytelling as stories emerging "from the lived experiences of Black people and communities that use Black knowledge/s as a tool to extend and author oneself beyond the conditions of anti-Blackness" (p. 4). This arts-informed study centered the everyday stories of Black Canadian mothers in Toronto and humanized their leadership experiences. The findings section of this article relied on the

Black storytelling tradition of call-and-response to illustrate the complexity and richness of the work and visioning of Black Canadian mothers in Toronto. Storytelling allows me to make space for other ways of thinking, knowing, interpreting, and representing work centered on the lives of Black Canadian mothers and their children.

Black communities worldwide have long engaged in the practice of call-and-response. Call-and-response patterns characterized play and work songs and spirituals sung by enslaved Africans in the Caribbean and North America (Sale, 1992). Call-and-response is a dialogic exercise between a speaker and listener where "the speaker's statements ('calls') are punctuated by expressions ('responses') from the listener" (Smitherman, 1977, p. 104; Toliver, 2020). Indeed, call-and-response is a shared storytelling event requiring communal participation (Boone, 2003; Richards-Greaves, 2016; Toliver, 2020). Boone (2003) and Toliver (2020) noted the prevalence of call-and-response patterns in everyday exchanges in Black communities across North America. As long as there is a speaker and an audience, Toliver (2020) argued, call-and-response can occur in a conversation between a mother and her children, around the kitchen table, or in a short story. As the practice of call-and-response can be carried out in a myriad of Black communal spaces, I contend that the practice can also be found in Black mothers' stories documenting how they come together to fulfill their dreams of improved learning experiences for their children.

The creative non-fiction short story *Set it Off* represents the study's findings. *Set it Off* assumes a call-and-response structure. The story uses footnotes to reference scholarship and invite the reader to consider the ways that multiple research traditions (i.e., storytelling, literary arts, and conventional scholarly work) come together to reveal the lives of Black Canadian mothers as they envision humanizing educational experiences for their children. *Set it Off* requires the reader to reflect on and disclose their own responses to the ideas put forward by participants, current policies, literature, and previous academic studies. This format honors an arts-informed research methodology by centering research on Black mothers' stories and dreams.

Set it Off, the data-driven short story representing study findings, is informed by Black oral storytelling traditions like call-and-response and audience participation (Morrison, 1984; Sale, 1992). *Set it Off* captures pertinent information garnered from the study's in-depth interviews with eight participants and current scholarship. The representation of the study's findings as a short story engages readers in a dialogic exercise with participants and current scholarship. Readers are asked to vicariously experience what the participants have gone through and affirm them as legitimate sources of knowledge. Readers are also challenged to leverage that knowledge to enact a change in their own communities.

This study used a comprehensive analytic process, rooted in Black storytelling, for collecting and interpreting stories shared

during in-depth interviews (Banks-Wallace and Parks, 2001; Banks-Wallace, 2002). This process positions Black storytelling as central to the analysis, synthesis, and presentation of data. For this study, I built on Banks-Wallace's (2002) process to reveal the depth of participants' lived experiences. This analytic process included the following: (a) locating the interviews within the historical context and cultural norms, (b) demarcation of boundaries for individual stories, (c) thematic and functional analysis of stories, (d) grouping stories according to themes and functions, (e) comparison of story themes and functions across participant interviews, (f) restructuring participants' memories into storied accounts, and (g) reviewing stories for conspicuous absences and silences.

Locating the interviews within the historical context and cultural norms

The social-cultural-political context in which a study is conducted influences story creation, telling, and interpretation (Banks-Wallace, 2002). As such, I documented directly onto the transcripts references made by participants to specific historical events and cultural conditions, such as the history of Black students in Canadian schools, the 1955 West Indian Domestic Scheme and the 2001 Immigration and Refugee Protection Act.

Demarcation of boundaries for individual stories

In order to analyze the data garnered from the interviews, I established story boundaries that were consistent with participants' experiences as Black Canadian women. For this study, temporal and spatial boundaries were used as the guides to distinguish one story from another in each interview. These boundaries indicated when the participant talked about an event outside the present context (Livo and Rietz, 1986). Some keywords included: "At the time…" "What happened was…" "Let me tell you about a time…."

Thematic and functional analysis of stories

When determining the thematic categories, I honored participants as thinkers and prioritized key words and phrases they used to tell their stories. Identifying these key words and phrases provided me with insights into the "embodied context of the [story]teller's world" (Banks-Wallace, 2002). Understanding why specific words and phrases were chosen to describe an event or convey an idea, as well as how the words were said, was critical in ensuring the correct interpretation of participants' stories (Banks-Wallace, 2002). Some keywords included: gran/granny/grandma; friend, sister, aunt, godmother; take care, help out, support.

Grouping stories according to themes and functions

Banks-Wallace (2002)'s process for analyzing stories rooted in Black oral storytelling traditions calls for the grouping of participants' stories into themes. I analyzed each identified story shared by participants in the interviews separately. For each participant, I created a Venn diagram labeled with the thematic categories (communal mothering, motherline, site of power, and homeplace). These categories were grounded in Black women's framework articulated by O'Reilly (2004) in her book *Toni Morrison and motherhood: A politics of the heart.* For each participant, I titled their stories and grouped them into the thematic categories on a Venn diagram. The Venn diagram allowed me to highlight the ways a participant's story addressed multiple themes.

Comparison of story themes and functions across participant interviews

I created a master Venn diagram for the study. Similar to that of the participants', the master Venn diagram was labeled with the thematic categories. I referenced participants' diagrams and plotted the titles of each story collected across interviews onto the master chart. I highlighted stories that were emotive and addressed the questions guiding the study. I created a chart outlining how each highlighted story connected to the study themes and answered the research questions.

Restructuring participants' memories into storied accounts

Goss and Goss (1995), Stewart (1997), Collins (2000), and Banks-Wallace (2002) write of the prominent role dialogue figures in Black storytelling traditions. With the aim to prioritize participants' voice and their relationships with one another, study findings were presented as a story. The short story began as dialogue. I took direct quotes from the interviews and used creative imagination to order participants' recalled memories as dialogue. I then included description as a way to reinforce the meaning captured in the dialogue. Description also enabled me to set participants' stories within a social, political and historical context. I consulted interview transcripts and, on two occasions, reconnected with study participants for additional details.

Reviewing stories for conspicuous absences and silences

I presented study findings as a storied accounts. I read the completed short story aloud and listened for conspicuous absences and silences. I noted directly onto the written stories openings for readers, scholars and artists to talk back to these silences. I drew on the Black storytelling tradition of call-and-response to elicit audience engagement with study participants. My aim was not to recreate "actual" Black oral traditions in written form, but rather to infuse a sense of orality into the stories. In so doing, the reader, and current scholarship became active contributors in the analysis and synthesis process.

Structure of footnotes

Similar to other arts-informed researchers, like Onuora (2015), I used footnotes extensively throughout each story.

The footnotes situate the stories in the historical, political, and social context of participants' everyday life as Black mothers living in Toronto. In this short story, footnotes capture the many voices, ideas, and structures that inform Black maternal life in Canada. Footnotes are used throughout each story to invite readers to participate in an improvised call-and-response where scholarship, audience reflections, and participants' voices are placed in dialogue. In addition to referencing current scholarship, footnotes comprise poignant questions that aim to help readers further connect the story to their own lived experiences. As captured in participant stories, Black life in Canada is noisy, overwhelming, and complicated (Walcott and Abdillahi, 2019; Fearon, 2020). The use of the footnotes reflects the complexities of Black immigrant literacy learners' work and care. Visually and in content, the structure prioritizes the voices of the participants. I invite readers to engage in the call-and-response in ways that are authentic to them. Readers are welcome to read the footnotes separately from participants' stories or alongside.

The story: Set it off[1]

On a Friday night, three women piled into a 2002 silver Camry. Tania settled into the driver's seat and grabbed the wheel. Cold to the touch, she let go of the steering and huffed into her cupped hands. Clouds of warm air circled her afro: cropped sides and fluffy on top. Stacey slumped into the Camry's center backseat. Her silver hooped earrings burrowed in the collar of her fur trimmed coat. Her purse, white leather with a silver strap, laid on her lap. Lisa jumped into the passenger side. She unzipped her coat revealing a white satin blouse with a deep plunge. She turned the dials of the radio stopping at G98.7. The song "Nah Sell Out" blared from the car's speakers:

> *Mi nah sell out mi fren dem*
>
> *Nah go dis mi fren dem*
>
> *Bare blessings mi sen dem*
>
> *Please Jah Guide and protect dem*[2]

"Big tune," Lisa yelled. She banged the dashboard with both hands. The women sang along. Their arms and hips moved to the beat of the dancehall song. The car sped down Markham Road rushing to Club Liv. The dance club advertised Friday nights as free for women before 11 p.m. who wore all white. The car slid to a halt at the Eglinton Avenue stoplights. The streetlight unveiled the Camry's rust framed doors that were otherwise hidden by the night's darkness.

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1 This is a revised story from my doctoral thesis.

2 Excerpt from the song "Nah Sell Out" by Khago (2011).

Stacey yelled from the back seat, "Lower the music!" Lisa, the car deejay, obliged. Her white tipped nails turned the radio dial until car horns and cackling pedestrians from outside were heard inside the car.

Stacey announced, "I found someone to help the kids with reading. Her name is Carrie Gordon, a retired teacher from back home[3]."

"How'd you find her?" Tania asked as she weaved the car through traffic.

"She goes to the same church as aunty Marjorie. You know the church– the one on Nelson Road with nuf Jamaicans," Stacey replied.

Tania maneuvered the curves of the road with one hand on the steering, while flicking the car's heater controls with the other. "How does this reading program work?"

From the back seat, Stacey looked out the window and watched cars pass through the falling snow. She answered, "The program isn't just for the kids. It's for us too. We meet up with Ms. Gordon and help plan out the program[4]. We figure out why our kids are struggling at school. She'll show us some things to do at home[5] and work with the kids too."

"How much is this gonna cost?" Tania asked.

Stacey responded, "Cheaper than if we get her to work with the kids one-on-one. Thirty bucks an hour. We can split it three-ways."

Lisa piped from the passenger seat, "I dunno if I can afford that. Things are tight as is. I might have to pick up more hours at No Frills[6]."

"I'm in," Tania interrupted. "Think about how expensive it'll be if the kids don't figure out this school thing."

Lisa shook her head. Her long box-braids knocked her brown cheeks and bunched into the hood of her coat. "Why do we have to spend all this money and time when it's the school's job to teach our children[7]?" Lisa asked.

"Yes, the schools are supposed to teach our children," Stacey exclaimed from the backseat, "But look what trusting schools to actually do their job got us. A bunch of kids who are struggling!"

"I hear what you're saying," Lisa said turning to Stacey, "But shouldn't we just keep pushing the teachers and principals to actually do their job?"

"I'm tired of begging people to do their job," Stacey sighed, "I'm tired of writing letters to superintendents and trustees about these bad schools.[8]"

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3 Who are your students' community-based educators? What areas of expertise do they hold?

4 What roles do Black mothers play in the design of your classroom curriculum?

5 How do you foster home-school relationships with Black families?

6 No Frills is a Canadian chain of discount supermarkets.

7 How do Black mothers help determine your school's mission and mandate?

8 How does your school collect, respond to, and act upon community feedback?

Tania chimed in, "I'm tired of feeling like a bad mom cuz my kid's failing everything except art and gym. We've wasted too much time and energy waiting on the school to get their shit together."

"Well," Lisa added, "I'm tired of working at No Frills just to pay bills."

"That's just it, Lisa, don't you want better for your son?" Stacey questioned.

"I do. That's the dream we all have for our kids," Lisa said.

"What's a Black boy to do if he can't read?" Tania asked not pausing for answers, "His future is what? Jail? Drugs? Death[9]? All three[10]?"

"And how many Black girls do we know that dropped out of school just to go and trick for some man?" Stacey added.

"I'm not against getting this tutor and working with her to create this reading program. I just don't see how it's fair that I have to put out all this money cuz the schools aren't doing their job," Lisa explained.

"Those people don't care about Black kids and they sure as hell don't care about us. We need to take things into our own hands[11]. We're gonna make sure our kids live that nice life," Tania said as she turned the car into Club Liv's lot. She steered the car up and down the aisles searching for available parking.

"Exactly. So ladies, are you in to hire Ms. Gordon as a tutor?" Stacey asked.

"I already told you; I'm in," said Tania.

"What about you, Lisa?" asked Stacey.

Lisa fiddled with her braids. "I'll try it out for a month," she said.

"Great," Stacey clapped, "I'll call Ms. Gordon tomorrow morning. She wants to meet the kids Sunday afternoon at the library. I'll text you with the exact time. I'll walk the kids to the library and stay there until their meet and greet is done."

Tania pulled the car into a spot at the back of the lot. "Good. I don't care who recommends her, you can't trust just anybody to be alone with the kids," Tania said. The women puckered their rouged lips, raised their penciled brows and nodded in unison. Tania pulled the key from the parked car. From inside the old Camry, the women watched a line of people in white, standing amongst mounds of snow, waiting to get into Club Liv before 11 p.m.

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9 "What kind of mother/ing is it if one must always be prepared with knowledge of the possibility of the violent and quotidian death of one's child? Is it mothering if one knows that one's child might be killed at any time in the hold, in the wake by the state no matter who wields the gun?" (Sharpe, 2016, p. 78).

10 "All I know is my father always tells me the dudes who act hard in this town all end up one of three ways: broke sitting under a tree, in jail, or dead" (Charlamagne Tha God, 2017).

11 "As Black women's lives require complex negotiations and the mediation of contradictions, the capacity for leadership has been shown in our ability to create strategies for survival and advancement..." (King and Ferguson, 2011, p.10).

Story insights

Communal mothering and freedom dreams

Set it Off recounts the experiences of three Black mothers as they rethink the educational opportunities afforded to their children. Grounded in endarkened feminist epistemology, this study drew on storytelling to help reclaim Black mothers' cultural, historical, and spiritual identities (Dillard, 2000; Toliver, 2021). The creative non-fiction story, *Set it Off*, centers the ways that a group of Black Canadian mothers came together to heal and uplift themselves and their children. The story captures the ways that the mothers care for one another's children. As depicted in *Set it Off*, participants shared personal narratives highlighting the central role of communal mothering arrangements in the lives of Black Canadian women and their children. An established body of literature attests to the pivotal role of communal mothering in the lives of Black children (Wane, 2000; Onuora, 2015; Fearon, 2020). Such scholarship describes communal mothers as formal or non-formal arrangements to care for children (Wane, 2000; Onuora, 2015; Fearon, 2020). Participants characterized these forms of parenting as revolutionary as they oppose the dominant idea that biological parents, especially mothers, should be the sole child rearers. In *Set it Off*, the mothers entrust each other with their children's wellbeing, safety, and learning. The mothers work together to establish learning spaces in the school and community where each other's children are affirmed and supported to achieve their goals.

The three mothers, in the story, lament the injustices they, along with their children, face in the public school system. Extensive research by James and Turner (2017) and Maynard (2018), amongst other Black Canadian thinkers, documents anti-Black violence inflicted upon Black Canadian students and their families. Study participants shared narratives archiving how they and members of their women-centered networks used communal mothering to create spaces where Black children are able to heal from injustices endured in the public school system. For example, in the story *Set it Off*, Stacey takes the lead in organizing a tutoring program for the mothers and children within her network. The children, who are labeled by teachers as struggling readers, continue to underachieve academically despite their mothers' interventions at the school and district levels. Stacey, with the support of a retired Jamaican teacher, dreams of establishing a reading program that will act as a homeplace for both the children and mothers within her network. Stacey urges her friends to draw on their collective dreams to help her design and implement a program for their children to foster literacy skills, support high academic achievement, and nurture their wellbeing outside of the school.

In *Set it Off*, Stacey challenges her friends to imagine new learning possibilities for their children within the community. Despite the financial and time constraints, the friends agree to

co-create a reading program where Black mothers are upheld as leaders in their children's learning. The mothers understand their leadership as part of a larger movement dedicated to improving the learning outcomes of Black children. In his seminal text *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination*, Kelley (2002) warned against presenting social movements as a series of targeted campaigns. Instead, Kelley (2002) urges scholars to focus on the collective radical imagination that conjures and sustains visions of freedom even in challenging times. Imagining a new world without oppression requires Stacey and her friends to "understand the mechanisms or processes that not only reproduce subjugation and exploitation but make them common sense and render them natural" (Kelley, 2022). Stacey and her friends denounce the school's dehumanizing conditions as well as revel in the possibilities of creating a new community-based learning site for their children. In so doing, the mothers are able to "see the future in the present" (Kelley, 2002, p. 9).

A site of resistance

Set it Off takes place in a rusted 2002 silver Camry. While driving to a local dance club, three Black mothers organize to improve the learning experiences of their children. In the story, Stacey positions her friends as fellow mother leaders. Stacey offers to share the cost of hiring a tutor and invites her friends to help design the reading program for their children. *Set it Off* attests to participants' beliefs that the Black mother's realm of work is not limited to children, but also extends to the care of other Black women. *Set it Off* explores the ways that motherwork promotes a generalized ethic of care where Black mothers are accountable to other mothers and their children in their community. This expanded form of care positions Black motherwork as activism.

Black motherwork as activism, Collins (2000) acknowledges, challenges "prevailing definitions of political activism and resistance" that upholds public, official, visible political activity over unofficial, private, and seemingly invisible spheres of social life and organization" (p. 202). *Set it Off* captures the pivotal role of dreams in Black women's activism. Stacey and her friends recount the ways that they sought to reform their children's school. For example, the women wrote letters to school superintendents and trustees, and met with principals and teachers. Stacey and the mothers understand the creation of a reading program as helping them realize their dream of creating humanizing learning experiences for their children. *In Daring to Dream: Toward a Pedagogy of the Unfinished*, Freire et al. (2007, p. 4) explain, "as human beings, there is no doubt that our main responsibility consists of intervening in reality and keeping up our hope." Although the mothers face everyday oppressions, they continue to draw on their own dreams and alternative visions to guide their activism. In so doing, the mothers collaborate with one another to create a learning site that acts as a homeplace for their children.

Conclusion

Love (2019), author of the book *We Want to Do More Than Survive: Abolitionist Teaching and the Pursuit of Educational Freedom*, calls for learning spaces to embrace Black children's full humanity. Love (2019) identifies the collective memories and dreams of children and their parents as fundamental to establishing educational freedom. In fact, to achieve educational freedom for Black children, Love insists that parents must tap into their imagination, determination, boldness, and urgency. For generations, Black Canadian mothers have come together to demand freeing educational spaces for their children. This arts-informed study showcased the ways that a group of Black mothers drew on their radical imagination to reconceptualize their motherwork and organize educational opportunities for Black children.

I began this article with an account from my childhood. I used the personal narrative to situate myself within the research and introduce my own family's experiences with freedom dreams. My mother continues to advocate for community-led learning spaces for Black children. Much like Stacey in the story *Set it Off*, my mother encourages Black mothers and their children within her network to participate in affirming learning spaces that exist outside of the school. The mothers featured in the story *Set it Off*, along with my own mother and aunt, engage in a longstanding tradition of using dreams to usher new worlds for our children.

This arts-informed study provides Black mother scholars with a framework to reimagine the ways we engage in educational inquiry. By grounding this study in Black traditions of storytelling, I explicitly challenge research ideologies that valorize objectivity and hierarchical relationships between the researcher and participants. Additionally, this study showcases to scholars the possibilities of using the arts to center Black mothers' humanity, creativity, and healing in research. I draw on the Black dialogical tradition of call-and-response to prioritize Black women's engagement in the knowledge creation process. Call-and-response allowed for participants, the researcher, current scholarship, and readers to come together and deepen their understanding of Black life and imagine better futures for Black children.

This study also showcased the need for Black mothers to take the lead in creating learning spaces for Black children. The study revealed the importance of establishing educational sites for Black children within schools and in the community. By positioning freedom dreams in a larger understanding about Black motherwork, we honor the knowledge and leadership of Black Canadian mothers in their children's educational lives. Black Canadian mothers' reimagining of educational spaces for their children recognizes Black motherwork as collective practices of freedom. I close this article by offering school-based educators a series of reflection questions to support their relationships with Black Canadian mothers: (1). How do

educators come to understand Black mothers' visions for their children? (2). How might educators leverage Black mothers' dreams, knowledge, and stories to inform curriculum, policies, and professional development? (3). How might educators partner with Black mothers to improve Black students' learning experiences? (4). How might educators address inequities existing within their schools? (5). What policies and procedures facilitate the collection and use of community feedback?

Data availability statement

The raw data supporting the conclusions of this article will be made available by the authors, without undue reservation.

Ethics statement

The studies involving human participants were reviewed and approved by the University of Toronto's Research Ethics Board. The patients/participants provided their written informed consent to participate in this study.

Author contributions

The author confirms being the sole contributor of this work and has approved it for publication.

Conflict of interest

The author declares that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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Check for updates

School ethnic-racial socialization and critical action among Black youth

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We explore the interaction of different types of school ethnic-racial socialization, youth's perceptions of the messages that schools and their agents broadcast about race and ethnicity, as it shapes Black youth's critical action, the individual and collective action that youth engage in to combat oppression and racism. In particular, the co-occurrence of *critical consciousness socialization* (emphasizes racial inequity; CCS), *cultural socialization* (celebrates youth's culture/s; CS), and *color evasive socialization* (de-emphasizes and thus delegitimizes the importance of race; CES) are explored. The adaptive culture and Mustaffa's conceptualization of Black lifemaking, an aspect of freedom dreaming in which Black people define and care for themselves in ways (such as critical action) that counter dominant, anti-Black ideologies, serve as the overarching theoretical frameworks. As both the adaptive culture paradigm and critical action necessitate a target of resistance, we hypothesize that CES, in providing Black youth something to resist against, may actually serve as a positive moderator between CCS and/or CS and their critical action. We investigate these questions among a sample of Black adolescents (n = 285, M = 15.09 years, and SD = 1.38 years). Benjamini–Hochberg corrected hierarchical moderations with age as a covariate and socialization type and interaction between types as predictors revealed that the interaction between CCS and CES significantly predicted critically conscious action [$β$ = 0.25, SE = 0.08, t(193) = 2.54, and p < 0.05] and political anti-racist action [$β$ = 0.21, SE = 0.09, t(193) = 2.38, and p < 0.05]. Critically conscious action was more frequent among Black youth who perceived greater CES. The relationship between CCS and political anti-racist action was stronger among those who perceived greater CES. These findings may provide comfort to those worried about CES' impact. Black youth simultaneously socialized with CCS seem to develop a critical consciousness that allows them to trouble CES and to be critically active despite it. Engaging in varied, frequent critical action allows Black youth to continue the life-making which improves the Black American experience and drives their freedom dreaming.

KEYWORDS

adaptive culture, antiblackness, ethnic-racial socialization, activism, critical action, Black youth, Black adolescents

Introduction

Thomas and King (2007) discuss the importance of racial socialization[1], how knowledge, viewpoints, and ideals about ethnicity and race are transmitted to children (Hughes et al., 2006), in raising African American youth[2]. Intentional socialization holds the potential to protect youth from the adverse effects of racism and to promote a positive racial identity (Hughes et al., 2006; DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2012; Neblett et al., 2012; Wang et al., 2020). While the field of ethnic-racial socialization has heavily studied ethnic-racial identity as an outcome (Hughes et al., 2006; Bañales et al., 2019; Byrd and Ahn, 2020), other assets have been understudied. This begs the question of what protective and promotive possibilities *critical consciousness* (critical analysis of historical and modern systemic oppression and inequity and corrective actions against it; Watts et al., 2011) development, specifically *critical action* (individual or collective action taken against oppressive and racist forces; Watts et al., 2011; Aldana et al., 2019), holds for Black youth. Thus, the current study will use García Coll et al. (1996) integrative model as well as Mustaffa's (2017) conceptualization of Black-life making to explore the implications of ethnic-racial socialization, specifically within schools, for Black youth's critical action.

Integrative model and school ethnic-racial socialization

García Coll et al.'s (1996) integrative model of developmental competencies in minority children posits that children of color develop within macrosystemic and microsystemic contexts alongside their white counterparts, but that their positive development is limited or thwarted given others' receptions of their minoritized racial and ethnic identities. These receptions lead children of color to encounter discrimination and prejudice on the micro-level, as well as racism and oppression on the macro-level[3], particularly through the

ramifications of broader policy and decision-making. Such policy and decision-making trickle down to influence whether the environments young people of color find themselves in, such as schools, promote or inhibit their development.

Sociocultural compatibility between a school's contextual norms and demands and the history and culture of its students of color largely determines whether or not said school will promote or inhibit these students' development. Educational institutions, at the collegiate *and* K-12 levels, reinforce white supremacy. They serve as sites of antiblackness, falsely communicating the inferiority of Black beauty, culture, knowledge, and life prospects (Dumas, 2016; Mustaffa, 2017; Humphrey and Davis, 2021). In particular, middle and high schools are spaces in which Black youth are socialized to accept a deficit view of themselves via interactions, physical artifacts and spaces, and curricula that reinforce white supremacy (Bañales et al., 2019).

If contextual norms and demands are not compatible with a student's history and culture, they may find themselves enacting the values of the *adaptive culture*, or "a social system defined by sets of goals, values, and attitudes that differ from the dominant culture" (García Coll et al., 1996, p. 1896). In other words, the adaptive culture encompasses the goals, values, and attitudes of a marginalized group's culture, as well as their contemporary and historical resistance to the dominant culture and/or oppressive forces. It is characterized by ways of thinking, being, and acting that support young people's development while implicitly or explicitly allowing them to resist social mechanisms that would thwart their development. Literature often theorizes the adaptive culture to be a "cultural asset," in more cognitive, mental, and/or affective terms (e.g., a strong ethnic-racial identity/pride and/or enacting cultural traditions and values, rather than assimilating to the dominant culture; Perez-Brena et al., 2018), but "it is important to note that [it] was originally defined in neutral terms as a coping mechanism" (García Coll et al., 1996, p. 721).

The adaptive culture is often considered in terms of cognitive coping mechanisms. Two dimensions of critical consciousness, critical reflection and motivation (Watts et al., 2011), can be thought of as such cognitive coping mechanisms. However, it is important to go beyond considerations of the adaptive culture's cognitive components, such as critical reflection and motivation (Diemer et al., 2020). While such critical cognition is necessary to inform and give meaning to action, foundational (Freire, 1970) and contemporary (Watts and Hipolito-Delgado, 2015) critical consciousness scholarship has always emphasized the need for consciousness-raising to ultimately manifest in liberation-oriented action. The goals

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1 Wherever mentions of "racial socialization" appear, I (GK) am using the author's/authors' terminology. In most current literature, it is more so the case that the term 'ethnic-racial socialization' is used, given the considerable overlap between racial socialization and ethnic socialization, and because ethnic-racial socialization "refer[s] to the broader research literature and focus[es] on other definitional and conceptual issues that [are] regard[ed] as more important [than distinguishing ethnic from racial socialization]" (Hughes et al., 2006, p. 749).

2 Here again, the term "African American" is used per the authors' terminology. I (GK) will refer to the youth of interest in this study as Black, as not all youth who are or who are racialized as Black are African Americans.

3 Although García Coll et al. (1996) original paper frames, racism, oppression, discrimination, and prejudice as part of the same class of social mechanisms, since its publication in 1996, scholars have parsed

oppression and racism to generally reflect macro-level mechanisms, and discrimination and prejudice to be interpersonal, micro-level mechanisms of degradation.

of such cognition are to encourage youth to practice their culture/s and to engage in sociopolitical resistance (Hope and Bañales, 2019), so that they may more effectively cope with marginalization (Diemer et al., 2020; Sosa-Provencio et al., 2020). Thus, it is of particular importance to consider what the adaptive culture entails in terms of active resistance and behavior via critical action, the third dimension of critical consciousness. Moreover, adolescence represents a developmental period during which middle and high school students of color develop the social-cognitive faculties to reflect on their ethnic-racial identities, as well as how the treatment they receive or their life prospects may be implicated by their race (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014). Given that the evolution of Black American culture has been consistently punctuated by sociopolitical movements (Wang et al., 2020), Black youth's clarity about and commitment to their ethnic-racial identity may spur them to engage in critical action as a way to reify the importance of their ethnic-racial identity (Mathews et al., 2019). Engaging in such action has been theorized to iteratively and reciprocally encourage critical reflection and motivation (Freire, 1970; Watts et al., 2011; Mathews et al., 2019).

Critical consciousness has historically and contemporarily been postured as an antidote to oppression given its emphasis on resistance and liberation (Watts et al., 1999; Jemal, 2018). Critical action has been increasingly and specifically studied as a means by which Black people can resist and cope with oppression (Hope et al., 2020; Mosley et al., 2021). While the onus is not on young Black people (or Black people of any age) to transform oppressive systems that they did not create, work by Hope et al. (2020) have shown direct and indirect relationships between racial stress and critical action among Black adolescents. They concluded that while racism is stressful and harmful for these young people, critical action provides a resource for them to cope as individuals and to resist and transform the systems that perpetuate racism and accompanying stress. Given this evidence and its original emphasis on coping, critical action—and critical consciousness more broadly—is studied and framed as part of the adaptive culture in the present paper. Consequently, the current study also theorizes youth's critical action as a function of sociocultural compatibility. In other words, the extent to which youth engage in critical action is a function of *school ethnic-racial socialization*'s (the messages about ethnicity and race that youth perceive their schools and the agents within them to be broadcasting; Byrd, 2017) promotion or inhibition of their critical consciousness.

Literature on the adaptive culture heavily studies ethnic-racial identity as a value or asset of the adaptive culture (Perez-Brena et al., 2018), but understudies critical consciousness. Accordingly, recent literature has called for critical consciousness, and specifically critical action, to be further studied (1) in its own right, (2) as an outcome of school processes, namely, school ethnic-racial socialization,

and (3) as the result of combined contextual influences (Diemer and Li, 2011; Byrd and Ahn, 2020; Heberle et al., 2020; Lambert et al., 2020), all calls to which the present study intends to respond. By definition, critical action must be enacted against oppressive forces. Despite this, little to no prior work has studied the interaction between school ethnic-racial socialization that *counters oppression* (critical consciousness and cultural socialization) and school ethnic-racial socialization that *is oppressive* (color-evasive socialization). Similarly, little to no prior work has investigated critical action as the desired outcome of such an interaction. The present study also aims to fill these gaps by including both empowering and oppressive forms of socialization within a model estimating critical action, as schooling contexts can simultaneously empower and oppress marginalized students.

While certain socialization practices promote critical consciousness, others inhibit its development. It is intuitive and well established by the literature that positive forms of school ethnic-racial socialization, which emphasize systemic racial inequality (*critical consciousness socialization*; Byrd, 2017) and which encourage young people to celebrate their own culture(/s, *cultural socialization*; Byrd) aid the development of critical consciousness (Bañales et al., 2019; Byrd and Ahn, 2020; Lambert et al., 2020; Seider and Graves, 2020; Wang et al., 2020). On the other hand, *color-evasive socialization*[4], a negative form of school ethnic-racial socialization that de-emphasizes systemic oppression and racial disparities, constrains critical thinking about racism (Aldana and Byrd, 2015) and is negatively related to anger toward injustice (Bañales et al., 2019). In ignoring systemic causes of oppression and racism, color-evasive socialization encourages individual-level attributions for poor life circumstances. Such an attribution style is characteristic of lower levels of critical consciousness, and thus lesser likelihood of engaging in critical action (Watts et al., 2011).

Despite the co-occurrence of positive and negative forms of school ethnic-racial socialization, few studies have interacted with these socialization practices, and even fewer, if any, have done so in models estimating critical action. Studying the co-occurrence of these conflicting forms of school ERS is important, as both the adaptive culture and critical consciousness require the presence of an entity to act against or resist. In the case of the adaptive culture, the target of this resistance is (assimilation to) the dominant culture, and thus resistance to marginalization and oppression. In the case of critical consciousness, the target of resistance is also oppression. With heightened perceptions of critical consciousness socialization and cultural socialization come

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4   Byrd and other cited authors use the terminology "colorblind." Despite the term being used in academic literature to mirror the wording advanced by wider, non-academic society in popular racial discourse (Ansell, 2008), it is ableist, and thus will be reworded as "color evasive" in the present study.

higher levels of critical consciousness, which may increase students' ability to "read the world." The growth in their critical consciousness likely positions these students to be more capable of identifying problematic and oppressive socialization messages, such that they perceive higher levels of color-evasive socialization. Critically conscious students will likely trouble color-evasive socialization's downplaying of racial disparities and stigmatization of conversation about systemic oppression and critical action. As such, color-evasive socialization likely serves as the target of resistance to these students' critical consciousness and adaptive culture engagement.

School ethnic-racial socialization, Black life-making, and critical consciousness

The present study posits that school ethnic-racial socialization (hereafter school ERS) plays a hand in whether schools serve to promote or inhibit the development of students of color, and thus in their engagement with the adaptive culture. So far, the existing literature on school ERS focuses more on academic outcomes and/or ethnic-racial identity (Hughes et al., 2006; Bañales et al., 2019; Byrd and Ahn, 2020), rather than critical consciousness. Accordingly, recent literature has called for critical consciousness to be studied as an outcome of school ERS (Diemer and Li, 2011; Byrd and Ahn, 2020; Heberle et al., 2020; Lambert et al., 2020).

The adaptive culture and critical action by definition necessitate the presence of something to adapt to, act against, and resist. Black students may adapt to and resist socialization that minimizes the existence and ramifications of racial inequities, given that such socialization comprises a tenet of and reproduces racism (Bonilla-Silva, 1998). *If these young people are receiving efficacious critical consciousness socialization and cultural socialization, as a product of their heightened critical consciousness and cultural awareness, they may be more apt to name and perceive this color-evasive socialization, which seeks to counter and delegitimize the importance of race. In other words, Black students who are well-socialized in terms of critical consciousness and their own culture(/s) may identify greater levels of color-evasive socialization in their schooling, and may implicitly or explicitly identify this socialization as something to resist against.* For example, a Black student learning about racial disparities in home ownership that disadvantage Black people (critical consciousness socialization) and/or about the history of Chicago's Contract Buyers League (cultural socialization) in one of their courses may be incensed by a teacher in another class saying that race does not impact people's life prospects (color evasive socialization). This student's critical consciousness, cultivated by critical consciousness socialization, allows them to perceive the latter message as color-evasive and oppressive rather than as benign and true. They may thus be driven to

engage in critical action, deriving from a heightened critical consciousness and from their resistance to and problematizing of color-evasive socialization. Another student, receiving little to no critical consciousness socialization, may not be critically conscious enough to trouble their color-evasive socialization. Such a student may make individual-level attributions for their own and/or their ethnic-racial group's hardships without realizing the role systemic oppression and racism play in those hardships. Without receiving critical consciousness socialization in concert with color-evasive socialization, they may also be less likely to engage in critical action. Lacking an adaptive, consciousness-raising coping mechanism, this student may suffer from negative mental health outcomes (Barr and Neville, 2014) and lower school self-esteem (Constantine and Blackmon, 2002), contributing to a poorer self-concept (Lambert et al., 2020). While cultural and critical consciousness socialization provide youth with the knowledge to act critically, color-evasive socialization provides a target for this action. Thus, including color-evasive socialization in models predicting Black youth's critical action may strengthen the relationship between critical consciousness socialization and critical action, and/or cultural socialization and critical action. Results from such moderation analyses may improve our understanding of how these school messages interrelate, as well as what engenders critical action among Black youth.

Relatedly, the current paper seeks to advance critical consciousness as part of *Black life-making*, or Black people's ability to define and care for themselves in ways that counter those dictated by dominant, anti-Black ideologies (Mustaffa, 2017), as no prior work has done so explicitly. The current paper also posits that Black life-making encompasses, if not complements, Black students' engagement in the adaptive culture. When there is low sociocultural compatibility between these students' culture/s and their schools' norms and demands, it becomes imperative to engage in the adaptive culture. Black life-making is a means through which students can do so. It is a means of coping with antiblackness via celebrating and reflecting on Blackness and resistance/critical action. Thus, the present paper also conceptualizes Black life-making as part of the adaptive culture for Black students.

Predictably, educational contexts meant to produce white supremacy are unwilling to concede room for "the creative spaces of possibility and freedom Black people produce when practicing self-definition, self-care, and resistance" (Mustaffa, 2017, p. 712). Despite this, Black people have been life-making as far back as (and even further back than; see Grant et al., 2016) the 1860s. During this time, enslaved Black people fled plantations to attend contraband schools to "catch a lesson," learning to read and write. There, they built the intergenerational knowledge necessary to survive and combat the post-emancipation evils of Jim Crow laws; segregation; political and economic disenfranchisement; police brutality; and myriad other forms of institutionalized antiblackness

(Nelson and Williams, 2018). By investigating the school ERS Black students perceive, we can better understand how schools are or are not co-conspirators in Black life-making.

Critical consciousness is a developmental asset (Ginwright and James, 2002; Yosso, 2005; Clonan-Roy et al., 2016; Diemer et al., 2016) that has been shown to relate to a host of other positive outcomes among youth of color (Jearey-Graham and Macleod, 2017; Pérez-Gualdrón and Helms, 2017; Delia and Krasny, 2018; Rapa et al., 2018; Seider et al., 2019). By studying a sample comprised exclusively of Black adolescents and investigating their levels of critical action, part-and-parcel to their critical consciousness, the current study combats traditional deficit-based views of Black students' educational and psychological experiences (Yosso, 2005; Dumas, 2016; Dumas and Nelson, 2016; see also Researcher Subjectivity). Amidst this theorizing on schools' roles in Black life-making, the current study also asks specifically how different types of school ERS may interact to shape Black youth's critical action.

Similarly, ethnic-racial socialization is moving toward the study of the combined, simultaneous influences of multiple ethnic-racial socialization messages on young people's critical consciousness (Hughes et al., 2006; Byrd and Ahn, 2020). Among a sample of racially diverse adolescents, critical consciousness socialization and color-evasive socialization were significantly positively correlated with each other (Byrd and Ahn, 2020; also seen in Byrd, 2015, 2017). It is likely the case that school personnel give both of these types of messages simultaneously and/or that certain students perceive both of these socialization styles simultaneously (Saleem and Byrd, 2021), hence the positive correlation. In addition, schools are contexts in which students receive a variety of socialization messages from different sources (e.g., teachers, administrators, curriculum, and peers). The roles and specific impacts of these varying sources are a burgeoning area of study within the school ethnic-racial socialization literature (Saleem and Byrd, 2021). However, it may be the case that some sources may emphasize critical consciousness socialization while others may emphasize color-evasive socialization. Moreover, literature on white parents' ethnic-racial socialization practices (e.g., Abaied and Perry, 2021) shows that white parents commonly give contradictory messages about race (e.g., race doesn't matter, but all races are equal and valuable despite their differences). Seeing as white teachers dominate the American public school teaching workforce (Bell, 2021; Schaeffer, 2021), it would follow to reason that color-evasive socialization and critical consciousness socialization are both broadcast by teachers. As the adults in the school who play a paritable socializing role to that of parents, and as the adults in control of the school culture, similar contradiction in teacher-delivered school socialization messages as in parental socialization messages may occur. For these reasons, Bañales et al. (2019, p. 15) call for "further investigation of the nature and measurement of school racial

messages and their role in youth critical consciousness around racism." Moreover, Lambert et al. (2020) state that future research should consider a variety of mechanisms Black youth may employ to cope with discrimination as a means of better understanding ethnic-racial socialization; critical consciousness has been shown to be one such mechanism (Hope et al., 2020; Mosley et al., 2021). These calls necessitate more ethnic-racial socialization research within schools; the need for this research to focus on critical consciousness as an outcome; and the need to study the combined influence and interplay of different types of school ERS.

Researcher subjectivity

As a young Black race scholar engaged in research for, about, and with my community, I (GK) am uninterested in research that dehumanizes Black people implicitly or explicitly. School ERS is conceptualized as a component of school climate research, which repeatedly resorts to comparing Black and white students (McGiboney, 2016). I believe it is important to illuminate disparities between these groups' experiences and outcomes, but I also believe that past a point, it is unproductive. More often than not, such studies fail to justify the use of racial comparisons. Similarly, they often fail to ground comparisons in systemic disparities, instead situating them as perceived individual deficits. Growth in my own critical consciousness and conceptualizations of race have led me to the conclusion that these failures aid and abet antiblackness. I feel that they result in myopic deficit views of Blackness, ignoring the diversity of strengths Black students hold, and the diversity of possible futures they can achieve. Such comparisons contribute to the idea that Black people engage in/disengage from certain attitudes, values, aspirations, and behaviors not of their own volition but to counter or foil those of whiteness or white people. As such, I felt it important and necessary to analyze responses from an all-Black sample, and I advocate for the importance and necessity of all-Black samples more broadly.

My engagement in meaningful critical action was minimal until I became an undergraduate student. This was the first time in my life I was exposed to coursework which deeply engaged the sociopolitical and racial dimensions of society and schooling, expanding the cognitive dimensions of my critical consciousness. I began my first semester of college during the 2016 election and ended my last semester of college as the racial reckoning of the summer of 2020 commenced. My undergraduate education was punctuated by critical action. I attended protests and sit-ins, engaged in campus organizing, and used my campus involvements to find ways to support similarly marginalized students. Coming to understand race, resistance, and education as they intersect with human development brought me to pursue a Ph.D., and thus to the present study.

Then and now, I wonder what it would mean or look like for Black students to begin meditating on these important topics

earlier on in their schooling. Growing up in predominantly white spaces, I never would have come to see the world and my place in it the way that I do were in not for my college education – I came to these views much later on than I would have liked to in retrospect. I am grateful, but I find it very troubling that this may be true for many other Black students. Contrasting the school ERS I received prior to college, during college, and now as a doctoral student encouraged me to pursue the current study. I feel it is imperative to reimagine K-12 schooling such that socialization that encourages Black life-making and critical action reaches as many young Black people as early as possible. Ignoring or mishandling the ethnic-racial socialization of Black youth, particularly in schools, poses the danger of stigmatizing or stifling the development of their critical action. Young people spend a significant portion of their days and lives in K-12 classrooms. Moreover, a linear pursuit of college or a pursuit right after high school may not make the most sense or be feasible for some students and their families. Youth for whom this is true are still engaged in resistance (Clonan-Roy et al., 2016) and still life-make (Mustaffa, 2017), but intentional, promotive K-12 school ERS may be of especial import to them. Such school ERS aids consciousness raising and critical action, which have improved and defined the Black American experience for generations. Additionally, the communities we serve as scholars of race, education, and psychology, and we ourselves, need to know more about what critical action young people are engaged in before they reach college. We also need to know more about what drives their resistance. With this knowledge, it is my hope that we can reimagine schooling to further encourage said action and the critical consciousness that drives it.

Current study

Thus, the current study seeks to investigate the interplay of different types of school ERS to see if said interplay shapes Black middle and high school students' critical action. Given that multiple forms of socialization can shape critical action, we hypothesize that color-evasive socialization may serve as a positive moderator, or something that strengthens the relationship between critical consciousness and/or cultural socialization and critical action.

Materials and methods

Participants

Participants in the current study comprised the 285 Black adolescents drawn from a larger data collection in a study of various contexts of ethnic-racial socialization among a larger, racially diverse group of youth (Byrd and Ahn, 2020). This Black

subsample was aged 13–17 years old ($M = 15.09$, $SD = 1.38$, based on $n = 284$, given that one young person did not provide their age). Among this sample, six young people were bi-/multiracially/-ethnically Black and white; one young person was African American and Native American; another was Black and Hispanic; and one more young person was Black, Japanese, and Filipino. There was also one young person who was a Black African. The sample was approximately equally comprised of girls ($n = 136$; 48.1%), boys ($n = 147$; 51.9%), and two youth who did not provide their gender. No youth indicated being genderqueer/gender non-conforming/non-binary.

Measures

School ethnic-racial socialization

The School Ethnic-Racial Socialization subscales from the School Climate for Diversity Scale-Secondary (Byrd, 2017) measured school ERS. Using a Likert-type scale from 1 (*Not at all true*) to 5 (*Completely true*), youth were asked to think about their school and whether statements regarding (1) Critical Consciousness Socialization (seven items, e.g., "In your classes you have learned about how success in life can depend on your race/ethnicity;" $\alpha = 0.75$); (2) Cultural Socialization (five items, e.g., "At your school, you have chances to learn about the history and traditions of your culture;" $\alpha = 0.76$); and (3) Color Blind Socialization (here, color evasive; five items, e.g., "Your school encourages you to ignore racial/ethnic difference;" $\alpha = 0.77$) were true of their experience. All subscales showed good reliability, with Cronbach's alphas ranging from 0.75 to 0.77.

Critical action

Nine items from the Critical Action: Sociopolitical Participation Subscale of the Critical Consciousness Scale (Diemer et al., 2017) measured critically conscious action. These items measure the frequency with which youth engage in various, more traditional forms of civic engagement, on a Likert-type scale from 1 (*Never did this*) to 5 (*[Did this] At least once a week*). An example of an item is, "In the past year, how often have you. . . contacted an elected official by phone, mail, or email to tell him or her how you felt about a social or political issue?" This subscale showed good reliability, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.75.

Given the face validity of scales meant for youth that are co-developed by youth and the recognition that the forms of critical action available to youth may differ as a function of their developmental stage and the opportunities available in their community, the Anti-Racism Action Scale (ARAS; Aldana et al., 2019) was also used to assess Black youth's critical action. Youth indicate whether they did (coded as 1) or did not (coded as 0) engage in various forms of (1) interpersonal anti-racist action (calling out/defending others against the usage of racist names or phrases; five of the original seven items, $\alpha = 0.79$), (2)

communal anti-racist action (institution-specific efforts against racism in youth's schools or communities; four items, α = 0.71), and (3) political anti-racist action (more direct engagement with and/or combatting of wider systems of racism and/or their agents; seven items, α = 0.69). All subscales showed good reliability, Cronbach's alphas ranging from 0.69 to 0.79.

Participants' scores on all items except for those from the ARAS were summed and then divided by the number of items on a given subscale, for mean scores equal to the participants' average score on each subscale. For the ARAS, scores were summed for composite scores. In either case, higher scores indicated a higher degree of perception of a certain type of school ERS or a higher frequency/amount of engagement in critical action. Each item on the ARAS is binary, unlike the critically conscious action items, which use Likert-type scales. This binary coding prevents ARAS sum scores from fulfilling the interval-level data assumption of linear regression. As such, the average of each participant's response for each ARAS subscale, rather than the sum score, was calculated to provide an interval-level measure of anti-racist action.

Procedure

Per Byrd and Ahn's (2020) study, participants were recruited via an online survey platform that connects researchers to study participants, Qualtrics panels. Parents were asked to provide consent for their child to participate. For a young person to be eligible for participation, their parent also had to verify that their child was between the ages of 13 and 17 and that they attended a public or private school. The young people then provided demographic information. If they were white, African American (in the current study, Black), Asian American, or Latinx, they were allowed to complete the rest of the survey. After ethnic-racial group quotas (around 250 young people per group) were reached, the survey was closed. Participants' parents were compensated with Qualtrics credit that could be "traded in" for gift cards and other rewards.

Planned analyses

To see *how different types of school ERS may interact to have a combined effect on the critical action of Black youth*, hierarchical moderation analyses were employed. Descriptive statistics were calculated (see **Table 1**), as was a matrix of correlations (see **Table 2**). Given that the socialization style predictors were highly correlated (*r* = 0.47–0.66), variance inflation factors (VIFs) were also calculated to further investigate possible multicollinearity. As all VIFs were valued below 10 (Field et al., 2012), predictors were not assumed to be collinear. The correlations between socialization styles are explored in further depth in the "Discussion" section.

Full Information Maximum Likelihood (FIML) was used to account for missing data. Rather than overly restrictive methods of dealing with missing data, such as pairwise or listwise deletion, FIML makes use of all datapoints and is appropriate to use when data are assumed to be Missing At Random (MAR; Kline, 2015). Data were indeed assumed to be classified as Missing At Random (MAR), although this assumption was made in differing ways according to the items in question. Firstly, 98.9–99.6% of participants had complete data on the school ERS items; with so few missing responses among these subscales (Little and Rhemtulla, 2013), data here were assumed to be MAR.

Secondly, missingness was assessed among the critically conscious action items. Although more responses were missing among these items (28.1–28.4% depending on the individual item), *t*-tests revealed that were no significant differences in the mean responses to any of the nine items between a sample comprised solely of participants who completed all nine items and a sample that included all participants, regardless of their completion of the critically conscious action items. In addition, neither age, gender, nor time taken to complete the survey predicted missingness on these items; time duration was included as a possible predictor of missingness, given that these items were toward the end of the survey, such that missingness might be attributed to fatigue. Thus, the assumption of MAR classification was tenable.

Lastly, missingness was assessed among the ARAS items. There was also an appreciable number of missing responses among these items (28.1–29.1% depending on the individual item), such that MAR classification could not be assumed on the basis of the complete response percentage. Because individual ARAS items are dichotomous, chi-square tests were used. These tests revealed that neither age, gender, nor time taken to complete the survey predicted missingness on these items. Thus, the assumption of MAR classification was once again tenable. Moreover, missingness was only marginally correlated with one of the three auxiliary variables (age, with the other two being

TABLE 1 Means and standard deviations of study variables.

Measure	*M*	*SD*
Age	15.09	1.38
Median household income	59832.56	13436.24
Critical consciousness socialization	3.07	0.86
Cultural socialization	3.23	1.00
Color evasive socialization	2.74	0.94
Critically conscious action	1.40	0.72
Interpersonal anti-racist action	2.08	1.96
Communal anti-racist action	0.66	1.24
Political anti-racist action	1.21	1.77

Scores could range respectively from 1 to 5 for all variables cultural socialization through critically conscious action; from 0 to 7 for interpersonal and political anti-racist action; and from 0 to 4 for communal anti-racist action.

TABLE 2 Correlations between study variables.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Age	–									
Gender	0.02	–								
Income	0.01	0.11	–							
CCS	0.06	− 0.04	0.01	–						
CS	0.03	0.02	0.01	0.66*	–					
CES	0.04	0.02	0.04	0.49*	0.47*	–				
Critical	− 0.02	0.06	0.14	0.26*	0.22*	0.28*	–			
Interpersonal	0.08	− 0.03	0.05	0.26*	0.12	0.09	0.32*	–		
Communal	0.05	0.03	0.03	0.34*	0.25*	0.34*	0.63*	0.45*	–	
PAA	0.04	− 0.01	0.04	0.44*	0.36*	0.44*	0.60*	0.48*	0.74*	–

Gender: 0 = girl, 1 = boy. Income, median household income; CCS, critical consciousness socialization; CS, cultural socialization; CES, color evasive socialization; Critical, critically conscious action; Interpersonal, interpersonal anti-racist action; Communal, communal anti-racist action; PAA, political anti-racist action. *$p < 0.002$.

FIGURE 1
Graph of simple slopes analysis, critically conscious action.
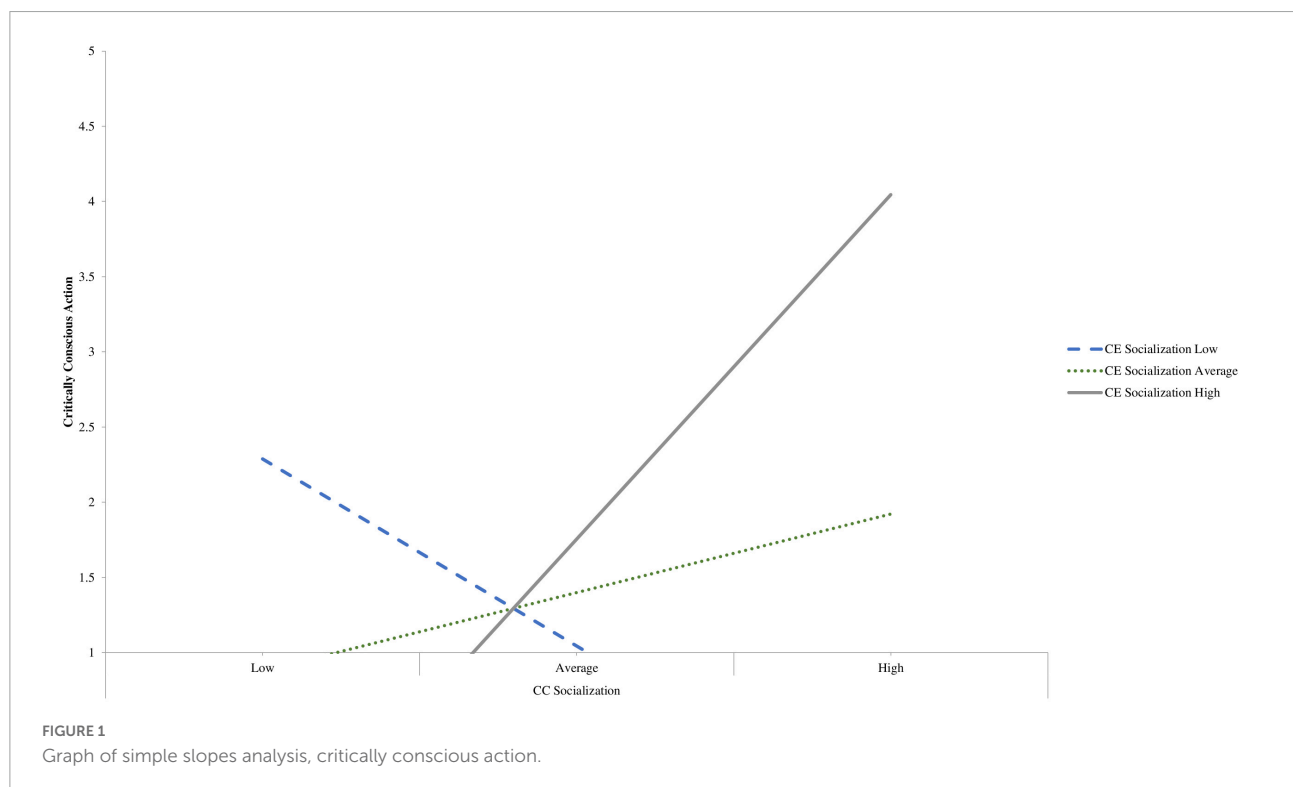
gender and duration) for the second Critical Consciousness Socialization item ($r = 0.12$, $p = 0.05$).

Four hierarchical regressions, one for each type of critical action (i.e., critically conscious, interpersonal anti-racist, communal anti-racist, and political anti-racist action), with an alpha criterion of 0.05, were conducted to explore how different types of school ERS may interact to have a combined effect on Black youth's critical action. Following these regressions, simple slopes analysis was employed to parse apart significant interactions indicative of moderation. Only coefficient estimates with values significant at the 0.05 level were corrected using the Benjamini–Hochberg correction, as the

Bonferroni correction uniformly shrinks p-values rather than adjusting them according to their effect size, leading it to be an at-times overly conservative correction (Hochberg, 1988; Field et al., 2012; Rubin, 2021). It is well established by the literature that critical consciousness socialization and cultural socialization bolster critical consciousness's development, and so they were entered ahead of color-evasive socialization in each step. Step 0 included the covariates of age, gender, and median household income for the zip code in which students lived; Step 1 included these covariates and each of these three socialization styles; and Step 2 included covariates, individual socialization styles, and all possible two-way interactions
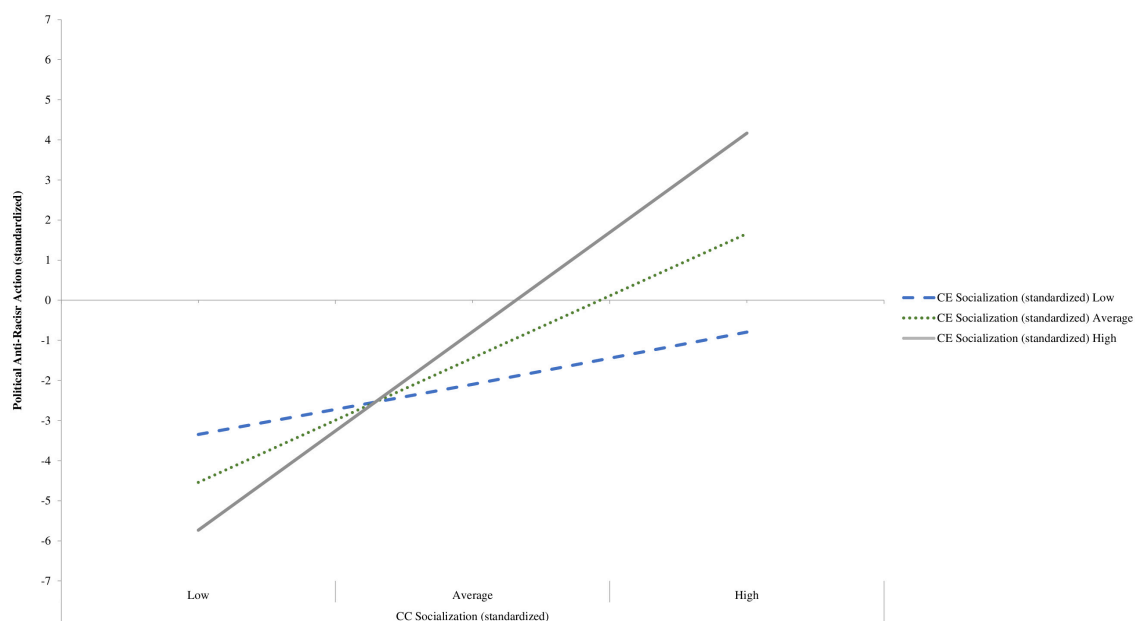
FIGURE 2
Graph of simple slopes analysis, political anti-racist action.

between predictors (cultural-critical consciousness, cultural-color-evasive, and critical consciousness-color-evasive). The third step, including a three-way interaction between each socialization style, was not included in the present paper as not to detract from the variance explained in the main effects. Because the proposed interactions were entered exploratorily, there was no theoretical underpinning to the order in which they were entered. It was hypothesized that (1a) at least one of the interactions involving color-evasive socialization would be significant, and that (1b) model fit would improve between Steps 1 and 2.

Results

Four three-step moderations were run for each outcome: critically conscious, interpersonal anti-racist, communal anti-racist, and political anti-racist action. For the sake of brevity, only regression models with significant interaction terms (the models for critically conscious and political anti-racist action) are reported below. Those models which lacked significant interaction terms (the models for interpersonal and communal anti-racist action) are reported in the **Supplementary material**.

Critically conscious action

A moderation using FIML regression was executed (see **Table 3**). The covariate of median household income was standardized to allow execution of the FIML estimation

command (Biesanz, 2022) in RStudio Desktop 2022.07.1 + 554. All predictors were centered beforehand, and the suspected moderator of color evasive socialization was entered last in Step 1.

Overall, the Step 0 model, including only the study covariates, was not significant, $F(3,176) = 1.56$, $p = 0.20$, $R^2 = 0.03$. The Step 1 model of the covariates and critical consciousness; cultural; and color evasive socialization was significant, $F(6,173) = 4.64$, $p < 0.001$, $R^2 = 0.14$. The Step 2 model of the covariates; critical consciousness, cultural, and color evasive socialization; and the two-way interactions between these modes of school ERS were also significant overall, $F(9,170) = 3.94$, $p < 0.001$, $R^2 = 0.17$. Fit improved significantly between Steps 0 and 1, and differed marginally between Steps 1 and 2. Supporting our hypothesis, the interaction between critical consciousness and color-evasive socialization was significant [$\beta = 0.25$, $SE = 0.08$, $t(193) = 2.54$, $p < 0.05$]. The only other significant "main effect" predictors in this model were critical consciousness socialization [$\beta = -0.02$, $SE = 0.07$, $t(218) = 2.54$, $p < 0.05$] and color evasive socialization [$\beta = 0.16$, $SE = 0.06$, $t(206) = 2.25$, $p < 0.05$]. All significant predictors in this model remained significant after the Benjamini–Hochberg correction was applied.

Simple slopes analyses

There was a significant, positive relationship between critical consciousness socialization and critically conscious action for youth scoring one standard deviation *above* the mean perception level of color evasive socialization ($b = 0.30$, $p < 0.001$). This means that when students perceived high

levels of color-evasive socialization, there was a positive link between critical consciousness socialization and critically conscious action.

There was not a significant relationship between critical consciousness socialization and critically conscious action for youth scoring one standard deviation *below* the mean perception level of color-evasive socialization (b = 0.03, p = 0.71). This means that when students reported low levels of color-evasive socialization, critical consciousness socialization was unrelated to critically conscious action. **Figure 1** depicts the simple slopes analysis visually.

Political anti-racist action

A moderation using a FIML regression was executed (see **Table 4**). Given the binary nature of the items from the Anti-Racism Action Scale, all covariates, predictors, and the outcome variable of political anti-racist action were standardized beforehand. The suspected moderator of color-evasive socialization was entered last in Step 1.

Overall, the Step 0 model, including only the study covariates, was not significant, $F(3,176)$ = 0.24, p = 0.87, R^2 = 0.004. The Step 1 model of the covariates and critical consciousness; cultural; and color evasive socialization was significant, $F(6,173)$ = 8.23, p < 0.001, R^2 = 0.22. The Step 2 model of the covariates; critical consciousness, cultural, and color evasive socialization; and the two-way interactions between these modes of school ERS was also significant overall, $F(9,170)$ = 6.29, p < 0.001, R^2 = 0.25. Fit improved significantly between Steps 0 and 1 and differed marginally between Steps 1 and 2. Supporting our hypothesis, the interaction between critical consciousness and color-evasive socialization was significant [β = 0.21, SE = 0.09, $t(193)$ = 2.38,

TABLE 3 Ethnic-racial socialization's effect on critically conscious action.

Variable	Step 0					Step 1					Step 2				
	b	β	SE	t	p	b	β	SE	t	p	b	β	SE	t	p
Age	− 0.01	− 0.03	0.04	− 0.34	0.74	− 0.01	− 0.03	0.04	− 0.45	0.66	− 0.008	− 0.02	0.03	− 0.22	0.83
Gender	0.08	0.08	0.10	0.78	0.44	0.06	0.96	0.10	0.61	0.54	0.04	0.04	0.09	0.40	0.69
Income	0.10	0.14	0.06	1.83	0.07	0.09	0.12	0.05	1.72	0.09	0.08	0.10	0.05	1.55	0.12
CCS						0.16	0.17	0.07	2.25	0.02*	0.18	0.20	0.07	2.54	0.01*
CS						0.02	0.04	0.06	0.25	0.80	0.01	0.05	0.06	0.16	0.88
CES						0.17	0.21	0.06	2.80	0.01*	0.14	0.16	0.06	2.25	0.03*
CCS × CS											− 0.03	− 0.05	0.06	0.16	0.57
CCS × CES											0.20	0.25	0.08	2.54	0.01*
CS × CES											− 0.07	− 0.08	0.07	− 1.03	0.30
R^2		0.03					0.14					0.17			
ΔR^2							0.11**					0.03			

Gender: 0 = girl, 1 = boy. Income, median household income; CCS, critical consciousness socialization; CS, cultural socialization; CES, color evasive socialization. *p < 0.05, **p < 0.001.

TABLE 4 Ethnic-racial socialization's effect on political anti-racist action.

Variable	Step 0					Step 1					Step 2				
	b	β	SE	t	p	b	β	SE	t	p	B	β	SE	t	p
Age	0.34	0.05	0.64	0.53	0.60	0.26	0.04	0.57	0.45	0.65	0.36	0.05	0.56	0.64	0.53
Gender	− 0.02	0.009	0.12	− 0.21	0.83	− 0.05	− 0.02	0.10	− 0.47	0.64	− 0.08	− 0.04	0.10	− 0.78	0.44
Income	0.03	0.04	0.06	0.46	0.65	0.01	0.01	0.06	0.23	0.82	0.0005	0.0005	0.06	0.004	0.99
CCS						1.04	0.30	0.25	4.22	0.001**	1.08	0.32	0.24	4.41	0.000**
CS						0.29	0.14	0.22	1.35	0.18	0.32	0.14	0.22	1.42	0.16
CES						0.38	0.13	0.18	2.04	0.04*	0.28	0.09	0.19	1.44	0.15
CCS × CS											0.03	0.02	0.07	0.50	0.62
CCS × CES											0.22	0.21	0.09	2.38	0.02*
CS × CES											− 0.07	− 0.09	0.08	− 0.89	0.38
R^2		0.004					0.22					0.25			
ΔR^2							0.22**					0.03			

Gender: 0 = girl, 1 = boy. Income, median household income; CCS, critical consciousness socialization; CS, cultural socialization; CES, color evasive socialization. *p < 0.05, **p < 0.001.

$p < 0.05$]. The only other significant predictor in this model was critical consciousness socialization [$\beta = 0.32$, $SE = 0.24$, $t(218) = 4.41$, $p < 0.001$]. All significant predictors in this model remained significant after the Benjamini–Hochberg correction was applied.

Simple slopes analyses

There was a significant, positive relationship between critical consciousness socialization and political anti-racist action for participants scoring one standard deviation *above* the mean perception level of color-evasive socialization ($b = 1.11$, $p < 0.001$). This means that when students perceived high levels of color-evasive socialization, there was a positive link between critical consciousness socialization and political anti-racist action.

There was also a significant, positive relationship between critical consciousness socialization and political anti-racist action for participants scoring one standard deviation *below* the mean perception level of color-evasive socialization ($b = 0.51$, $p < 0.05$). This means that the previously described relationship between critical consciousness socialization and political anti-racist action was also experienced among Black students who perceived lesser color-evasive socialization.

It would seem that this relationship is stronger among students who perceive greater amounts of color-evasive socialization, but it is still evident among those who perceive lesser amounts of color-evasive socialization. Moderators can either change the direction of the relationship between the predictor and the outcome, as was the case for critically conscious action (see **Figure 1**), *or the size* of this relationship, as is the case here for political anti-racist action. **Figure 2** depicts this simple slopes analysis visually.

Discussion

Integrative model of developmental competencies in minority children

Color-evasive socialization emerging as a significant positive predictor of critical action in both Step 1 models (see **Tables 3**, **4**) contradicts the notion that color-evasive socialization cultivates inhibitive, critical action-stifling school environments (Joseph, 1995; Pollock, 2004). Through the lens of the integrative model, one might expect a negative relationship between these variables, such that young people would engage in less varied and frequent critical action in the presence of greater color-evasive messages. The Step 1 model findings are surprising because they indicate that young people engaged in *more varied and frequent* critical action in the presence of greater color-evasive messages. This association could be construed as promotive of young people's development, despite the fact that color-evasive messages are harmful. Even the validation

article for the School Climate for Diversity Scale-Secondary speaks to contradictory quantitative findings that show positive relationships between color-evasive socialization and desirable developmental outcomes. Byrd (2017) writes: "[A]lthough research has hypothesized negative outcomes due to [color-evasive] socialization; the vast majority of existing research is qualitative and based on researcher evaluations of [color evasion]. Few studies have examined adolescents' perceptions of [color-evasive] messages. Therefore, further research is needed to explore the role of the messages for youths' outcomes" (p. 18). While school is the socializing context under investigation in the current study, it is not the sole source of ethnic-racial socialization. Seeing as color-evasive messages represent a form of racial discrimination (Bonilla-Silva, 1998), students may draw on the preparation for bias (Hughes et al., 2006) socialization they've received from their parents or within their communities to resist color-evasive school socialization. This might allow them to similarly identify color-evasive socialization as a target for their resistance and may explain the positive relationship between color-evasive socialization and critical action. Alternatively, ethnic-racial composition (Byrd), racial stress and racial identity (Hope et al., 2020, 2021), and anger toward injustice (Bañales et al., 2019) may also help to explain (i.e., mediate) and unpack this unexpected relationship, placing it in better alignment with the integrative model. However, such analyses were outside of the scope of the current project.

School ethnic-racial socialization (and critical consciousness)

Speaking specifically about Black adolescents' lived experiences with school ethnic-racial socialization presents possibilities for nuancing the results of the current study. As the current measures of school ethnic-racial socialization, regardless of their specific type, gauge students' *general perceptions* of school messages surrounding ethnicity and race, it is also important to think about the *lived experiences* students may be having. These "day-to-day" experiences are what shape the perceptions endorsed on the aforementioned subscales.

Firstly, cultural socialization did not emerge as a significant positive predictor of critical action, neither on its own in Step 1 models, nor as a member of the interaction terms within the Step 2 models. In other words, messages encouraging young people to celebrate their culture(/s) had no main or combined effect on the frequency or varied types of critical action young people engaged in. This finding is surprising, given that this positive form of socialization has been shown to encourage critical action (Byrd and Ahn, 2020; Lambert et al., 2020; Seider and Graves, 2020; Wang et al., 2020). It may be the case that because cultural socialization centers pride in a *single* ethnic-racial group, it fails to highlight the *intergroup* nature of power dynamics between ethnic-racial groups. Critical

action assumes the existence of a power differential between groups that must be resisted, and so a focus on a singular group may not be enough to cultivate such resistance. It may also be the case that school messages about social justice and critical interpretations of history, those characteristic of critical consciousness socialization, are of paritable salience or inherently co-occur when socializing Black students around their culture (Byrd and Hope, 2020). Black American culture is heavily influenced by social justice and action in resistance to systemic racial oppression and marginalization (Wang et al., 2020), given the tradition of Black life-making (Mustaffa, 2017). Cultural socialization and expressions of Blackness and Black Americans highlight (but are not limited to) awareness of the following: (1) that Black people have been negatively racialized in American society, (2) that life prospects differ as a function of one's minoritized and/or dominant racial identities, and (3) that American culture and history privileges white perspectives. As such, messages that elevate and celebrate Black American culture simultaneously revolve around a critical consciousness of racism. This notion is supported by the current study's significant and positive correlation between critical consciousness and cultural socialization ($r = 0.66$, $p < 0.002$). This correlation may indicate that these two positive forms of socialization tend to be delivered at once for Black students. This correlation may also indicate that an increased perception or an increase in the salience of one of these forms of school ERS is related to an increase in the perception or salience of the other.

Another finding in need of such nuance was color-evasive socialization, in and of itself, serving as a positive predictor in each Step 1 model. As discussed previously, this finding may indicate that a greater perception that one's schooling downplays race is related to more frequent and varied critical action. While these results should not be interpreted as an endorsement for color-evasive messages, it may be the case that certain youth endorse color-evasive socialization as a rejection of race as a barometer by which to judge or to hold prejudices against other people. Such a stance would be similar to that advanced by egalitarian/pluralist ethnic-racial socialization messages in the parental ethnic-racial socialization literature. The distinction between color evasion as a mechanism of egalitarianism and color evasion as a mechanism to downplay the structural constraints created by racism has also been identified in the parental ethnic-racial socialization literature (Hughes et al., 2006; Juang et al., 2016). It could also be the case that the association between color-evasive socialization and critical action is only present among those who receive critical consciousness socialization as well. This notion could potentially be supported by the presence of significant, positive interactions between critical consciousness and color-evasive socialization in the Step 2 models (Tables 3, 4). These interactions indicate a unique, combined effect of critical consciousness and color-evasive socialization left uncaptured by the Step 1 models, which did not include interaction terms.

More plainly stated, simple slopes analyses showed that greater color-evasive socialization was only (in the case of critically conscious action) or more greatly (in the case of political anti-racist) associated with critical action for young people receiving high levels of critical consciousness socialization (Figures 1, 2; $b_{critical} = 0.30$, $p < 001$, $b_{political} = 1.11$, $p < 0.001$). Thus, the present study's interaction terms and simple slopes analyses reveal that color-evasive socialization in its own right is not promotive, but has the potential to undergird/serve as a target of young people's critical action when received in concert with high levels of critical consciousness socialization.

We must also think about how color-evasive and critical consciousness socialization are interfacing in students' lives. Seeing as schools' contextual demands and norms often center whiteness and white supremacy, color-evasive socialization may be the default mode of ethnic-racial messaging Black students receive. They may receive color-evasive socialization throughout most of their school day, but with particular(/particularly or even singularly impactful) moments of critical consciousness socialization. This thought aligns with the idea of color-evasive and critically conscious messages co-occurring, as well as with the significant interactions found between these two modes of messaging (Tables 3, 4). Moreover, latent profile analysis including school ERS subscales has shown that youth often perceive comparable and/or comparably high levels of both positive and negative forms of socialization (Byrd and Ahn, 2020; Golden and Byrd, 2022). Another possible explanation could be that race is especially salient or non-salient to certain students. Students with high racial salience may be more likely to perceive a message's racial tones, whether they are positive (like critical consciousness socialization) or negative (like color-evasive socialization). On the other hand, students for whom race is less salient may perceive low levels of socialization on the whole, regardless of whether that socialization is positive or negative. Thus, future qualitative research exploring the lived experiences these young people have with school ethnic-racial socialization is warranted. Such work would lend further insight into what this co-occurrence actually looks like during the school day.

Moreover, the positive correlations between color-evasive and critical consciousness socialization ($r = 0.49$, $p < 0.002$) and between color-evasive and cultural socialization ($r = 0.47$, $p < 0.002$) are unexpected on theoretical grounds, despite being fairly common in prior studies (Bañales et al., 2019; C. M. Byrd, personal communication, 2/25/21; C. M. Byrd, personal communication, 4/3/22). There are two reasons why these correlations are surprising. Firstly, critical consciousness and color-evasive socialization are theorized to be opposites, and thus would be expected to be negatively correlated. Secondly, cultural socialization, being a positive form of school ethnic-racial socialization akin to critical consciousness socialization, may also be expected to negatively correlate with color-evasive socialization. As stated previously, it may

be the case that racial salience shapes students' overall ability to perceive school ERS, regardless of whether that socialization is positive or negative. It may also be the case that with increased perceptions of critical consciousness socialization, and accompanying increases in students' critical consciousness, comes an increase in their ability to perceive and name socialization that would thwart this consciousness, such as color-evasive socialization (see School Ethnic-Racial Socialization, Black Life-making, and Critical Consciousness). Cultural socialization often accompanies critical consciousness socialization for Black students as discussed previously. Thus, an increased perception of cultural socialization may similarly increase the ability to name and perceive problematic color-evasive socialization.

While variance inflation factors were all below 10, and thus multicollinearity was not assumed to be an issue in these analyses (Field et al., 2012), the significant positive correlations between color-evasive and critical consciousness socialization and between color-evasive and cultural socialization may raise questions about the degree to which these messages are truly demarcated in their delivery from schools to students (see Bañales et al., 2019 for similar musings). If not this, it may be the case that these correlations speak to these forms of socialization being simultaneously delivered or simultaneously, highly salient to young people, as has been postulated in other analyses of these data (Byrd and Ahn, 2020; Golden and Byrd, 2022). Future qualitative work, particularly with observational or ethnographic elements, may be especially vital to better understand the points of similarity and divergence in the "live" delivery and reception of school ethnic-racial socialization (for interview-based work that fulfills this call, see Byrd and Hope, 2020).

Black life-making and critical consciousness

Black life-making, or the ways in which Black people define and care for themselves in educational settings despite dominant anti-Black ideologies (Mustaffa, 2017), was introduced as a framework to establish critical consciousness, and critical action specifically, as a key feature of the Black student and broader Black American experience. Taking up the analytic lens of Black life-making allows for a nuancing of the scope of the critical action this socialization shapes. *Given the focus on school ethnic-racial socialization in the present study, some may have expected the interaction between color-evasive and critical consciousness socialization to be significant in the communal anti-racist action and interpersonal anti-racist action models, instead of or in addition to the critically conscious action and political change action models. Through the lens of Black life-making, however, it can be argued that critically conscious and political anti-racist action are of "parallel scope" to the*

socialization items. Schools and the people within them can be understood as microcosmic sites and agents of systemic, anti-Black educational violence (Mustaffa, 2017). With this understanding, we can move away from viewing schools primarily or solely as microsystemic community spaces, the "scope" highlighted within communal and interpersonal anti-racist action. Instead, we can move toward viewing schools as sites of macrosystemic oppression. We can also move toward viewing the people within them not as individual actors, but as potential agents of said macrosystemic oppression. This notion is supported by the fact that interpersonal ($r = 0.09$) and communal anti-racist action ($r = 0.23$) were the forms of critical action most weakly correlated to color-evasive socialization. If the target of resistance is color-evasive socialization, then we would expect the forms of critical action of "parallel scope" (i.e., the forms of critical action most related to resisting color-evasive socialization) to be those more strongly correlated to it. Instead, we see stronger correlations between critically conscious action and color-evasive socialization, and political anti-racist action and color-evasive socialization ($r = 0.28$ for both). Seeing as the critically conscious and political anti-racist action items have "scopes" in which the targets of resistance are wider systems and their agents, the presence of the significant interactions in these models, rather than the communal and interpersonal anti-racist action models, aligns with this study's hypotheses and frameworks.

Black life-making also allows for a speculatory nuancing of the temporal aspect of socialization. Black life-making is perpetuated, defined, and undergirded by an intergenerational, time-stretching, or even time-defying quality. The knowledge and critical consciousness of Black ancestors and Black students from many generations ago is passed onto and remains relevant for today's Black students. Thus, troubling, mystifying, or lending lesser credence to the quantification of the portions of time that constitute simultaneity may be of the essence (Brand, 2011; Mustaffa, 2017). Earlier in this manuscript, the simultaneity of positive and negative forms of ethnic-racial socialization seemed to speak to the co-occurrence of these opposing socializations happening "in the same breath." However, this simultaneity may be better understood as these messages being delivered in a commensurate or sequential timeframe. For the interactions between critical consciousness and color-evasive socialization to shape critical action in the ways found in this study may be more a product of comparable *impact or perception of* these forms of socialization, rather than of *comparable saturation* of these forms of socialization. Simple slopes analyses revealed that in order for more varied and frequent critical action to emerge, it was necessary for Black students to perceive high levels of both critical consciousness socialization and color-evasive socialization. *Black life-making stretches across generations and thus defies linear conceptions of time. Thus, the amount of time it takes students to reach such high levels of perception, or how frequently instances*

of these socialization forms must occur to garner such high perception, may be of lesser import than the impact of pivotal instances of socialization. Future longitudinal work researching ethnic-racial socialization's bearings on critical action may investigate this notion. The survey data used were cross-sectional, such that these notions or hypotheses and analyses revolving around time and ordinality could not be appropriately investigated. Regardless, Black Americans have repeatedly life-made in response to the denial of the right to schooling and education; dilapidated and/or overpoliced school buildings; outdated, inadequate, or disempowering educational materials; inequitable funding and educational polices; and countless other oppressive forces. *Despite the ever presence of white supremacy in educational institutions (here, through color-evasive socialization), Black students (aided by the simultaneous reception of critical consciousness socialization) have and will continue to life-make, to resist antiblackness, and to strive toward liberation.*

Limitations

Despite the nuanced connections between the current study and the theoretical frameworks and literature that scaffolded it, there were a few limitations of note we would like to address. In terms of statistical limitations, the small sample size of the current study may have rendered its analyses underpowered. Future research may replicate this study using a better-powered, larger sample size to ensure that effect sizes are robust, and that the significant and null results still hold true and reflect real-world phenomena as accurately as hypothesis testing allows for.

Moreover, sensitivity checks, such as (1) including *critical reflection* (mental attributions of inequality to systemic factors rather than individual shortcomings; Watts et al., 2011) as a predictor or covariate in this study's models and/or (2) investigating critical reflection as a mediator between color-evasive and critical consciousness socialization, may have made the analyses more rigorous. However, it should be noted that the critical reflection items included in the dataset were not all specifically oriented around antiracist reflections or musings about race. The same could be said of the critically conscious action items, but this "gap" was filled by the inclusion of items from the Anti-Racism Action Scale (Aldana et al., 2019). No such "buffer" of antiracist reflection items was available in this dataset. To ensure that all variables were appropriately and specifically tied to resisting racism, these sensitivity checks were not pursued.

Given the strong, positive correlations between the critical action measures and their conceptual relatedness, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) may have been advisable. Rather than keeping the outcomes separate, a CFA may have revealed a multi-dimensional factor structure that would have allowed for the usage of a simple composite score and thus a single

moderation analysis. The utility of keeping the critical action outcome measures separate was to better understand the impact of ethnic-racial socialization on different forms of action—collapsing these forms onto a composite measure would not have allowed us to distinguish the varied ways socialization may shape more proximal or microsystemic "scopes" of action versus more distal or macrosystemic "scopes" of action (see the Black-Life-making and Critical Consciousness section).

Although inclusion in the current sample was reliant on young people selecting "Black" on a forced-entry ethnicity/race question, these young people, particularly those who are bi/multiracial; lighter-skinned; or who have what white supremacy deems "white" features, may be racialized differently (Hunter, 2007; Reece, 2019; Rosario et al., 2021). While these young people are Black or may identify with whatever aspects of Blackness help them to life-make, others may temper anti-Black tendencies when interacting with these young people depending on how they racialize them. This tempering may differently valence their school's ethnic-racial socialization.

Grant (1979) argued that previous studies only saw socialization as a process of "socializing" the student, without any recognition of how teachers are socialized within a classroom context. Teachers facilitate classroom time according to the (school) ethnic-racial socialization they received not only when they were students but perhaps too from their coworkers and the students they teach. Peers also serve as socializing agents to one another, and as thought partners in processing adult-delivered socialization messages (Hagerman, 2018). The current study was unable to explore these particular impacts of teachers and peers on socialization. The school ethnic-racial socialization items (Byrd, 2017) are constructed to measure *student* perceptions of the ethnic-racial socialization facilitated by their teachers, classes, and schools more broadly, rather than the intentions of teachers or impacts of peer-driven socialization. Future research may investigate teachers' experiences socializing and being socialized. Researchers should also study the role of peers in school ethnic-racial socialization. Lastly, future research may investigate the distinction between implicit and explicit socialization (Bartoli et al., 2016; Hagerman, 2018).

Future directions

Despite cultural socialization perhaps being the socialization style best suited to promote sociocultural compatibility (García Coll et al., 1996) between a school's demands and norms and the history and culture of its Black students, cultural socialization never emerged as a significant predictor of critical action. It may be the case that this form of socialization is of paritable salience or especially likely to co-occur with critical consciousness socialization for Black youth. The reason for this may be the overlap between what constitutes cultural socialization for Black Americans and critical consciousness socialization. Further

study of what school ethnic-racial socialization entails for Black students is warranted. A school ethnic-racial socialization scale designed with their particular experiences in mind could be especially generative for the above reasons.

Additionally, greater accountability to intersectional and gendered experiences in school ethnic-racial socialization than this *quantitative* work could afford would also be fruitful. Gender differences in ethnic-racial socialization have not been consistently found when measured quantitatively (Hughes et al., 2006). Statistical significance, however, is not the only means by which empirical research can speak to real-world significance in the form of individuals' lived experiences. There is a need for qualitative work to trouble and guide quantitative ethnic-racial socialization work, perhaps in the form of an exploratory sequential design with greater accountability to gender and intersectionality. Similarly, Black women have traditionally served as driving agents of Black life-making (as well as leadership in social movements, educational institutions, and, most pertinent to most of the ethnic-racial socialization literature, in families), despite their contributions being understudied and understated. Conducting further qualitative work that centers their ethnic-racial socialization experiences and their conceptualizations of their intersectional, critically conscious experiences as Black women would enrich our understandings of gendered ethnic-racial socialization (see Leath and Mims, 2021 for a generative example of such work). Simultaneously, such work would enrich our understandings of Black life-making.

Conclusion

The current study investigated the interplay of different forms of school ethnic-racial socialization as they shape Black youth's critical action. Color-evasive and critical consciousness socialization interacted such that young people who perceived higher levels of critical consciousness socialization as well as higher levels of color-evasive socialization were more frequently involved in critical action and were involved in more varied forms of this action. These findings lend support to the idea that if critical consciousness socialization is effective, young Black people who perceive it should be apt to name and perceive the color-evasive socialization that seeks to counter their critical consciousness. Interpretation of these results added nuance to theoretical conceptualizations of the adaptive culture; Black life-making; school ethnic-racial socialization; and critical consciousness, while still leaving room for such work to be more specifically accountable to Black American culture and to gendered and intersectional experiences. Interacting socialization styles is informative, given (1) the co-occurrence of these forms of ethnic-racial socialization within schools, and (2) both the adaptive culture and critical consciousness requiring the presence of an entity to act against or resist. The present

study is significant in that it attempts to fill these theoretical and empirical gaps.

This study's results should not be read to mean that color-evasive socialization is beneficial for Black students. These findings may provide comfort to parents, educators, and other concerned parties worried about the impact of schooling that de-emphasizes the reality of racism. More frequent and varied critical action among young Black people functions as a benefit not only on the individual (Hope et al., 2020; Mosley et al., 2021) and systemic levels (Watts et al., 1999; Jemal, 2018), but also a benefit of intergenerational importance. Critical action provides a means for these young people to carry on the tradition of life-making, loving, and defining their Blackness in spite of systemic anti-Black educational violence, thus contributing to the improvement of the broader Black American experience.

Data availability statement

The raw data supporting the conclusions in this article will be made available by the authors, without undue reservation. Requests to access these datasets should be directed to CMB, cmbyrd3@ncsu.edu.

Ethics statement

The studies involving human participants were reviewed and approved by the North Carolina State Institutional Review Board and North Carolina State University. Written informed consent to participate in this study was provided by the participants' legal guardian/next of kin.

Author contributions

GK conceived the study and its design, analyzed and interpreted the data, and drafted the manuscript. CMB provided and cleaned the data and provided feedback on the final manuscript draft. MD provided feedback on data analysis and manuscript drafts. All authors contributed to the article and approved the submitted version.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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Supplementary material

The Supplementary Material for this article can be found online at: https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/feduc.2022.924930/full#supplementary-material

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Check for updates

"I rewrote their story and you can, too": Black girls' artistic freedom dreams to create new worlds

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For Black girls, whose histories are often taught in schools through deficit-based narratives, the need to create and reauthor their personal and communal stories is a resistant act that gives their stories permanence in the present and the future. This article explores how Black girls leveraged creative expression to freedom dream in a virtual summer arts program. Theoretically grounded in Abolitionist Teaching and Critical Race Feminism, this study explored eight adolescent Black girls' (co-researchers) experiences in Black Girls S.O.A.R. (scholarship, organizing, arts, and resistance), a program aimed to co-create a healing-centered space to engage artistic explorations of history, storytelling, Afrofuturism, and social justice with Black girls. The study utilizes performance ethnography to contend with the following research question: (1) How, if at all, do adolescent Black girls use arts-based practices (e.g., visual art, music, hair, and animation) to freedom dream? Analyses of the data revealed that co-researchers used arts-based practices to reclaim personal and historical narratives, dream new worlds, and use art as activism. In this, co-researchers created futures worthy of Black girl brilliance—futures where joy, creativity, equity, and love were at the center. I conclude with implications for how educators and researchers can employ creative, participatory, and arts-based practices and methodologies in encouraging and honoring Black girls' storytelling and dream-making practices.

KEYWORDS

Black girls, abolitionist teaching, arts education, critical literacy, Afrofuturism

Introduction

> Black is ignorance and it is laziness.
> Black is a ghetto mess and a whole lot of trouble.
> Blackness is a threat and it is something you should fear. To
> be Black is to be the worst version of a human being.

I'm sorry, I fear I was mistaken before.
To be Black is everything.
Blackness is power and knowledge.
It is beauty and strength.
To be Black is a blessing because Blackness is greatness.
I rewrote their story and you can too.
Be proud of your Blackness and all of its glory because
Blackness is a part of you.

Olivia, Black Girls S.O.A.R co-researcher

The Zoom room grew quiet as Olivia unmuted herself. Her loved ones' and peers' faces filled the virtual tiles – a group of Black women and girls coming together in celebration of the artwork a team of Black girl co-researchers constructed over the span of a few months. Olivia's voice reverberated as she boomed the first line of her original poem. With every line, she spat out the words until she got to the row, "I'm sorry, I fear I was mistaken before." She cleared her throat and her tone changed. "I rewrote their story and you can, too."

Olivia's poem is an expression and enactment of how Black girls use art to write, create, and reclaim their stories. As science fiction author and ancestor Octavia Butler said, "Every story I create, creates me. I write to create myself." Olivia illustrates what it means to craft a narrative about who she is, but also asserts who she is not. She rewrites a deficit-based narrative, but also poses a resounding call-to-action for educators, "You can, too." She let that line linger in the air with a deep breath. She laid bare the hatred and fear tactics to evoke an emotional stir. Olivia makes it plain for anyone who will listen that these are the messages she receives from society and at school. As she sang her last line, the chatbox erupted with affirmations. The screen lit up with fire emojis and clapping emojis. She grinned and accepted the applause as she murmured, "Thank you for the love." As part of the Black Girls S.O.A.R. (scholarship, organizing, arts, and resistance) virtual summer program, Olivia penned this powerfully lyrical piece.

What does it mean to center a liberatory curriculum where Black girls can refute harmful messages they have heard, and instead, posit their own narratives that highlight the brilliance, creativity, and freedom dreams that Black girls hold? How can we hold space for Black girls to rewrite the harmful stories they get told too often, and make their stories the definitive ones? How do we make it so Black girls do not have to rewrite, but simply create their own narratives? What new worlds are Black girls dreaming and building into existence? How can educators support those visions? These are the questions that guide me in this work.

Black girls are brilliant, creative, and intuitive. They are already dreaming new worlds through their artwork and creations, but also through their existence. Reynolds (2019) reminds us that "Black girls are curators, leaders, artists, freedom fighters, but most are Black girls – beautiful, complicated,

magical, and survivors" (p. 11). However, "rarely is Black creativity centered in empirical literature or facilitated within educational environments" (Mims et al., 2022, p. 135). This article explores how Black girls leveraged creative expression to freedom dream their stories in both the present and the future by answering the question: "How, if at all, do adolescent Black girls use arts-based practices (e.g., visual art, music, hair, animation) to freedom dream?"

Theoretical framework

Abolitionist teaching

Freedom dreaming in education requires an abolitionist orientation. Abolition, in its most foundational definition, is about dismantling a structure, system, or institution. While historically applied to the abolishment of enslavement, current abolitionists apply the term to the praxis of eliminating imprisonment, policing, and surveillance, while creating alternatives committed to community-constructed safety (Critical Resistance, 2020). The prison industrial complex regards humans as disposable and as problems to be dealt with, rather than grappling with the failures of systems to provide necessary support for individuals and collectives to survive. Abolition is not solely about tearing down systems, like the prison industrial complex, but dreaming and enacting something new and more just in its place (Gilmore, 2021). Further, the new structures abolitionists are building center those who have been pushed to the margins. The call for abolition is not new, rather it is rooted in the work and love of Black, Brown, queer, and women revolutionaries who have always imagined and forged new horizons. In particular relevance to this study that explores Black girls' art-making and freedom dreaming, Hartman (2020) described that Black feminist poetry has provided a roadmap for abolition. For example, Lorde (1984) named,

Poetry is not a luxury. It is a vital necessity of our existence. It forms the quality of the light within which we predicate our hopes and dreams toward survival and change, first made into language, then into idea, then into more tangible action (p. 37).

This quote links the necessary nature of art to being able to not only dream new futures, but take action to craft them. Building on the legacy of abolition work, abolitionist teaching as a framework applies future dreaming to pedagogy and education. Love's (2019) conceptualization of abolitionist teaching poses a call-to-action to dismantle current schooling structures and build more human-centered ones. The premise is that schools operate exactly how they were formed – to further

colonization through conformity and obedience to maintain an inequitable system.

Institutions, such as schools, do not need to be reformed but instead replaced because they were built with harm at the center. As Stovall (2018) named, "school" abolition is about "teachers who dared to imagine another space for their students and engaged a process to build it" (p. 52). Abolitionist teaching and Stovall's (2018) notion guided the decision to explore an out-of-school program to pose an opportunity to look beyond the current structure of schooling and create something outside of current confines of K-12. Through Black Girls S.O.A.R., I sought to create an alternative to traditional schooling spaces, where Black girls' creativity was centered and truth-telling was a cornerstone of the curriculum.

Abolitionist teaching can take many forms. Love names that educators can create "safe space or homeplace in their classrooms, fight standardized testing, restore justice in their curriculum, or seek justice in their own communities." Scholars have explored abolitionist teaching in a number of ways, including in civics education (Dozono, 2022), language arts and literacy in an urban school district (Hoffman and Martin, 2020), STEM (Jones and Melo, 2020; Louis and King, 2022), and teacher education (Faison and McArthur, 2020; Riley and Solic, 2021; Sabati et al., 2022). These studies helped me to think expansively about my role in the revolution as a striving practitioner of abolitionist teaching, as well as view abolitionist teaching from both a theoretical and conceptual lens. Rodríguez (2010) noted, abolition is a "perpetually creative and experimental pedagogy." (p. 15). Love (2019) warned educators to not fall trap to gimmicks or quick fixes in education, but rather embed themselves in and be guided by the North Star that frameworks like Critical Race Theory (CRT) offer. To put abolitionist teaching into practice in this study, the program required a creative curriculum, but also creativity in how it was structured as to not simply reproduce in repackaged ways the same harms I sought to disrupt. It is in this vein that I incorporate Critical Race Feminism into the framework. Critical Race Feminism grounds abolitionist teaching, particularly in explicitly naming the need to abolish racist, sexist, heteropatriarchal systems, centering Black girls' counter-stories, and ensuring intersectionality.

Critical race feminism

Critical Race Theory involves "a collection of activists and scholars interested in studying and transforming the relationship among race, racism, and power" (Delgado and Stefancic, 2001, p. 2). As a framework, it was coined in the 1970s by legal scholars and activists to acknowledge the permanence of racism in the United States (Bell, 1995). CRT acknowledges race as a socially constructed concept which works to maintain the dominance of whiteness to perpetuate social, economic,

and legal inequality. It acknowledges that racism is more than individual bias and prejudice, but rather is embedded into the foundation of societal structures (Crenshaw, 1991). CRT allowed me to root this study in the salience of racism in education. Additionally, there are a few particular tenets that rest CRT in this study: the examination of intersectionality and the power of counter-storytelling as an act of freedom-dreaming and resistance.

Critical Race Theory scholar Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw coined the term intersectionality to describe the inequality that individuals experience at multiple levels in the intersections between their multiple, oppressed identities (Crenshaw, 1991). Black feminist scholars, such as Anna Julia Cooper, Patricia Hill Collins, and Barbara Smith also centered their work around the intersections of Blackness and womanhood. Anna Julia Cooper considered Black women are "doubly enslaved" because of their multiple, oppressed identities (Moody-Turner, 2009). Frances Beal coined the term "double jeopardy" in 1969 to describe these oppressions as being different from Black men or white women. Their "both/and" worldview from the lens of race, class, and gender creates new possibilities and solutions for dismantling oppressive structures and offers new insights about the potential of society when white, cisheteropatriarchy is not centered as the norm. Black feminism is centered in the present study to recognize the intersections of oppression that Black girls experience at the intersections of their multiple, oppressed identities.

Critical race feminism, rather than feminism, is used to acknowledge the troubled history Black women have with the feminist movement, which often rendered experiences of racism to the margins (Crenshaw, 1989; Collins, 1990; Evans-Winters and Esposito, 2010). Feminism has often been dominated by the interests of middle-class white women. Critical race feminism attends to how Black women have experiences at the intersections of racism and sexism, and other forms of oppression.

To more fully understand the complexities and nuances of Black girls' dreaming practices that are impacted by these intersections, counter-storytelling offers an opportunity for Black girls to not only name the harms of structures and systems of oppression, but speak back to them. Counter-storytelling has been used as a method of centering the stories of those whose knowledge has not been privileged and as a mechanism for challenging white supremacy (Solórzano and Yosso, 2002). The practice of counter-storytelling, "strengthen(s) traditions of social, political, and cultural survival and resistance" (Solórzano and Yosso, 2002). African women have long used storytelling to preserve cultural knowledge and give voice as a form of counter-narrative in and of itself, as it offers a counter to their present reality.

Taken together, abolitionist teaching and Critical Race Feminism acknowledge that racism is ingrained in structures and systems, namely the schooling process. For Black girls to be

able to freedom dream, we must acknowledge why they must freedom dream in the first place. Also, we must reckon with what needs to be abolished, as understanding structural and systemic oppression is critical to activism. We cannot push back against what we do not know constrains us. Black girls use art to confront the truths of their experiences, but they also use art to tell stories of a world anew.

Literature review

Afrofuturism

In 1993, cultural critic Mark Dery coined the term Afrofuturism to speak to how the erasure of Black history is tied to how Black people aim to make sense of the Black political present by imagining alternate worlds. Specifically, Afrofuturism contends with the possibility of Black communities being able to imagine futures amid white violence and erasure. The legacy of enslavement lives through state-sanctioned violence, particularly against Black bodies, minds, and spirits (Warren and Coles, 2020). We see this happen through the "spirit murdering" of Black children in schools in the form of whitewashed curricula and pedagogy, the presence of police in schools, and policing policies and practices (Love, 2016). However, in Ohito's (2020) words, "Yet we breathe life into this place, having manufactured methods to refuse elimination from the white world" (p. 193). In that vein, 20 years ago, the *Dark Matter* anthology was published, which was the first anthology that highlighted Black writers in sci-fi. Black writers and artists have always created new possibilities, alongside new worlds. Art-making and freedom-dreaming practices are refusals of being eliminated – we breathe life through artwork.

While this violence continues to occur at multiple levels in society, theorists of Black Livingness (McKittrick, 2021; Quashie, 2021) point us to something that counters erasure – Black aliveness as antithetical to Black inhumanity, which highlights freedom dreams, joy, and a future where Black people can simply *exist*. I join the scholars who do not limit Black girls' lives to survival, but orient our hearts to engaging in Afrofuturistic visioning.

Black women artists have leveraged Afrofuturism in their work as a means of writing themselves and their existence into the future. To see Black girls and women in the future is an act of resistance. Particularly, using art as a form of not only defiance but as a tool for creating new ways of understanding the world subverts how oppressive structures and systems enact violence as a form of erasure on Black girls. As Toliver (2021a) wrote, "Afrofuturism can act as an experiential portal that guides readers to reflect on the current state of the world and to challenge any possible future or realm that attempts to ignore the existence of Black people." (p. 2). To

illustrate how Afrofuturism acts as a portal, Janelle Monáe's albums introduce fans to the land of Metropolis, where androids work to escape enslavement from humans. Monáe's alter-ego, Android 57821, otherwise known as Cindi Mayweather, runs from hunters after breaking the ultimate law, falling in love with a human. However, Mayweather was born to incite a rebellion and uses the underground as a place for rebellious expression where music and dance free android's souls (Romano, 2018). Through the process of creating the story, Monáe creates herself by tapping into the history of her ancestors and reclaiming her power to seize freedom for the future. This type of "radical speculation enables us to imagine futures, reclaim histories, and create alternate realities" (Gunn, 2019, p. 16). Visual storytelling like this depict Black people in a fantasy realm and evoke the supernatural. It shows how Black people name historical harms and design alternate futures.

As illustrated through Monáe's work, art is a portal through which Black people "imagine and develop their futures" (Boyd Acuff, 2020, p. 15). Toliver's (2021b) work directly shows how Black girls do this. The Black girl writers in the study use agitation literacies, or literacies that directly disturb racism and other oppressions, as a strategy to resist and incite action from others (Muhammad, 2019). Some girls write how their characters do not engage in retaliation and violence because they have had enough, while others write their characters as engaging coalition-building to facilitate widespread social change. By employing Afrofuturistic fiction, Black girls merge reality, dreams, and action.

Black girls have long used art to name and construct their freedom dreams. Historically, Black women have used art as blues singers, poets, artists, and storytellers to express the truth of their inner lives, discuss the struggles of the Black community, but also to give voice to Black women's creativity and survival (Berry and Gross, 2020). Through the work of literary Black women titans Zora Neale Hurston, Alice Walker, Toni Morrison, Maya Angelou, and so many more, they tell Black girls' stories, not only making society see Black girls' existence and their presence, but the fullness of their humanity. As an example, in Ntozake Shange's (1975) monumental choreopoem, *for colored girls who have considered suicide/when the rainbow is enuf*, the women engage in joyful, childlike wonder and play as they chant, "mama's little baby likes shortnin, shortnin," and "little sally walker, sittin in a saucer." They dance across the stage, letting the rhythmic melody serenade them as they get lost in the moment. While the choreopoem tackles the heaviness and violence of racism, patriarchy, abuse, and assault, they reclaim their joy through music, dance, and friendship. They (re)write their stories by centering their dreams of freedom and they weave the "strength and sadness" (Nunn, 2018) with the joy that society tries to rob from them. They engage in the practice of Black feminist futurity, a "performance of a future that hasn't yet happened

but must" (Campt, 2017, p. 34). Black girls seize their joy as a future-making process.

As part of a legacy of Black women writers and artists, Black girls use writing, journaling, social media, movement, music, hair, and dress as arts-based practices to understand their own identities, and to tell their stories and counteract the negative stereotypes that confine them (e.g., Gaunt, 2006; Winn, 2011; Muhammad, 2012; Brown, 2013; Muhammad and Haddix, 2016; Muhammad and Womack, 2015; Evans-Winters and Girls for Gender Equity., 2017; Lu and Steele, 2019). When Black girls take up space and express themselves in places not built for them, they resist the oppressive forces that often take away the joy and fun of learning.

Annamma (2017) called for a "pedagogy of resistance" which includes arts-based curriculum such as dance, art, and poetry (p. 145). This resistance shows up in the form of dismantling stereotypes by sharing their own truths. Language, specifically spoken word, can help Black students resist dehumanization (Desai, 2017). As an example, Jacobs (2016) explored how Black girls in grades 9–12 enacted "oppositional gaze" (i.e., speaking back to negative narratives; hooks, 1990) using forms of media. One girl made a poster that said "Black girls rock!" to push back on dehumanizing narratives using an affirmation. In another study, Muhammad and McArthur, 2015 found that Black girls felt that the media judged them by their hair, personality, and how vocal they were. In order to talk back to these negative stereotypes, the participants wrote about their own experiences to reveal their truest selves. One participant, Dahlia, noted, "…Who can tell our stories best but us?" (Muhammad and McArthur, 2015, p. 137). In this naming practice, Black girls (re)member the legacy in which they come from, as well as their creative resistance in telling their own stories (Dillard, 2012).

As Black girls construct their identities, they posit their dreams alongside their examinations of the structures and systems of oppression. For instance, Turner and Griffin (2020) conducted a case study of twin sisters engaged in multimodal artwork to share their career aspirations. The sisters created boards of their future careers and life goals and critiqued the underrepresentation of Black career women images on Google. In this study, Black girls used multiliteracies, including professional literacies (e.g., presenting career dreams), aspirational auditory (e.g., music), and life literacies (e.g., help Black girls navigate the world). Further, in another study by Griffin and Turner (2021), they explored how middle and elementary school students identified Black futures in their multimodal renderings of responses to the police murder of Michael Brown case. Students challenged anti-Blackness and reimagined futures where anti-Blackness does not exist. Black girls grapple with truthful accounts of history in order to dream new futures both in their personal aspirations and in the world.

Freedom dreaming for Black girls is a radical act of resistance as it asserts their presence in a future in a society that has desperately aim to erase their existence through policing, control, and punishment. Kelley (2003) said, "progressive social movements do not simply produce statistics and narratives of oppression; rather, the best ones do what great poetry always does: transport us to another place, compel us to relive horrors, and, more importantly, enable us to imagine a new society" (p. 13). As Kelley (2003) directly names what great poetry does, I am reminded of the power of art in creating and sustaining social movements. This is freedom dreaming – believing in and pouring life into a world that does not exist yet (adrienne maree brown, as cited in Love, 2019). I am also re-prompted to think about how freedom dreaming and Afrofuturism make us confront the past as we orient our gaze forward. Research shows how Kelley's (2003) conceptualization of freedom dreaming shows up in practice and this study adds to the scholarship while providing arts-based, participatory methodology as possibilities for deepening our understandings of freedom dreaming in out-of-school spaces.

Arts education

Bettina Love (2019) noted that art frees up space for creativity, which is necessary in imagining and creating a more just world. However, arts education is not accessible or equitable in today's public schools. A study conducted by the U.S. Government Accountability Office (2009) found that schools that cut time and resources for arts education are in predominantly Black and Brown communities, and are often designated as "in need of academic improvement" (as referenced in Cratsley, 2017). When schools are marked in this way, funds are often shifted from creative opportunities to test-based accountability reforms, which promotes control and conformity rather than imagination (Yee, 2014). I argue that this is a strategic effort to deny Black students the space to dream and create in schools to stifle protest and social movement.

Not only is art education stratified, but when Black and Brown students do have access to arts education, there are very few policies in place that ensure that arts educational experiences are culturally affirming (Kraehe et al., 2016). To illustrate, Charland's (2010) study showed that Black students discussed remembering artwork they did at home more than artwork they created at school. The art they were most proud of represented their communities and told their life stories, while the art they made at school were given good grades for simply following directions. This contributes to the importance of out-of-school art-making, where students are able to bring their culture and life experiences into their art and were proud of that art.

Art educators have traditionally rewarded technically talented individuals and students that follow directions; however, art education should be regarded as "social and aesthetic studies, intended for all, and as socio-cultural

necessities" (Desai and Chalmers, 2007, p. 9.) For students who often do not see their cultural arts practices being taught or highlighted in either content course curriculum or in arts classes, it is difficult to see and engage in art as an avenue for expression at school. However, as evidenced by Charland's (2010) study, students are already creating art outside of schools that gets policed inside of schools through rigid grading practices.

Scholars have argued for a more expansive arts education that centers futuristic counter-narratives without subscribing to the liberal multiculturalism that exoticizes the African diaspora (David, 2007; Boyd Acuff, 2020). As an example of this work in practice, Dando et al. (2019) studied the ReMixing Wakanda Project, where students engaged in design practices to create medallions as an artifact that detailed their personal histories and then were put together to make a collective artifact. Additionally, in a systematic review of 155 publications, Mims et al. (2022) found that research and practice often confines Black creativity and neglects Black brilliance. Thus, they call for more support for fugitive spaces that center creative expression and education, particularly because many of the spaces where Black children engaged in effective creative educational experiences were outside of traditional schooling spaces (Mims et al., 2022). To carry forth their framing of Black creative educational experiences and to explicitly be more inclusive of the many ways that Black girls express themselves, I use the term arts-based practices, rather than art. While "traditional" art education has long been a rigid practice of conformity, I am inspired and grounded by the work of Black women who explore Black girl literacies that build on the monumental work of our literary and artivist (i.e., artist-activist) foremothers. This study adds to the body of empirical literature that looks at creativity, specifically Black creativity, in an expansive way that does not limit Black brilliance.

Out-of-school spaces

Out-of-school spaces can be fugitive spaces. Jarvis Givens (2021) described Black education as a "fugitive project from its inception – outlawed and defined as a criminal act…the pursuit of literacy in secret places" (p. 3). While fugitive spaces can occur in schooling spaces, Black girls often experience formal educational spaces as sites of oppression, which is evidenced through school policies, curriculum, and pedagogical practices that work to suppress their cultures and languages (Paris and Alim, 2014; Hines-Datiri and Carter Andrews, 2017). Community-based programs can serve as potential sites where liberatory pedagogy can be further developed, enacted, and sustained. These spaces can encourage "Black children to imagine, dream, create, resist, take up space, and be […] [and] to define themselves on their own terms, free from interruption and prescriptive identity markers placed on Black folx" (Dunn

and Love, 2020, p. 191). While the K-12 curriculum is often constrained by standards and high-stakes testing, out-of-school spaces provide flexibility to explore creative endeavors without the bureaucracy and politics of K-12 policies and standards.

To fill the curricular gap that does not amplify Black people's stories, out-of-school programming must connect Black girls "to their unique histories and their Blackness" (Nyachae, 2016, p. 799). While programs may connect Black girls to one another, it is critically important to also examine historical context and build critical consciousness. Programs that promote "empowerment" (Brown, 2013) or push for certain ways for how Black girls should act (Nyachae and Ohito, 2019) can be harmful spaces that reproduce respectability politics and further constrain Black girls' identities (Cooper, 2017). For an example of the importance of moving beyond the empowerment frame, the Saving Our Lives, Hear Our Truths (SOLHOT) program invited Black girls to be part of a revolutionary space where they could determine and envision Black girlhood on their own terms (Brown, 2013). Other studies have also explicitly used Black feminist pedagogy in after-school programming. One study showed that Black girls who participated in the program deepened their critical consciousness and developed a stronger sense of self-esteem that resisted negative stereotypes, as compared to girls who did not participate (Lane, 2017). Liberatory pedagogical models help Black girls see beyond the one-dimensional narratives they learn in school to what could be possible in the future.

To think expansively about the fusion of arts-based and participatory action research, I also looked outside of empirical research to better understand how freedom dreaming showed up in out-of-school settings. Choreographer and dancer Camille A. Brown used Gaunt's (2006)[1] work as a framework to build a program entitled Black Girl Spectrum (BGS). In this program, she used participatory action research with adolescent Black girls. The research informed a production they crafted called *BLACK GIRL: Linguistic Play*, which used dance, double dutch, music, and hand game traditions from West and Sub-Saharan African cultures to highlight scenes that performed Black girlhood and womanhood. The production gave performers a space to come into their "identity from childhood innocence to girlhood awareness to maturity—all the while shaped by their environments, the bonds of sisterhood, and society at large" (Brown, 2015, para. 2). Communal spaces, like the creation of *BLACK GIRL: Linguistic Play,* establish spaces for self-affirmation, growth, and healing (hooks, 1990). These spaces also serve as "homeplaces" or "homespaces," where Black girls

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1   Kyra Gaunt's book *The Games Black Girls Play* (2006) explored Black and biracial adolescent girls' experiences in a Michigan summer writing workshop. Gaunt (2006) argued how the games that Black girls learn when they are young (e.g., hands games and double dutch) are at the heart of historical and current Black music making. Hand games and double dutch are particularly important in understanding the arts-based practices of Black girls from a historical context.

can come together to celebrate themselves and each other (hooks, 1990; Jacobs, 2016). Brown (2015) explored what a homeplace could look like onstage for Black girls to support one another as they process through their development. This participatory research fused with performance theory informed the construction of the Black Girls S.O.A.R program. While Brown's (2013) and Brown's (2015) work provide both the infrastructure and vision for this study, I sought to add to the body of work that centers participatory, arts-based research in the field of education. This article and work rests in a legacy of Black women critical literacies scholars, fugitive Black education scholarship, and arts-based practice literature.

Materials and methods

Black Girls S.O.A.R.

The program, Black Girls S.O.A.R., aimed to co-create a healing-centered (Ginwright, 2014) space to engage artistic explorations of history, storytelling, Afrofuturism, and social justice with eight Black girls. The study took place from July 2020-September 2020 in a fully virtual format on Zoom.[2] In addition to artistic exercises, co-researchers participated in research training, collected and analyzed data, and took themes from the data to create artwork they presented in a community arts showcase to their loved ones.

The first session explored the history of the Black Freedom Struggle as we learned about Black women activists and artists. In the second session, we discussed the meaning of self and community care. With an emphasis on self, we crafted artwork that showed our counter-stories, and explored the counter-storytelling tenet of C CRT. During the third session, we discussed Afrofuturism and what it means to write ourselves into the stories of the present and the future, with inspiration by Octavia Butler, Janelle Monáe, and N. K. Jemisin. During this session, we also learned about qualitative coding and engaged in group coding of the transcripts from our first three sessions. During our fourth session, we wrote our own Ten Point Program based on the Black Panther Party's program to show how we could demand the world we deserve. At the end of the program, the co-researchers put together a Community Arts Showcase for their loved ones to highlight the artwork they crafted that told the story of the data.

Co-researchers and recruitment

The co-researcher team included eight Black adolescents who identify as girls. The co-research team consisted of high

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2   Zoom is a video technology system where people can videochat in groups.

school students ages 14–17. Co-researchers were recruited from a dance studio where I regularly teach and also through snowball sampling. I created a two-page Black Girls S.O.A.R. recruitment sheet with information (e.g., goals of the program, dates, and times), and an outline of the sessions, which the dance studio shared *via* e-blast. Three middle and high school teachers in Washington, D.C. also shared the recruitment sheet with their Black girl students. I introduce the co-researchers in the ways they identified themselves in the pre-interview, as well as the way they described their dreams for the future (**Table 1**). The descriptions are all in their own words to privilege how they are "naming themselves for themselves."

Throughout the program, we determined that we wanted to use the term "co-researcher" to describe how we participated in and contributed to the study. With inspiration from Toliver (2021b), I recognize that "freedom dreaming requires intergenerational imagining." In the spirit of abolitionist values – creativity, determination, rebellious spirit, subversiveness, love, and freedom – I invited the co-researchers to dream alongside me about how schools and society could look and feel if they were centered on love and community (Love, 2019). We researched together, and we also created artwork together. Performance ethnography lends itself to participatory methodology and the larger study from which this data comes from included the co-researchers engaging in research training about data collection and analysis. In the larger study, they collected data (e.g., oral history testimonies from loved ones) and analyzed the oral histories and the transcripts from our conversations to create artwork to share in a showcase for their loved ones.

Positionality

The study was conducted from the perspective of the author, who ran the virtual Black Girls S.O.A.R program. I am a millennial Black and Filipina cisgender woman who has long called the eastern coast of the United States home. I have taught dance and movement classes to Black and Brown girls in both the D.C. Metro Area and rural and suburban New Jersey for over ten years at the time of writing this. As a dancer, a choreographer, and an artist, I frequently engage in art-making practices that allow me to "attend to the inner-child work, desire-checking, and a commitment to creating fugitive spaces for Black girls" (Young, 2021, p. 15). I am an on-going student of abolition. This also shapes my dedication to arts-based work, as I have witnessed how it has guided my self-concept and dreaming practices, as well as that of the young people I work with.

Research design

I used performance ethnography (Denzin, 2003; Soyini Madison, 2006) to contend with the following research question:

TABLE 1   Co-researchers.

Co-researcher name*	How they identified themselves	Dreams for the future
Camille	Young, inspired Black girl who is an educator and role model	When she graduates from high school, she wants to study theater and business. She also wants to move out of the United States with her family to go to Africa – she named Uganda as a possible place she would like to live.
Briana	Black girl	After high school, she wants to own a business.
Jessie	Creative, enthusiastic person	When she graduates she wants to be an animator and work for an animation facility like Pixar, as well as own a business on the side for art projects.
Mackenzie	Black female, student, and innovator	When she graduates from high school, she wants to work in cybersecurity policy at the Department of Defense.
Lisa	Musician and gamer	When she graduates, she wants to be an instrumentalist that works on movie soundtracks and scores.
Olivia	Black girl, dancer, writer, and teenager	When she graduates, she wants to be a neurosurgeon.
Nia	Black woman	When she graduates from high school, she wants to be a lawyer.
Alia	Black girl, an athlete, and musician	When she graduates, she wants to be a fashion designer, professional tennis player, and sell art as a small business.

*All names are pseudonyms that co-researchers selected in their pre-interviews.

How, if at all, do adolescent Black girls use arts-based practices (e.g., visual art, music, hair, and animation) to freedom dream? This approach centered the co-researchers' perspectives, particularly as it was expressed through art in the program. Performance ethnography brings together ethnographic methods, with its foundation in cultural anthropology, and theory from performance studies (Soyini Madison, 2006; Denzin, 2009). Performance as a method of inquiry allowed me to consider how Black girls perform multiple, layered, and nuanced identities, acts of resistance against structural and systemic oppression, and dreams for the future. In essence, constructing and performing acts of resistance and freedom dreams helps us to better understand and make visible these aspects of self, as well becomes a modality for remembering and re-representing who they are. Taken with CRT at its helm, performance can be questioned in this case as performing for whom and for what? In this study, I wondered: How can we seek to move away from performing for the white gaze or the male gaze? This guided the decision to center a Black girl space.

Further, performance ethnography takes the data collected and turns it into a performance accessible to audiences outside of the academy. We collectively coded the transcripts to develop a list of inductive codes after participating in an interactive research training, which the co-researchers then determined how they would individually and collectively turn the themes from the data into artwork. The method utilizes arts-based practices to explore the multiple and varied expressions of Black girlhood. A multiple methods approach is needed to understand and access Black girls' innermost thoughts and feelings (Neal-Jackson, 2018). The "overreliance on oral and written communication" fails to fully capture the ways that individuals comprehend themselves, the world, and the relationship between the two (Kortegast et al., 2019, p. 503). This concept is enacted through the decision to collect and analyze the artwork the co-researchers created throughout the program

and presented at the Community Arts Showcase. Additionally, it was not about creating art for the product, but for process. Art encouraged further dialogue and discussion.

To study how Black girls' use arts-based practices to resist oppression and dream, Black girls are central to examining what they are resisting, how, and what they hope to build instead. For example, during the pre-interviews, one of the questions on the interview protocol was, "If you were leading a program for Black girls, what would you and your girls do?" Their answers informed and shaped the curriculum for the program. To illustrate, Nia said, "We would learn history about ourselves first." When I brought this to the group, they said they wanted to learn about their family's stories by interviewing them. They also named that they wanted to learn about Black women and girl activists and artists. We engaged in a mixer lesson developed by Teaching for Change called Resistance 101, where they read and did research on the lives of Black women and girls such as Judith Jamison, Ella Baker, and Destiny Watford. Each co-researcher shared in their interview that they wanted to create art, so many of the activities we did involved an artistic element and guided the usage of performance ethnography as methodology.

Data collection

Co-researchers and I collected our conversation transcripts from the sessions, which we collectively coded and analyzed to understand themes. Data collection was "two-tiered." The first tier was the data the co-researchers and I collected together, including transcripts from our conversations during the first three sessions. The second tier was my simultaneous collection of pre-interviews, field notes, artifacts (artwork), the transcript from the final session and Community Arts Showcase, and my reflections after each session. The second tier allowed me to gain a sense of co-researchers' thoughts, perspectives, and

feedback on the program. This article focuses on analysis of the pre-interviews, transcript data, and artwork from the session and the showcase.

Throughout data collection, the choice to center art was guided by the theoretical framework's emphasis on art to dream and build. A few components of abolitionist teaching are rebellious spirit and subversiveness, which include tackling and disrupting myths and dominant narratives we learned in school as part of the curriculum. Additionally, during the pre-interviews, the interview protocol included questions such as, "What are your dreams for the future?" to encourage co-researchers to engage in future-casting as part of the curriculum and research process.

Data analysis

Data analysis involved collaborative coding with co-researchers during the program and coding I did on my own. I used inductive and deductive approaches to privilege the co-researchers' direct quotes, while also examining the data in light of the research questions and the framework. Data analysis was conducted in three stages. In the first stage, I prepared the data, specifically the pre-interview transcripts and transcripts from the first three sessions. I transcribed the pre-interviews before the program began, so that I could prepare the activities and topics from the co-researchers interests and feedback. Then, mid-way through the program, I transcribed the first three sessions and de-identified transcripts to share with the co-researchers to conduct the second stage.

In the second stage, the co-researchers and I collectively coded the de-identified transcript data during the third workshop session using *in vivo* coding (Saldaña, 2009) with my guidance and assistance. I included a coding training portion in the third session of the program. This meant inviting co-researchers into the process of seeing their own words on paper in the form of a typed transcript so they could hype each other up, as well as bear witness to their own brilliance on paper as a self-love practice. The initial codes they highlighted included: *history, resistance, narratives, school*, and *care*. Some of these codes, such as *narratives*, were collapsed for a more specific code from other codes including *stories* and *communication*. From the codes, co-researchers discussed the emerging themes and defined these codes from reading the transcript data.

The permanence of seeing their thoughts on paper as "commensurate with other 'data' they will learn in school" gave way to futurity (Morris, 2019, p. 127). They saw both their past selves through their ideas on paper, as well as their future selves because of its permanence. Further, putting Black joy and love at the center of practice meant engaging in member checking to ensure I was representing the co-researchers' thoughts and perspectives during two critical moments: (1) during week three

and four of the program, where participants coded and analyzed transcript data from the program discussions and (2) when the first draft of the findings section was written.

In the third stage, I deductively coded in light of the theoretical framework (e.g., creativity, rebellious spirit, racism) and research question (e.g., freedom dream). To code the artwork created throughout the program, I used Turner and Griffin's (2020) adaptation of Serafini's (2014) framework to create coding sheets for the visual artwork.[3] First, I used the coding sheet to write down who/what was represented (perceptual dimension); the relationships between the visual elements (structural dimension); ways the images represented aspects of freedom and resistance (ideological dimension); and how the co-researcher discussed the meaning of their artwork (Turner and Griffin, 2020; Table 2). I recognized that "the meaning ascribed to images are socially constructed" (Kelly and Kortegast, 2017, p. 7). Since my goal was to ensure that I accurately reflected the co-researchers' meaning behind the artwork, I encouraged them to describe what the image meant to them in their own words.

Findings

Analyses of the data revealed that co-researchers used arts-based practices to freedom dream in three ways: to reclaim stories, to pose Afrofuturistic visions, and use art as activism to create action steps toward those visions.

Reclaim stories

Throughout the program, the co-researchers used art to rewrite history and recreate historical narratives they learned in school. In their pre-interviews, many of the co-researchers discussed wanting to learn about "their" history, meaning Black history. During the first session of the program, I asked the co-researchers what they learned about Black history in school, at home, or in their community. They expressed that the only topics they covered in regards to Black history at school were enslavement, Rosa Parks and the Montgomery Bus Boycotts, and Martin Luther King, Jr. In essence, the girls reported learned very little about Black history, only focused on a few figures, and learned about Black trauma by mostly seeing their ancestors depicted as enslaved in textbooks without learning about how enslaved people resisted. By only highlighting false narratives of Black subservience, the standard

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3 Serafini (2014) created a framework for interpreting visual images and multimodal ensembles. Turner and Griffin (2020) added intersectionality and participant interpretation to their analysis in a study that explored Black girls' career dreams through multimodal compositions.

TABLE 2 Example of critical visual analysis coding sheet – Mackenzie's textbook drawing.

Image	
Perceptual dimension	The image shows a brown-skinned person who has dark hair on the right side and light hair on the left side.
Structural dimension	The person is in the middle of the drawing and the focal point of the drawing. On the left side there is a tear falling from the person's cheek and a muzzle on their mouth. The person has a black line going down their face, physically splitting it in two.
Ideological dimension	The left side of the person's face that has the muzzle represents how Black people are represented in textbooks, particularly their voices, perspectives, and experiences are stifled. The right side looks like it represents power, fullness, and humanity.
Participant interpretation	I wanted to highlight the Afro like when we talked about the Black Panthers and how female Black Panthers wore their hair naturally. That's what I was trying to highlight there. Then, I also drew tears on the narrative that we're told because I feel like that's usually how we see Black people in our textbooks and things like that. They're always sad and crying, but in reality, we are powerful, even though we've gone through some rough things.

curriculum communicated to them and their classmates that Black peoples' history began at enslavement and ended with the Civil Rights Movement. Lisa, a 17-year-old musician and gamer, shared,

> I also think that they [teachers and textbooks] should explain that Black history isn't full of suffering and that they should explain a lot more of the successes that are in our history and that make us who we are because there is and not everything is suffering for us. There are a lot of artists and things that we don't learn about (Session 1).

Lisa points out how the narrative of suffering, especially when that narrative fails to share stories about Black success and joy, affects how society views Black people. Lisa followed up by mentioning that the way textbooks told the stories of Black history made it seem like this history was not still being made,

> I also want to say I was thinking about something that I saw on a post and someone was like, "You guys can't keep blaming what happened to your ancestors on us." The comment under it was, "It wasn't our ancestors. You mean our grandparents and our great-grandparents?" In the way it's written in textbooks it seems like this happened so long ago, but it wasn't. It was not that long ago (Session 1).

The idea that we live in a post-racial society absolves individuals of dismantling the very systems that continue to privilege and oppress. It perpetuates a false narrative that keeps people apathetic and subverts social movements.

The co-researcher's artwork also emphasized how narrowly presented Black history is in schools. Mackenzie, a 15-year-old innovator, presented a drawing that illustrated a Black

woman with an Afro with a tear streaming down her face (Figure 1). Mackenzie shared her artwork at the Community Arts Showcase,

> I wanted to highlight the Afro like when we talked about the Black Panthers and how female Black Panthers wore their hair naturally. That's what I was trying to highlight there. Then, I also drew tears on the narrative that we're told because I feel like that's usually how we see Black people in our textbooks and things like that. They're always sad and crying, but in reality, we are powerful, even though we've gone through some rough Things (Session 5).

One half of the face had lightened hair to contrast with what Mackenzie drew as an Afro that symbolized the Black Panthers' resistance. The Afro was a symbol of strength and resistance to Mackenzie. The other side of the face has a muzzle

FIGURE 1
Mackenzie's textbook drawing.

FIGURE 2
Jessie's Afrofuturistic world drawing.
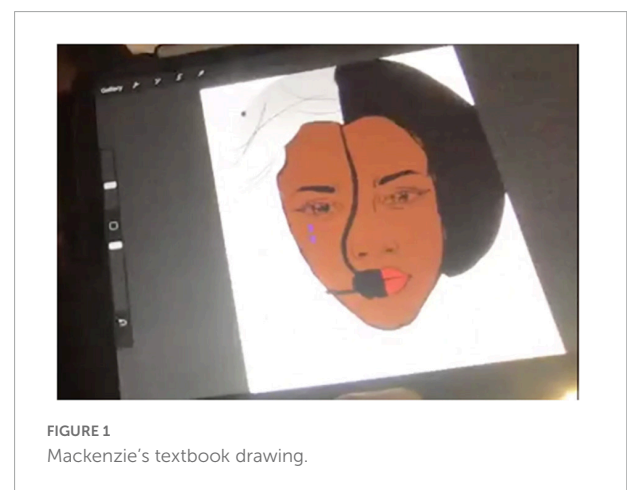
over the mouth. In Mackenzie's explanation, she noted that this is the side that is typically depicted in textbooks, which communicates that Black people are not only shown as in pain, but lacking voice because they are absent or only shown in confined, minimal ways.

Not only did the co-researchers rewrite the history they see in textbooks, but they reclaimed their own stories. Nia, a 14-year-old future lawyer, shared a powerful counter-narrative during the Community Arts Showcase. She drew a heart with her name and wrote words that described her positive attributes. She stated she drew "bad things that people say" about her on the outside of the heart, which were "crossed out and faded." The words that were closest to the heart with her name, such as "best friend" and "determined," were "believable because they're the good ones" (Session 2). By having the positive qualities, the qualities that she saw in herself, close to her, she represented what it would look like to hold these aspects of her identity close, while physically separating herself from the negative feedback. The co-researchers used art as counter-narrative and to perform a future that can and must exist. To emphasize, Jessie, a 14-year-old self-described creative animator, shared,

> I would say specifically when I make art, I use it to define a story and get words out and go against what other people maybe think, or their perception of other people, how they perceive people and how they think they are. I go against that (Session 4).

Jessie highlighted the importance of art to reclaim stories. She goes against that by telling her own story.

Dream new worlds

When asked in the pre-interviews their dreams for the future, many of them regarded the future as their plans for when they graduate. They shared aspirations such as becoming a neurosurgeon, lawyer, entrepreneur, and animator. Co-researchers also expressed their desires to move out of the country, continue on with their art, and hold multiple roles (e.g., photographer and cybersecurity analyst). They put no limit on their individual life dreams. However, they began to think of their hopes more expansively as the program went on, particularly how their own visions related to dreams they had for the future of society.

During the third session, the co-research team and I discussed Afrofuturism and what our dreams were for a better world. After defining the term Afrofuturism, we watched a clip of *Black Panther* that detailed the Wakanda origin story. After viewing the clip Mackenzie, 15-year-old innovator, named the contradictions she observed. "It frustrates me that in the movie they pin African people against Black people. If we're thinking about new worlds, I wouldn't want that to be the case" (Session 3). Mackenzie was already naming her freedom dreams before we introduced the dreaming activity.

We drew our own Afrofuturistic worlds with these prompts guiding us: If you could design a new world, what would it be like? Where would it be? What resources would it have? Who would be in leadership, if anyone at all? The answers to these questions inspired the co-researchers' dreams of a world where equity, justice, love, and joy were at the forefront. Many of the Afrofuturistic worlds the co-researchers imagined addressed some of the current problems they see in society. For instance, Olivia, a 17-year-old self-described dancer and writer with aspirations to be a neurosurgeon, discussed her world,

> My Afrofuturistic world would be an all-inclusive society. There is no hatred towards one another. There is love. We welcome all people. That was the main value, that everybody is just kind to one another. We had to talk about the things that we would have there. I wanted community facilities. There was a place where people who weren't from here could come for sanctuary or for permanent citizenship (Session 3).

Olivia imagined her world as welcoming and inclusive, but it also provides community care supports. Her world would not only welcome those who are part of the community, but also others who are in need of community. She recognized the power in supporting one another. In Olivia's case, she was offering subtle commentary about how the United States weaponizes policy to keep Black and Brown people out of the country. She made clear that she opposed keeping people out.

As another example of an inclusive world, Camille, a 15-year-old young, a self-described inspired Black girl shared that

"Everybody takes care of each other. We don't have a president or higher power. We're all equal in this [world]" (Session 3). The co-researchers dreamed of a world that was not governed by one person, but rather all people working collectively. She was making a statement about her observations of different forms of government. In her drawing, the community is surrounded by nature represented by "string lights," which hang from the trees and gave an ethereal feel to the scene. It was illuminating the future of a society that is *truly* equal. Camille noted, "my world is not here" (Session 3). By "here" Camille was referring to the United States. By saying that her world was not here, it reinforced how she viewed the United States as a place that is not equal.

In a previous session, Camille also shared that she wished that she and her loved ones could move to a different country where there were "more people that looked like" them (Session 2). She also mentioned wanting to move to another country in her pre-interview – a resounding theme. In her drawing, she used darker colors to illustrate the beautiful skin tones of the community members. This underscored, in many ways, how the co-researchers felt that they were being failed by United States society in its lack of providing the structural support needed for them to feel affirmed and valued in this country.

Even in their frustration, the co-researchers offered moving visions for what could be possible. Some of their worlds even bridged the past with ideas they had for the future. For example, Jessie, a 14-year-old creative animator, shared an idea of how she envisioned aligning technology and nature ([Figure 2](#)),

> One of the main things that I would want was the house in my drawing to be powered by the waterfall in the background so that it would be connected to nature but still be technology-based [powered by the waterfall]. I drew a house that looked similar to the ones I'146;ve seen in pictures my family has shared from Ghana (Session 3).

Jessie's weaving of nature and technology exemplifies the possibilities of the future when situated in the visionary inventiveness of Black girls. As Jessie illustrated, the house resembled a hut on stilts that raised it above the water. Rather than choose a house that looked like one in her community, she chose to recreate one from what she had seen in a picture from Ghana. The waterfall behind the house offered an energy source to power the home, which reflected Jessie's commitment to efficient, clean energy and climate justice. It is also an example of how many of the co-researchers, including Jessie and Camille, chose to depict nature in their drawings, rather than cities or suburbs.

They valued their relationship with nature by having it be a highlight of their artwork.

Art as activism

The week after our session on Afrofuturism, we focused our conversations on activism, specifically art as activism. We discussed activism in light of the worlds we crafted to collectively brainstorm how we could use our actions to actually build these dream worlds in our everyday work. We recognized that in order to see the changes we wanted, activism was necessary to bring about those changes. The co-researchers talked about what activism means to them,

> **Alia:** I'm thinking you have to be bold and be able to speak up all the time and care for others, but also care for yourself as well.
> **Briana:** I just think that that means that you're very passionate in who you are and inspire others to feel great about who they are too.
> **Jessie:** Personally, I feel like activism can come in a lot of different ways, not just we, when we think of an activist, we do think of someone who's out there doing things. I feel that's a really good example, but when you talk about how do you personally see yourself as an activist, I feel like you can be a small-scale activist and just be an activist within your friend group or within your community. Just boiling down to it, it's just speaking out for what you believe in. I feel like that's just what it is.
> **Camille:** There are going to be so many people in this world that silence you and tell you that your voice doesn't matter, but it does. Activism is also resistance, and it's taking a lead and showing an example to people who are younger than you, older than you, just really being, I guess, like a teacher and spreading the word about what you know is right or what you believe in. That's what activism is to me.
> **Mackenzie:** I think being a Black girl activist means talking about the injustice that you have seen. Not being complicit in all the racism going around, but just actually talking about your experiences, because, I guess, it's easy to see a statistic. That doesn't really have a ton of meaning. It's just a number. But when you tell your story, then that's someone's Life.

Alia, Jessie, Camille, and Mackenzie all mentioned concepts of "speaking up," telling your story, and how activism can happen at many levels (e.g., with yourself, your friends/community, and the world). Together, we talked about how, as activists, we stand up for what we believe, but how we also have the power to use our art, our strengths, our gifts, and our talents to influence, create, and fight for the world we dream of. To dig deeper into activism and organizing, we used the Zinn Education Project's lesson, "*What We Want, What We Believe*": *Teaching with the Black Panthers' Ten Point Program.* We reviewed the Black Panther Party's Ten Point Program to

relate what the Black Panthers were demanding in the 1960's to what we are still demanding today.

After reading the Ten Point Program, we discussed the similarities and differences between the Black Panthers' demands and current injustices. Specifically, we noted how the end to police brutality is something we are still fighting for. We also offered other thoughts and insights about the language the Black Panthers used to detail their 10 points. For example, Mackenzie, 15-year-old innovator, raised a critical point,

I can't remember if anyone [one of the other co-researchers] said this. Of the first six ones, something that was a common theme [in the Ten Point Program], was *decent* housing and *decent* education. I don't know. I just think it's interesting that what they were pushing for was just decent and not equal because I feel like decent has the connotation of the bare minimum. I guess that is your right, is to have the basic whatever, or basic anything. I think that they should have been pushing for something other than just decent (Session 4).

Mackenzie's point encouraged the team to think about what we would demand in our Ten Point Program. We reflected on what the Black Panthers may have grappled over while discussing the Ten Point Program and how they may have struggled over what words they wanted to use.

Specifically, the co-researchers wanted to make sure they accurately and vividly reflected their dreams for what the world could be by being intentional with their language. Mackenzie pushed us to think about how to demand justice and go beyond just decent. Using the Ten Point Program, the co-researchers developed their own demands.

Black Girls S.O.A.R. Ten Point Party Program

We want. . .

1. A fixed justice system
2. Equality in race, gender, and religion
3. We want to have free rights to believe what we choose, to follow who we want to follow and speak our minds
4. Officers involved in shootings of Black people held accountable and charged
5. We want to ban conversion therapy, the KKK, and other organizations/groups that cause harm
6. We want an immediate end to workplace and school discrimination for the hair choices of Black people
7. We want to end private prisons/for profit prisons
8. We want an end to the over-policing in Black neighborhoods
9. We want to replace police in Black schools with counselors
10. We want to incorporate the teaching of Black history as a required course in the school system (2020).

Much of what we outlined in our Ten Point Program highlighted how oppressive systems continue to police and punish Black people, including police in schools and neighborhoods, hate groups like the KKK, and also the carceral state of prisons. We were also concerned with ensuring equity, equality, and justice for all people, including LGBTQ+ communities and other oppressed groups. Along with the demands for society, we also detailed our demands for schools, including teaching Black history, hiring more counselors, and ending hair discrimination. Through our demands, the co-researchers offered a roadmap for not only creating a world where Black girls feel safe and affirmed, but where all people, specifically oppressed communities, could experience freedom and liberation. Black girls' freedom dreams are inclusive.

Discussion

I approached the analysis of the findings by weaving together connections to illuminate major themes and considerations in the data. I specifically focused on emphasizing the linkage between language and art – how both communicate the "inner lives" (Simmons, 2015; Berry and Gross, 2020) of Black girls to help us understand their experiences beyond the surface of the raw data.

For co-researchers in the Black Girls S.O.A.R. virtual summer art program, our time together illustrated the Ghanaian principle of Sankofa ("it is not taboo to fetch what is at risk of being left behind"). Sankofa teaches us that we must (re)member our roots, or our past, in order to move forward and reimagine a future rooted in Black epistemologies (Dillard, 2012). The symbol of Sankofa is represented by a mythical bird with its body faced forward and its head turned backwards to retrieve an egg from its back. This embodies the idea that we must honor the teachings of the past and those who have paved the way in order to carry us forward. The co-researchers were on a quest for knowledge – knowledge of self, knowledge of community, and knowledge of ancestry. In this quest, they came to uncover stories about Black history and in the process, they realized stories about themselves.

While some stories emphasized Black struggle, all of the stories offered a duality of pain and power. Nia's drawing showed how the negative feedback never touched her, while Mackenzie's portrait juxtaposed pain (i.e., the tear) with power (i.e., the Afro). Even Olivia's poem, which opens this article, has a physical split to emphasize the two distinct stories that are told and can be told about Blackness. This is aligned with Nunn's (2018) "strength and sadness" conceptualization which was applied to younger Black girls and for older Black girls, this showed that their version was pain and power. Through this naming, the co-researchers showed their full humanity on paper, which is an essential part of freedom dreaming in a society that

seeks to rob Black people's humanity (Desai, 2017). It carried on the work of Black women literary titans to assert Black girls' presence by placing their personhood on paper, so it could not be erased.

Art was how they made sense of, solidified, and presented their identities and stories. Art laminated their freedom dreams. In other words, Black girls seeing their identity and dreams on paper or another medium through writing or art makes it so that they can see and speak back to it (Muhammad, 2012; Muhammad and McArthur, 2015). For example, many of the co-researchers voiced their career dreams for the future when asked (Turner and Griffin, 2020), but also provided more broad ideas for their dreams for the world, such as being governed by the people or letting all people be a part of the community. In a society that strives to push them out of spaces, like schools, their art is a visible reminder of their presence in the present and the future. They used art to tell the stories of their experiences and speak back to negative narratives, which supports previous studies that have found that Black girls use critical media literacy to create counter-narratives and analyze the messages they receive (McArthur, 2015; Muhammad and McArthur, 2015; Jacobs, 2016). The co-researchers looked back, in a sense, at stereotypes, in order to look forward. Additionally, they engaged in a practice of (re)writing. The prefix re- means to do again. As Dillard (2012) discussed the concept of (re)membering, the co-researchers already knew their stories, but schooling served to make them forget who they are. This study highlights the importance of creative expression for Black girls in fugitive spaces to affirm their multi-layered identities and see those identities in the future. Black girls need to see that their identities and stories are, literally and figuratively, works of art.

Abolitionist teaching, in this program, looked like bridging the past with the future through counter-narratives. They drew themselves into history, specifically they told historical stories that emphasized Black people's creative resistance. Richard Delgado (1989) reminded us that "oppressed groups have known instinctively that stories are an essential tool to their own survival and liberation" (p. 2436). They critiqued dominant narratives they learned, while mentioning how telling their stories is a form of activism. Art was their tool for sustaining their cultures and making sure asset-based stories about Black people survived in the future. This supports scholars' work that showed how storytelling is "one of the most powerful" practices Black girls' employ to "convey their special knowledge" (Richardson, 2003, p. 82).

In Jessie's Afrofuturistic drawing, she bridged the past with both the present and the future by interweaving technology powered by a waterfall. In many of their freedom dreams, co-researchers created items that were familiar to them, but also served a futuristic purpose to make society more just. In adrienne maree brown's words, "We are imagining a world free of injustice, a world that doesn't yet exist" (as cited in Love, 2019, p. 100). The results from this study support previous research that showed that a Black feminist curriculum builds

critical consciousness (Lane, 2017). Abolitionist teaching also surfaced as how the co-researchers not only expressed what should be changed, but also what should be built in its place. It is through this creativity that activist and organizing demands are birthed and realized. The work the co-researchers did around Afrofuturism allowed us to reflect on what a world could look like if it were equitable and just. Through artwork, they are performing the future. Coupled with writing demands based on the Black Panther Party's Ten Point Party Program, they began to draw and fight for worlds that are possible.

Specifically, they named how speaking up and sharing their stories are integral parts of how they will work to create new worlds. Similar to Toliver's (2021b) finding that Black girls engaged in agitation literacies, literacies that agitate racism and oppression (Muhammad, 2019), the Black Girls S.O.A.R co-researchers named the importance of coalition-building to resist injustice, and even further, they centered intersectionality in their framing. They described their Afrofuturistic worlds as "all-inclusive" and that they welcome *all* people. In their 10-Point Demands, they modeled what that could look like by stating their desire to ban groups and ideologies that cause harm and oppression. This study adds to the growing body of literature that explores what abolitionist teaching looks like in practice by creating space to examine radical wonderings of the past and find themselves and freer futures through dreaming.

Implications

The literature that uses performance ethnography with Black girls in K-12 education continues to grow. Brown's (2013) work offered a framework for using performance ethnography in research and programming with Black girls, and this study examines performance ethnography with Black girls in education research, which has implications for pedagogy and curriculum. While education literature on Black girls' experiences incorporates art, specifically through the lens of literacy, there are more studies needed that use arts-based approaches as methodology. For example, many Black girl literacy studies incorporate artwork as literacy (Muhammad, 2012; Jacobs, 2016; Turner and Griffin, 2020), and this study adds to that body of work by using arts-based methodology to study art-making.

The co-researchers acknowledged the "curricular violence" (Jones, 2020) that occurs at school. Through their art, they depicted sadness, tears, and hurt, which is how they made meaning of the images they saw in school and in their textbooks. This is consistent with previous research that has shown that Black history curriculum is often only about enslavement (Mims and Williams, 2020), or a few figures, like Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Rosa Parks, whose stories are depoliticized (Wineburg and Monte-Sano, 2008). In the co-researchers' Ten Point Program (modeled after the Black Panther Party), they explicitly named their demand for curriculum, "We want to

incorporate the teaching of Black history as a required course in the school system." During a time where 42 states (and counting) have introduced or passed legislation that bans critical conversations about racism and oppression in schools, it is even more imperative that educators, administrators, and co-conspirators organize to ensure that Black history is taught in its entirety, including Black joy, Black creativity, and Black resistance.

Abolitionist teaching as a praxis centers Black joy and also provides space for students to disrupt the educational process and name what is not working for them. This study contributes to the growing body of literature that seeks to move abolitionist teaching from a theoretical concept to an empirical and practice-focused one. While abolitionist teaching has been applied to studies on civics education (Dozono, 2022), language arts and literacy in an urban school district (Hoffman and Martin, 2020), STEM (Jones, 2021; Louis and King, 2022), and teacher education (Faison and McArthur, 2020; Riley and Solic, 2021; Sabati et al., 2022), this study focused on Black girls and abolitionist teaching in an out-of-school setting. Because the out-of-school space is one not burdened by the bureaucracy of K-12 educational standards, it can serve as a site of the creative pedagogical experimentation that Rodríguez, 2010 named. In practice, abolitionist teaching could be seen as an embodiment of Sankofa. The literature underscores the need to examine Black girls' arts-based practicesthrough a historical lens (Muhammad, 2012), through critical consciousness-building (Jacobs, 2016), and through dreaming imagined futures (Turner and Griffin, 2020; Toliver, 2021c). This study bridged these three areas together (i.e., past, present, and future) as abolitionist teaching in practice to create a curriculum aimed at Black girls negotiating and building their multi-layered identities while simultaneously crafting Black futures. Abolition and Afrofuturism, taken together, make us contend with the past to dream forward the future to then build coalition and incite action in the present.

Art and storytelling should be used in the classroom to invent new futures and take action toward ensuring those futures, as they are critical elements of abolitionist teaching. As Mims et al. (2022) warned, when using art, we cannot constrict Black art-making practices in rigid ways. Rather, we must invite them to engage in art-making practices that they gravitate toward. For example, Olivia chose poetry, while Camille and Mackenzie chose to draw with paper and coloring utensils and Jessie drew on her iPad. For Black girls, whose histories are often taught in schools through deficit-based narratives (Mims and Williams, 2020), the need to create and reauthor their personal and communal stories is an act of future-casting. To this end, Hill (2019) argued, "Those of us invested in Black girls' livelihood must ask what they are experiencing and create space for them to tell us what they know about their lives, as well as what they need from us as educators, elders, activists and advocates" (p. 281).

Conclusion

We must support space for Black girls to explore and determine the fullness of their freedom dreams – from examining history, to refuting stereotypes, to creating their identities, to thinking about future aspirations, to dreaming a new world into existence, to developing demands to enact those futures. We also must not solely listen, but act in service of those demands. As Olivia wrote in the poem that opens this article, "I rewrote their story and you can, too." She is asking educators to tell more fuller, nuanced stories of Black communities, as well as let Black girls write their own stories. She is asking for education to stop erasing, whitewashing, and misconstruing narratives to maintain hierarchies of oppression. This study provides an example of how curriculum can weave together history, present, and the future to ensure a full(er) examination of Black girls' freedom dreams.

Data availability statement

The raw data supporting the conclusions of this article will be made available by the authors, without undue reservation.

Ethics statement

The studies involving human participants were reviewed and approved by the University of Maryland, College Park. Written informed consent to participate in this study was provided by the participants' legal guardian/next of kin.

Author contributions

The author confirms being the sole contributor of this work and has approved it for publication.

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Frontiers in Education

Like our foremothers survived: Self-education, direct confrontation, and humor as resistance coping in Black womxn and femme college student being

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In our continued study of Blackness and being, we must emphasize the quotidian—or everyday—strategies that young Black womxn and femmes employ to cope with anti-Black gendered racism and its psychological impact at historically and predominantly white institutions. As such, the purpose of this article is to give prominence to the resistance types of coping strategies that Black womxn and femme college students used to maintain their dignity at a predominantly white university of the American West, where the psychological aftermath of anti-Black gendered racism remains hidden under dense layers of neoliberalism, affluence, faux progressivism, and whiteness.I approach this topic from the conceptual perspective of Blackness and being at the nexus of gender by combining discourses on the ontologies of Blackness, and Black feminist thought and epistemology. In the study that informs this article, I utilized qualitative mixed methods—one-on-one interviews, focus group interviews, and participant observation.Like our foremothers whose survival was predicated on the subtle and purposeful coping strategies they engaged, Black womxn and femme college students' resistance coping styles were demonstrated in the everyday presence of anti-Black gendered racism. Findings reveal that Black womxn and femme undergraduate students demonstrated three main types of resistance coping when experiencing anti-Black gendered racism: (1) self-education; (2) direct confrontation with aggressors (e.g., racists, sexists, homophobes, elitists); and (3) humor. I conclude with recommendations on transformative justice, monetary trusts, longitudinal data collection, and critical curriculum at historically and predominantly white educational institutions.

KEYWORDS

higher education, resistance coping, anti-Black gendered racism, Black feminist thought and epistemology, Blackness and being

Introduction

Extent literature reveals that Black womxn and femmes in higher education experience gendered racism and actively resist is by practicing various herstorical, intersectional, and culturally-relevant means (Lewis et al., 2013; Szymanski and Lewis, 2016; Leath and Chavous, 2017, 2018). Scholarship shows that many Black womxn and femmes demonstrate active resistance through talking back (hooks, 1989), collective organizing (Davis, 1972; Taylor, 1998; Springer, 2005), and anger (hooks, 1996; Perlow, 2018; Lorde, 2020; Pearl, 2020). Black womxn's and femmes' acts of resistance in higher education is intergenerational knowledge and praxis exchanged through othermothering (Mogadime, 2000; Griffin, 2013; Collins, 2022), mentorship and sister circles (Green and King, 2001; Szymanski and Lewis, 2016; Kelly and Fries-Britt, 2022; Parrott, 2022; Samuels and Wilkerson, 2022), radical care (Luney, 2021b; Chambers and Sulé, 2022; Harushimana, 2022), and sharing knowledge to survive (Combahee River Collective, 1977; Hull et al., 1982). Literature on Black womxn's and femmes' active resistance in higher education demonstrates that Black women and femmes pass down and exchange knowledge to one another through their communal (Collins, 2009; Szymanski and Lewis, 2016; Jones and Sam, 2018), pedagogical (hooks, 2014; Gines et al., 2018), and epistemological (Collins, 2004, 2009; Dotson, 2015; Nadar, 2019; Porter et al., 2022) efforts.

Our academic foremothers, sisters and siblings, aunties, and cousins weave their lessons together, which loom over us and through us in the dusty, thin-aired, and arid universities of the American West. For their narratives guide us in our journeys of surviving anti-Black gendered racism at historically and predominantly white universities. Our collective and lived experiences of coping to survive in higher education are pertinent to establishing discourse around gendered Blackness and being, or our mere existence. Once we understand Black womxn's and femmes' existence within predominantly and historically white higher education institutions that benefit from colonization (e.g., land-grant colleges and universities), we paint a more comprehensive picture of Black youth claiming their humanity and dignity within educational settings.

In our continued study of Blackness and being, we must emphasize the quotidian strategies that young Black womxn and femmes employ to cope with anti-Black gendered racism and consequent psychological traumas at predominantly white institutions. These traumas include exhaustion; self-doubt and an altered self-image; anger; embarrassment; anxiety and melancholia; alienation; and distrust in the university or peers (West et al., 2010; Szymanski and Lewis, 2016; Shahid et al., 2018; House, 2020; Luney, 2021b). As such, the purpose of this article is to give prominence to the resistance coping (Lewis et al., 2013; Szymanski and Lewis, 2016; Corbin et al., 2018; Shahid et al., 2018; House, 2020) that Black womxn

and femme college students use to maintain their dignity at University of Colorado Boulder (CU Boulder), a predominantly white university of the American West. There, the aftermath of gendered anti-Blackness remains hidden under dense layers of neoliberalism, affluence, faux progressivism, and whiteness (Luney, 2021a,b). Like our foremothers, whose survival was predicated on the bold and purposeful coping strategies they engaged, Black womxn and femme college students' resistance coping styles are demonstrated in the everyday presence of anti-Black gendered racism.

Throughout this article, I address the resistance coping strategies that Black womxn and femme college students practice. I approach this topic from a conceptual perspective consisting of Blackness and being, and Black feminist thought and epistemology in hopes to emphasize students' everyday agency and survival at a historically and predominantly white university. I utilized qualitative mixed methods in the study that informs this article. Findings from the study reveal that Black womxn and femme college students who participated in the study demonstrated three main types of resistance coping when dealing with anti-Black gendered racism:

1. self-education;
2. direct confrontation with aggressors (e.g., racists, sexists, homophobes, elitists); and
3. humor.

To conclude, I call researchers and higher education personnel to address the everyday life of Black womxn and femme being in higher education. We must esteem what means for college-age Black womxn and femmes to be, particularly within political and socio-herstorical contexts at the local level. I present transformative justice, monetary trusts, longitudinal data collection, and critical curriculum as recommendations to mitigate the impact of anti-Black gendered racism on Black womxn and femme undergraduates and the diligence that coping with it entails.

Conceptual framework and scholarly framing

On Blackness and being: Anti-Black settler colonialism, enslavement, and a colorblind society

I define being as the ontological life of Blackness to make meaning of our existence rooted in histories and herstories of colonization and enslavement. Being captures the intricacies of what it means to be, to exist, to survive, and to continue living in white supremacist and capitalist systems that require the exploitation and death of Black bodies, cultures, and

vitality. This article partially details being for Black womxn and femme undergraduate students at the University of Colorado Boulder (henceforth referred to as CU Boulder)—the study site—situated within the context of anti-Black settler colonialism. Anti-Black settler colonialism categorized "Others," or the subaltern, to incite racial hierarchies in which white Euro-Americans monetarily benefit from Black subjugation, fungibility, and liminality through enslavement, driving settler-colonial ventures. Connections between humanism—or the making of "Man" and "human"—and control over land and property persist as main components of anti-Black settler colonialism. As geopolitical, ideological, theoretical, cultural, spiritual, and existential explorations led to definitions of "Man" based on the precipice of "incommensurable ontological (anti)Blackness" (Bilge, 2020, p. 2302; Sexton, 2011), race and capital undergirded categorizations of white Euro-Americans as human, colonized Indigenous peoples as sub-human, and colonized and enslaved Africans and Black Americans as non-human to justify the anguishes of colonization (Wynter, 1989; Mills, 1997; Wilderson, 2010, 2020; King, 2019).

Exploring Colorado's regional and state sociopolitical history of anti-Blackness from a decolonial perspective reveals a colorblind racist society (Bonilla-Silva, 2006, 2015; Bonilla-Silva and Dietrich, 2011) as well. At Colorado's founding, white tolerance of African Americans was not based on the recognition of Black people's humanity and dignity, nor was it an accurate understanding of power, oppression, and white privilege. Instead, white tolerance was based on the dehumanization of other non-white Westerners like Indigenous people, Mexicans, and Chinese immigrants (Wayne, 1976; Junne et al., 2011). This type of tolerance of Black folks persists in higher education institutions in the West, such as CU Boulder, due to the fungibility of the Black body and Blackness for the sake of labor, monetary and social gain, and as a tool to occupy Indigenous spaces and maintain racial-ethnic hierarchy based on cultural familiarity (e.g., English as a primary language). Tolerating Blackness is unequivocally and largely due to university administrators' lack of critical approaches to white supremacy and racism in the academy.

Within the context of anti-Black settler colonialism and a colorblind society, CU Boulder instituted non-discriminatory policies since its inception and never explicitly implemented procedures that discriminated against students on the basis of race, gender, class, ability, or other groups, classes, or categories in the written record or university policy (Hays, 2010). In fact, CU Boulder's campus community admitted non-white students without prejudice. On the contrary, CU Boulder's campus and the Boulder City community instilled colorblind racism and anti-Blackness in the form of *de facto* segregation and white supremacy. CU Boulder's colorblind racism and anti-Blackness by way of segregation prevailed adjacent to non-discriminatory policy at the university (Hays, 2010). CU Boulder has always been "bound by law and regulation to allow minority attendance

and to educate without prejudice," and held responsible by loco parentis (Hays, 2010, p. 145). Yet, neither students, faculty, nor administration confronted inequity, racial separation, or white supremacy. According to Hays (2010, 145), "passive egalitarianism appears to have coexisted with campus and local customs of segregation."

Just as white supremacy and segregation persisted through "passive egalitarianism" within CU Boulder, the university subjected Black students to anti-Black racism concurrent with Colorado law mandating that higher education institutions educate persons based on merit as opposed to racial and gender identity. The landmark United States Supreme Court decision in *Plessy v. Ferguson* reigned as the guiding law for race relations, and social and political codes, instituting "separate but equal" mores throughout the state. Subsequently, the university's apathetic approaches toward protecting student welfare sustained separate but equal sentiments, guiding anti-Black race relations at the institution. Black people faced an insurmountable level of anti-Black racism from the 1800s throughout the 1900s (McLean, 2002, 2018; Hays, 2010). Additionally, Boulder City began outsourcing blue-collar mining and industrial jobs, which led to a decrease in the county's Black population and brought in white Southerners to boost the tourism and white-collar economies around 1910. Resultingly, Black folks faced harsher anti-Blackness, such as segregated housing where Black people could only live north of campus; segregated restaurants, theaters, and other businesses and services on The Hill and throughout the city; and racist stereotypes depicted in cartoons, editorials, and other media publications (Hays, 2010).

At the University of Colorado's flagship institution, administrators and faculty denied Black students from admittance and enrolling in courses, and rejected Black students from campus services and assistance. Members of white Greek-letter organizations explicitly refused Black students from participating in their organizations, and CU Boulder's student life inhibited Black students from participating in extracurricular and social events. Because of the university's and city's segregationist mores, Black students had to travel to Denver—approximately 30 miles away from campus—to be serviced by barbers and hair stylists, obtain their teaching hours for practicum, and receive medical and mental health attention. Segregationist efforts by the university and the city particularly affected Black womxn's work life in the mid-1900s because they could not find kitchen or custodial work at businesses on The Hill or in boarding houses as their male counterparts did (McLean, 2002; Armitage, 2008). Furthermore, Black students who attended CU Boulder were subject to segregated housing practices in that they were banned from campus housing, leaving them responsible for paying higher prices for room and board in houses with inadequate living conditions located north of campus (McLean, 2002, 2018; Hays, 2010). As part of a long linage of anti-Blackness, white

supremacy continues to persist against Black students, and Black womxn and femme students specifically, at CU Boulder.

Anti-Black settler colonialism dictates Black college womxn's and femmes' experiences of coping in spaces that have been colonized through the logics of whiteness to maintain white supremacy and racialization. It informs how I analyzed the study site, emphasizing that Black femme bodies are contemporarily and herstorically positioned in the humanistic settler-colonial project in Colorado. Furthermore, anti-Black settler colonialism highlights the afterlife of enslavement (Spillers, 1987; Wynter, 1989, 2003; Hartman, 1997, 2007; Sharpe, 2016; King, 2019; Wilderson, 2020) that African Americans inherit. I argue that this afterlife—and the assumed mark of enslavement that continental Africans living in the United States (US) must also face—deems Black college womxn and femmes as undeserving to thrive within higher education institutions upholding settler-colonialism, and are instead positioned as liminal in these spaces.

In assessments of Black femme life at universities, we must account for anti-Black settler colonialism, the afterlife of enslavement, and colorblind racism because the effects remain fixed in our current lives. Through their existence, Black womxn and femme undergraduate students continue to battle anti-Black settler colonialism, the mark of enslavement, and colorblind racism, which reveals themselves as anti-Black gendered racism. Black being and survival—by way of resistance coping techniques—enmeshes with broader historic and sociopolitical implications of anti-Black settler colonialism amidst a gendered and anti-Black herstory at CU Boulder. In turn, Black womxn and femmes have maintained resistance coping strategies to deal with gendered anti-Black racism at CU Boulder.

Black feminist thought and epistemology

Black womxn,[1] as a group, gain, generate, and share knowledge through their overlapping experiences of oppression (Collins, 2004, 2009; Dotson, 2015; Nadar, 2019; Porter et al., 2022). These knowledges tell us about the relationship between connected oppressions exasperating the gravity of inequality that Black womxn experience brought about by the matrix of domination, or the organization of intersecting oppressions Black womxn face. Furthermore, Black womxn demonstrate the role of agency in consciousness-building and productions of knowledge that criticize human subjugation. In combination, these factors make up Black feminist thought, which is a critical social theory where US African American womxn's collective

wisdom and consciousness motivate creations of specialized knowledge from common thematic experiences of oppression and resistance (Collins, 2004, 2009; Dotson, 2015; Nadar, 2019; Porter et al., 2022).

Regarding knowledge production, Black feminist epistemology allows us to redefine the term "intellectual" to include not only Black womxn scholars in academia, but alternative thinkers outside the academy providing oppositional knowledge as well. While Black womxn's intellectual thought is suppressed in the academy and society—through surveillance in bureaucratic institutions and segregation in structural domains of power—we develop Black feminist thought by reclaiming intellectuals through "discovering, reinterpreting, and analyzing" (Collins, 2009, p. 16) their works with a Black feminist epistemological framework.

Additionally, Collins emphasizes the importance of "the group" stating that, although responses between individual group members are diverse, Black womxn share common experiences that elicit their standpoints. This results in their agency and resistance against subjugation through self-determination and self-definition. Moreover, because Black womxn's experienced oppressions shift over time, Black feminist thought is dynamic and everchanging. The day-to-day experiences of Black womxn scholars and alternative thinkers encompass a holistic view of the matrix of domination because they experience oppressions at various axes; hence, Black womxn experiences decrypt how power and control operate. Within this framework, a transversal politics is achieved, which occurs when we observe the intersects of others' oppressions without privileging our own (Collins, 2004, 2009; Dotson, 2015; Nadar, 2019; Porter et al., 2022).

Black feminist thought and epistemology re-orientate how knowledge is created by centering Black womxn and femme undergraduate students as alternative thinkers to orthodox and hegemonically white supremacist ways of producing knowledge. Drawing on Black feminist thought and epistemology, I argue that Black womxn's and femmes' shared experiences with gendered anti-Blackness at a historically and predominantly white university elicits further investigation on the lineage of their resistance coping strategies. Placing recent and past Black womxn and femme undergraduates' experiences with resistance coping in conversation with one another yields a generational discourse on being and survival. Just as the afterlife of enslavement remains present in our current lives, so too does our will to cope with the encumbrances of anti-Black, anti-womxn, and anti-femme being.

Resistance coping for Black womxn in higher education

Resistance is a form of engagement coping, which occurs when people actively address stressors and stress-related

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[1] Black feminist thought and epistemology, as theory, centers cisgender womxn. As such, I solely refer to cisgendered womxn throughout this section. My application of the conceptual framework and analysis incorporates gender non-conforming/gender queer femmes throughout the remainder of the article.

emotions. Types of resistance coping that Black college womxn demonstrate are defying Eurocentric beauty standards, speaking up about gendered racism on campus, and education and advocacy (Lewis et al., 2013; Szymanski and Lewis, 2016). Coping scholarship on racial identity centrality suggests that African Americans cope differently than other racial-ethnic groups based on culturally specific strategies learned and passed on throughout generations, and the types of discrimination we face (Daly et al., 1995; Coll et al., 1996; Utsey et al., 2000; Johnson, 2001; Scott, 2003; Blackmon et al., 2016). Researchers have found that Black womxn in college use cognitive, emotional, ritual, collective, and spiritual-centered methods of Africultural coping, and that Black college womxn cope by relying on their racial self-identity (Robinson-Wood, 2009; House, 2020). Other studies show that racial identity fails as a strategy to mitigate the impact of gendered racism on mental health, and does not prevent psychological distress as it may cause more race-related stress than other coping strategies (McKnight, 2003; Robinson-Wood, 2009; Szymanski and Lewis, 2016; Burton, 2017; Luney, 2021b).

Many Black womxn attending historically and predominantly white institutions cope by relying on the resilience that comes with being a Strong Black Woman (Lewis et al., 2013; Corbin et al., 2018; Shahid et al., 2018; House, 2020). In many instances, Black college womxn counteract repressive and silencing dynamics on campus but are careful not to embody the Angry Black Woman stereotype in these efforts (Corbin et al., 2018). The Strong Black Woman is personified in response to racially gendered microaggressions to avoid embodying the Angry Black Woman archetype. Adopting the Strong Black Woman archetype to fight gendered racism, or misogynoir (Bailey and Trudy, 2018; Leath et al., 2021) in this case, may have negative impacts on Black womxn's wellbeing such as racial battle fatigue, where constant exposure to gendered anti-Blackness elicits emotional, psychosocial, and physiological stress responses (Smith et al., 2007; Smith, 2014; Corbin et al., 2018; Quaye et al., 2019; Rollock, 2021). Another result of coping with the Strong Black Woman identity is a potential increase in perceived racial tension on campus that causes stress but does not prevent it because the cause of this stress is administrators' failure to improve race and gender relations on campus (Shahid et al., 2018).

The current study situates Black womxn and femme college students' resistance coping—which is connected to Black womxn's and femmes' being—as a human response to gendered anti-Black racism rather than a solution to it. In addition, the current study delves into the retribution that Black womxn and femme undergraduates face when they resist gendered anti-Black racism and advocate for themselves, providing implications for the Angry Black Woman myth and resistance coping. While previous scholarship stresses the role of the Strong Black Woman in Black womxn undergraduate coping, the findings of the current study reveal that the Angry

Black Woman trope arises as a consequence to resistance coping strategies. Findings also provide implications on Black womxns' and femme's agency in their educational journeys and humor, accentuating the significance of their humanity in a colonial, anti-Black, and anti-womxn and femme institution.

Materials and methods

Outsiders within the academy: Researcher positionality and student narrators

While outsider-within status (Collins, 1986, 1999, 2009; Howard-Hamilton, 2003; Wilder et al., 2013; Bartman, 2015; Garrett and Thurman, 2018; Porter et al., 2020; Porter, 2022; West, 2022) speaks to Black womxn who are academicians, I employ the term to refer to myself and Black womxn and femme participants, or "narrators" (Bignold and Su, 2013), in the current study. I occupy an outsider-within position because I choose to remain in the academy knowing that I will never obtain full insider status in institutions that were set up for and cater to whiteness and capital. Additionally, I occupy an outsider-within position because I choose to bring my experiences as a Black Kentuckian womxn who grew up in poverty to the forefront of my research and existence in the academy. I use my outsider status to avoid assimilating into orthodox ways of interpreting social phenomena.

I recognize the narrators of this study as outsiders within the university as they were perpetually perceived as "strangers" (Collins, 1986, p. 15) at the study site, and because they maintained critical perspectives of the academy. Narrators who are Black, womxn, and femme—amongst other multiply marginalized identities—provide an epistemology that recognizes the persistence of anti-Black gendered racism in higher education, and the significance of coping as form of surviving higher education institutions.

Researcher positionality

I often considered myself an outsider from the narrators because of my education status, where I am from, socioeconomic status, the type of undergraduate institution I attended, and power dynamics between undergraduates and me that were based on my roles as a doctoral student, teaching assistant, part-time instructor, staff member, and community organizer. Through these roles, I established relationships with Black students, some of whom participated in the study. The participant observation phase of this study underscores my positionality as a researcher, how I analyzed the study site, and implications for strained relationships between myself and narrators that expound how I was an outsider from narrators.

Alternatively, my status as a Black womxn who matriculated through the CU education system very much made me an

insider with the students who were the focus of the study; one with experiential knowledge about how Black womxn and femme students were treated at the university. My involvement with grassroots organizations might have encouraged students to see me separate from a strictly academic role. Furthermore, my early interactions with grassroots organizations and Black students on campus allowed me to learn more about their lives as CU Boulder students.

It took time to make my presence known in the first relationship I held with a student organization due to changes in leadership. I was concerned that I may have jeopardized my relationship with the organization and other students because of a staff position I took at the university. The intent was to "immerse" myself in the setting by obtaining a staff position; however, I recognized that some students had not fully trusted the administrators I worked under in light of institutional politics, Black exceptionalism, and politics of respectability. In the staff position, I witnessed tensions between Black students and CU Boulder administrators, which included some Black administrators.

At the time of participant observation, I was involved with a united conglomeration of campus organizers representing various groups, and who called for reallocated funds from the university police's multi-million-dollar budget to improve mental health services, antiracism training, and Black and Indigenous People of Color (BIPOC) student programs and resources on campus. I was also a member of a grassroots group of students and staff wanting to radically change CU Boulder and the larger community, and care for one another as students, staff, and faculty who had been harmed by the institution. Lastly, I was a team member and mentor for a community building program for Black students, faculty, and staff, whose hope was to create a sustainable community for Black students attending and transitioning to CU Boulder in efforts to provide support while navigating the academy. In addition to meeting students through my academic, staff, and organizing roles, I worked on building relationships with Black students in non-Black Greek-letter organizations, the athletics department, and those majoring in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) fields.

Methodologically, being an organizer and researcher held challenges for me; challenges that scholars rarely discuss openly. There were times in which I felt that I was too "close" to organizing to conduct sound research, being pulled in by the force of social justice work and the life of organizing for a more equitable future. I would follow these feelings with the reminder that Black feminist scholarship argues that no research is objective and rejects the notion that someone could be too close to their work (Hull et al., 1982; Ladson-Billings, 2000; Wing, 2000, 2003; Chilisa, 2019; Evans-Winters, 2019; Esposito and Evans-Winters, 2021).

Student narrators

Using purposeful sampling technique (Patton, 1990; Esposito and Evans-Winters, 2021), I observed approximately 80 undergraduate students of various gender identities during participant observation; nine Black womxn and femmes participated in exploratory focus group interviews to inform this study; and twenty-five core narrators participated in one-on-one interviews and are the foci of this research article ($n = 25$). These core narrators racially identified Black, African American, and/or other terms for the African diaspora; had a womxn and/or femme gender identity; were between the ages of 19 and 22; and were in their second, third, fourth, or fifth year of undergraduate studies at CU Boulder, or had graduated within the past academic year. The 25 core narrators completed a demographic survey that gathered information on their age, academic year/class, major(s) and minor(s), the amount of time they had lived in Colorado, and their racial and ethnic identities. Table 1 provides demographic information about the 25 Black womxn and femmes that participated in one-on-one interviews, such as their racial-ethnic identity, gender identity, skin tone, age, academic year/class, residence, and socioeconomic background.

Study site: The University of Colorado Boulder

Colorado appointed Boulder City as the city to house the first state university in 1872. Four years and one constructed building later, CU Boulder was founded in 1876 during the same year that Colorado became a state. CU Boulder is now the flagship institution of the University of Colorado system that includes three additional campuses. CU Boulder is a public Research I institution accredited by the Association of American Universities (University of Colorado Boulder, 2022). Guardians send their children to CU Boulder under the pretenses that the university is a prominent public teaching and research institution. CU Boulder's overall student population is wealthy, making up the second most affluent student population amongst selective higher education institutions in the US with a median family income of $133,700 (The Upshot, 2017). Approximately 1.2% of undergraduate students come from an impoverished background, whereas almost 60% of undergraduate students come from families who are in the top 20% of income earners in the US (The Upshot, 2017).

During the fall 2019 semester, 703 Black undergraduate students enrolled at CU Boulder. At the time of the study, Black students accounted for only 2.6% of CU Boulder's undergraduate population and this proportion had not increased since 2010, although white and Latinx student populations had grown since 2016 (University of Colorado System Office of Institutional Research, 2020; University of Colorado Boulder IR – Profile, 2021). Of the Black

TABLE 1 Demographics of narrators from one-on-one interviews with Black womxn and femme undergraduate students: Racial-ethnic and gender identity, skin tone, age, year/class, residence, and socioeconomic background.

Demographic	n	%
Racial-ethnic and gender identity		
Black and/or African American, womxn	15	60
Multiracial, womxn	1	4
Black and/or African American, gender non-binary/non-conforming	1	4
Multiracial, gender non-binary/non-conforming	1	4
Black and/or African American, womxn, Ethiopian heritage	4	16
Black and/or African American, womxn, Congolese heritage	1	4
Black and/or African American, womxn, Nigerian heritage	1	4
Black and/or African American, womxn, Gambian-Senegalese heritage	1	4
Skin tone		
Light	11	44
Dark	7	28
Medium	7	28
Age		
19	5	20
20	5	20
21	10	40
22	5	20
Year/class		
Second	3	12
Third	6	24
Fourth	8	32
Fifth	5	20
Recently graduated	3	12
Residence		
From the US	20	80
Not from the US	5	20
From Colorado	20	80
Not from Colorado	5	20
Socioeconomic background		
Impoverished and/or working class	4	16
Upper working class	1	4
Lower middle class	6	24
Middle class	10	40
Fluctuating	3	12
Unknown	1	4

Most of the demographic categories (racial-ethnic and gender identity, age, year/class, residence, and socioeconomic background) were determined by narrators' responses to a demographic data form and during interviews. Data on the narrators' skin tones were collected to better understand the intersectional and nuanced experiences of Blackness in education. Participant observation and interviews revealed that colorism remained a part of CU Boulder's sociopolitical context and affected how Black womxn and femmes were treated on campus. For most of the core narrators, I determined their skin tone based on their appearance. In other instances, which was typically throughout one-on-one semi-structured interviews, I determined narrators' skin tones based on the descriptions they provided about their identity and their intersectional experiences. Narrators explained the socioeconomic category that best fit their experiences after I asked the open-ended question: "How would you explain the type of socioeconomic background you come from?"

undergraduate students attending CU Boulder, 35.4% were first generation, 42.5% received institutional financial aid, 74.1% paid in-state tuition as Colorado residents, and 44% identified as womxn and 56% men. One hundred and thirty-five Black undergraduate first-year students enrolled for the 2019 fall semester, and African American students' one-year retention

rates declined between 2014 and 2018 (University of Colorado System Office of Institutional Research, 2020; University of Colorado Boulder IR – Profile, 2021).

A 2014 campus climate survey showed that Black students feel less welcome, valued, and supported than the rest of the CU Boulder student population.[2] Findings indicated that Black students felt less intellectually stimulated at the institution and were not as proud to attend the institution when compared to the overall student population. CU Boulder's Black student population was less likely to perceive CU Boulder as diverse. Black students reported experiencing more microaggressions on campus than the rest of the student population as well. Additionally, Black students were less likely to report a sense of community and less likely to report that they have made friends at the institution. In the classroom, Black students expressed that instructors tolerate the use of stereotypes, prejudicial comments, or ethnic, racial, and sexual slurs or jokes. Black students were less likely to feel that instructors help students to understand the different perspectives of diverse cultures and social groups as well. Lastly, Black students were less likely to feel that instructors successfully manage discussions about sensitive or difficult topics, treat students with respect when they voiced positions or opinions, and provide a supportive classroom environment in other ways.

I specifically name—or call out—CU Boulder as the study site to hold the institution accountable for its role in allowing anti-Black gendered racism to permeate through its campus culture, policy, and praxis. The current study appertains to Black womxn and femme undergraduates' techniques of resistance coping, which may empower us to continue surviving or provide us hope. Yet, we must not lose sight of the structural issues that Black womxn and femme undergraduates must survive. I openly identify and name the higher education institution in which this study is set so that we recognize the localized herstory of anti-Black gendered racism, and to subject CU Boulder to retribution for its prolonged mistreatment of Black womxn and femme undergraduate students.

Data collection

The 14-month study used three different tools of data collection: (1) semi-structured one-on-one interviews; (2) semi-structured group interviews; and (3) participant observation. I

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2 This campus climate survey was distributed every four years since 1994 but skipped in 2018 because of a university system wide campus climate survey distributed in November of 2019. An official report of 2019 campus findings were to be released in 2020, but CU Boulder's Office of Data Analytics did not conduct a climate survey at the university-level, opting instead to conduct the survey in select research institutes and social science departments. I was unsuccessful in obtaining CU Boulder's most updated campus climate statistics on research institutes and social science departments from the Office of Data Analytics because the aggregate data had not been compiled nor anonymized for public access at the time of writing and publishing this article.

heavily draw on the one-on-one interviews in the forthcoming analysis; however, group interviews and participant observation informed how I conducted these interviews, the questions I asked, and how I analyzed the local context of CU Boulder.

I conducted in-depth, one-on-one interviews with 25 core narrators who racially identified as African American, or Black, womxn and/or femmes. The purpose of in-depth, one-on-one interviews is to gain an understanding of narrators' realities with gendered racism and coping outside of the influence of other narrators (e.g., group interviews), and to allow time and space for more detailed questions. The one-on-one interviews encouraged narrators to determine their own narratives with race and gender through a reflective process of storytelling. By telling their stories, narrators "talk back" (hooks, 1989) to systems of oppression diminishing their wellbeing and exercise a sense of agency by speaking about their coping strategies. I asked narrators open-ended questions about stressors they encounter as a CU Boulder student, the impact of these stressors on their wellbeing, how they cope with such stressors, and the impact of their coping strategies on their wellbeing.

In addition, I conducted two semi-structured focus group interviews with seven sophomores, juniors, and seniors during the Spring 2020 semester to engage them in reflecting on their perceptions of CU Boulder, wellbeing, derogatory and favorable experiences at CU Boulder, and how they cope with such experiences. I also conducted a semi-structured group interview with two self-identified African American undergraduate first-year women to triangulate focus group data.[3]

As a participant observer, I spent one to two hours a week observing any number of African American students engaging in spaces and meetings (both in-person and online) pertaining to their experiences on campus. During participant observation, I paid attention to collective dialogues, behaviors, and interactions between narrators, non-African American students, faculty, staff, and campus community members.

Data analysis

I conducted open coding for descriptive themes both inductively and deductively (Emerson et al., 1995; Maxwell, 2013; Ravitch and Riggan, 2017; Esposito and Evans-Winters, 2021). I used transcriptions and memos from fieldnotes to meticulously review narratives several times to better gain context of the narrator accounts, discover commonalities in content, and create substantive/descriptive themes found in the data. My analysis became more methodical, employing an iterative process. Using this iterative process, I checked the coding scheme and modified codes as new themes emerged, then compared and condensed substantive/descriptive codes.

I conducted theoretical coding to connect themes found in the collected data with my conceptual framework and scholarly framing. I identified how Blackness and being, Black feminist thought and epistemology, and Black womxn's coping techniques play out in narrators' lives. Furthermore, I used intersectional qualitative research methods (Evans-Winters, 2019; Esposito and Evans-Winters, 2021) to analyze commonalities between Black womxn's and femmes' lives on campus, but to also expose the nuances and contentions in their perceptions of CU Boulder and their experiences of coping with gendered racism. Data collection and analysis were successful as the study had sufficient data to logically code for themes regarding Black womxn and femme undergraduate experiences at CU Boulder.

Findings

Resistance coping is "the process of confronting the perpetrators of a discriminatory behavior" (Szymanski and Lewis, 2016, p. 231). I conceptualize resistance coping as processes of addressing and challenging gendered racism by attempting to rectify oppressive systems at micro and macro levels, and/or adapting emotional, behavioral, and cognitive responses within the context of anti-Black gendered racism's impact on wellbeing. Black womxn and femme undergraduates at CU Boulder survived by using self-education, direct confrontation, and humor to cope with anti-Black gendered racism.

To supplement the presented findings, it is important to note that narrators' perceptions on the uniqueness of anti-Black gendered racism differed throughout this study. Most narrators argued that anti-Blackness at CU Boulder was more intense than in other spaces they had experienced it, including other higher education institutions, due to Boulder City's colonially historic mistreatment of Black people. In fact, participant observation interactions, additional exploratory interviews with alumni, and narrative accounts from Black womxn alumna (McLean, 2002) illustrate that Black women and femme undergraduates faced anti-Blackness throughout the years. Other narrators expressed that the campus represented a microcosm of anti-Blackness against Black womxn and femmes en masse. While the current study is unique to a university in Colorado, the ways in which Black womxn and femme undergraduates cope with anti-Black gendered racism persists in every college and university due to the noxious persistence of anti-Black gendered racism in the academy. The findings from this study push us to not only recognize how Black womxn and femme students live out resistance coping, but to also pinpoint anti-Black settler

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3 Including first-year student perspectives helped to understand how African American first-year perspectives and coping strategies compare to those of upper-class students. Having these experiences provide a point of triangulation (Mathison, 1988), and comparatively allows me to observe the development of African American college students' coping strategies and how they understand their experiences as they matriculate through CU Boulder.

colonialism as the background plaguing the very campuses that Black femmes must survive overall. This study transpires as an example localized to CU Boulder.

"It's weird to say that I love learning about systems of oppression because they absolutely suck": Self-education as resistance coping

Coping through education and advocacy is "the process of increasing self and other's awareness of discrimination and implementing advocacy efforts to fight discrimination at micro- and macro-levels" (Szymanski and Lewis, 2016, p. 231). I define education and advocacy as processes of informing the self and others about the impact and functionality of systems of power in order to navigate anti-Black spaces, combat oppression, and empower the self and others through advocacy. Throughout the study, Black womxn and femme undergraduate narrators demonstrated education and advocacy coping at CU Boulder. I present how Black womxn and femme undergraduate student narrators educated themselves as a resistance coping strategy henceforth.

Narrators educated themselves using various methods, such as dissociating from stressors and using their access to academic content as college students. For example, Octavia, a 22 year-old fifth-year student, said that she selected "very specific classes about writing and liberation. And so, I've got to meet professors that have opened my mind so much to the entire universe, including race relations." Similarly, Ayanna engaged in schoolwork when she was stressed:

Weirdly enough, if I get stressed by things that aren't school related, I [turn] to school. I make sure that I have [that] one aspect of my life. I'll figure it out. Maybe I'll do some extra credit or something. Or I'll read. Sometimes professors will have assigned reading and then maybe recommended reading. So I'll read a recommended reading and immerse myself in this very dense, scholarly articulation of the world's problems, and theory. It allows me to detach from some of the things that are happening in my personal life. And I can go super meta. It's very strange. I don't get overwhelmed by that, taking it in.

As Ayanna illustrated, Black womxn and femme narrators used their academic work to "detach" from stressors in their personal lives by delving into professors' recommended reading lists and engaging with high theorizations of the world. Narrators mentioned several books that they were reading— whether assigned or suggested by their teachers, or on their own fruition—in order to cope with anti-Black gendered racism. These texts included *Between the World and Me* by Ta-Nehisi Coates (2015), *White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism* by Robin DiAngelo (2018), *The Color of Compromise: The Truth about the American Church's Complicity in Racism* by Jemar Tisby (2019), and the infamous *This Will*

Be My Undoing: Living at the Intersection of Black, Female, and Feminist in (White) America by Morgan Jerkins (2018).

Narrators contended that they engaged such thought provoking and timely texts because they were inspired by the Black Lives Matter Movement, the sociopolitical climate of 2020, and because they learned more about their place in the world as Black womxn and femmes. According to Inez, a 21-year-old fourth-year student, learning about how gendered racism functioned made her "feel better" because she understood the "history and background" of power and oppression. Inez also explained that taking Ethnic Studies courses at CU Boulder was "affirming and validating" to her experiences throughout life, as they provided her the "vocabulary" to conceptualize how she had been treated by others, and sometimes complacent, in predominantly white spaces.

Knowing about power and oppression as an educational coping strategy remained a prevalent theme. While some narrators educated themselves to better conceptualize how systems of oppression impacted their daily lives, others used it as an opportunity to connect with likeminded people on campus. Milan explained that taking Ethnic Studies courses with her friends and colleagues connected her with compatible colleagues because they validated one another and saw their lives reflected in the academic content. Milan stated that taking her Ethnic Studies courses with friends helped them to:

> . . . connect what we're learning academically to our own personal lives. It's helpful to talk that out with somebody who knows the authors that I'm talking about, the texts that we've read, the conversations we've had in and out of class.

In a like manner, Ayanna mentioned that she had met people who were just as curious as she about systems of oppression and had "in depth discussions and examinations" of the world with them. Ayanna talked about why she was interested in learning about power and oppression as well:

> It's weird to say that I love learning about systems of oppression because they absolutely suck. And they're the worst aspect of humanity. Like, why can't we get this shit right? But it's rewarding in a way. The impact is not all negative because the positive impact on my wellbeing is that I'm better equipped with strategies and coping mechanisms, like talking about it and being able to articulate it. [Learning about systems of oppression] better prepares you for more of the same.

Ayanna's narrative exemplifies that self-education positively affected her wellbeing in that she connected with others and gained tools for future coping skills. She also found joy in having the ability to "articulate" and expound on the topics she learned about. Other narrators provided specific examples of why they engaged in self-education, like Monica, who used it to prepare

for pushback when she politically advocated on social justice issues. Monica shared,

> I would research and write, take down notes, because I've always been in environments where people at times don't accept your statements and always want to challenge it. And so I always came prepared for whatever stance was taken, whatever stance I take, whether they speak or not, that I was knowledgeable about it.

As found in interviews and participant observation, Black womxn and femme college student narrators were often silenced at CU Boulder. This was particularly the case when directly confronting and advocating for social equity on campus. Monica's narrative highlights that she dealt—or coped—with the silencing of Black womxn and femmes by learning from past experiences of having her "stance" challenged and educating herself in preparation.

Self-education also helped narrators who were student organizers cope with gendered racism because it gave a sense of purpose and time to nurture themselves. Milan, who spoke openly about the disadvantages of organizing and activism, mentioned that engaging in self-education led her to feel "purposeful." When I asked Milan to further explain her thoughts, she stated,

> Oftentimes, it feels like what I'm doing is not enough, whether protesting isn't enough or the policy work isn't enough. Because nothing has happened after that. Sometimes I feel like I need to do more and be more. . . . It feels like at the end of the day, nothing is left, almost. Even my friends, who have been on the front lines right now protesting, come home and it's like, "Damn. I hope that was for something." Like, "We went through all this traumatizing stuff for what?" But through my academics and in my writing, it feels like I'm doing something for myself, instead of constantly fighting for the community and constantly fighting for my people as a whole. Because, yes, that's what I love to do, but I need to also tend to myself because my mental health is also very important. And it is often overlooked, or it gets lost in the movement, it gets lost [while] constantly working, and constantly going from classes to meetings to work. Academics has taught me that we need to take a step back. And I'm trying to – I've been trying to – implement that in my life.

Milan's narrative testifies to her and her peers questioning if the labor they had committed to activism and policy work would implement social change. Given the fungible status of Black womxn and femme undergraduate students (Luney, 2021b), the university's abuse of their labor (Dancy et al., 2018; Luney, 2021b), and keeping up with work and academics, student

activist narrators such as Milan became apprehensive of the benefits of organizing. Furthermore, Milan understood her writing and academics to be "purposeful" in that they taught Milan to "take a step back" from the bustling life of class, meetings, and "the movement," creating time for her to focus on improving her mental health and wellbeing.

"I slander them actively. . . . It's not that passive shit": Direct confrontation as resistance coping strategy

Previous scholarship lists confrontation, community organizing, and student activism as types of resistance coping (Lewis et al., 2013; Szymanski and Lewis, 2016; Burton, 2017). Narrators in the study shared stories about directly confronting assailant in their everyday lives, and the resultant impact on their wellness.

Narrators demonstrated resistance coping techniques through direct confrontation with aggressors, such as racists, sexists, homophobes, elitists, and misogynoirists. When discussing her strategies of direct confrontation, Meg, a 21-year-old fourth-year student, reasoned that she prefers to directly speak with people when racially gendered stressors arose, stating, "I'm very big on 'We are not going to drive this [issue] for weeks and weeks and weeks' because I [do] not have that kind of time. I don't have time." Emphasizing that she did not "have time" to participate in drawn-out conversations with aggressors was reflected in the labor that Black womxn and femme students faced—like work study and creating political change—in addition to carrying the hardships of anti-Black gendered racism from the campus community. Angela, a 22-year-old fifth-year student, also preferred to directly confront adversaries. During our one-on-one interview, they spoke about practicing pettiness for this process:

> Angela: I get on some petty shit. If someone says something racist to me, I'm like, "What?!" Petty! I slander them actively.
> LeAnna: You said you slander them actively?
> Angela: Yeah.
> LeAnna: Is that what pettiness is? Is that how we define it?
> Angela: Yeah. It's an active slander. 'Cause it's not that passive shit. I'm like, "That person's a fucking racist. That one right there. They say racist shit to people." I know sometimes, when it's lightly racist shit I'm like, "This is problematic."

For Angela, direct confrontation as a form of resistance coping emerged as pettiness, or the idea of exaggerating or overemphasizing what others might consider miniscule to accentuate points of an argument, actions or behaviors,

ideas, or attitudes. Based on our interview conversation and working on social equity initiatives with them on campus during participant observation, Angela's actions to "actively slander" and to be "petty" called out racists and problematized "lightly" racist actions while informing other minoritized people of potential harm.

At times, campus community members retaliated against narrators when they challenged them for perpetuating anti-Black gendered racism. Angela's direct confrontation—and radical honesty—often sparked controversy and criticism from people on campus. After telling me a story about how they were reprimanded for confronting a Latina colleague at a summer program for using the N-word, Angela explained their initial coping response, saying:

> I feel like whenever it happens, I just disconnect for a little bit. 'Cause I can't fight people anymore. 'Cause every time I would fight people, I would get threatened by going to OIEC [Office of Institutional Equity and Compliance].

In instances involving retaliation to direct confrontation, Angela used disconnection and boundaries (Luney, 2021b). Due to the backlash that people gave Angela, they decided that confronting people would create penalty from the public, and the OIEC in particular, so they began creating spaces and groups with and for marginalized people to empower, validate, and inform one another. Angela further complicated the strategy of coping through direct confrontation and why they received pushback when calling out others:

> With violence and Black bodies and aggression, that's how I know I'm Black. 'Cause sometimes I'll say some shit and then magically it's like, "Oh, so you're aggressive." It's like, "No," because when I try to tell you in your language, when I try to tell you calmly, when I try to tell you that's fucked up, you did not listen. And clearly if I don't fucking drag you, you're going to be on some fuck shit. And so it's petty, but it's also like "Nah, I'll be up in your face."

Worth noting is Angela's explanation of why they were obligated to engage direct confrontation as a type of resistance coping. They pinpointed a crucial aspect of what it means to be a Black femme, which is that others expected them to express their concerns "calmly" and to accept being silenced, or to be categorized as "aggressive" once they became "petty." These expectations are based on the Angry Black Woman myth, a herstorically damaging stereotype of Black womxn and femmes (Collins, 2009; Corbin et al., 2018; Perlow, 2018; Doharty, 2020). Furthermore, this passage expounds on why Angela used direct confrontation to cope with anti-Black gendered racism. As Angela explains, placid reasoning with aggressors may be ineffective in mitigating the damage of anti-Black gendered

racism, but that forthright contest draws attention to Angela's voiced demands for humanity.

"I say that I'm on this journey, writing this anthropological research, on white spaces": Humor as resistance coping strategy

Scholars have outlined humor as a coping strategy (Carver et al., 1989). Humor is "the production of laughter that results from the observed misfortune and suffering of others and viewed as the ultimate soul cleansing" with undertones and connections to leisure and playfulness (Outley et al., 2020). Moreover, humor is a method of redressing the traumas of anti-Black violence, accentuating "its ability to frame or reframe situations or experiences in ways perceived as being more interesting for the individual" (Outley et al., 2020, p. 2). Throughout my study, narrators resisted aggressors by turning to humor when dealing with stressful events around misogynoir. Angela shared how they employed humor as a form or resistance coping:

> Think about so many of the best Black comedians' jokes and how they address racism. It's never that they're like, "This racist white person." They're like, "This racist white person said something [racist] and I flamed them." Because what do you want me to do? You really want me to hit you and confirm the physical aggressiveness that you're saying I have? 'Cause, honestly it seems like you prefer I say some shit and embarrass you, because that seems easier for you than getting the shit smacked out of you.

Angela's narrative accentuates how narrators used humor strategically to navigate stereotypical assertions of "aggressiveness" and other illogical sentiments about their character. As Angela and other students described in their narratives, perpetrators of anti-Black gendered racism left little space for uncensored expression of narrators' frustrations, bogging them down with stereotypical expectations of aggression. Therefore, humor, such as embarrassing oppressors, was an auspicious form of resistance coping.

Other narrators explained that humor helped them to bear second-hand trauma from witnessing anti-Black racism at CU Boulder. Ayanna, for instance, described how she and her friends, who are also Black, utilized humor to cope with hearing about a white woman from Boulder City calling two Black men students the N-word during the fall 2019 semester:

> I was finding myself going to my Black friends in particular, and finding them and finding strength in being around people that really understand the impact. And then also are

> able to make fun of it in that very nuanced, very specifically Black way. Where it's like, "We understand what's going on and we understand that [racism is] hurtful, but also we're able to tear it down piece by piece through poking at it and prodding at it."

As Ayanna described, Black students communally used humor to cope with racism on campus by analyzing the inanity of racism on campus through mutual understanding and validation. Moreover, Ayanna's humor highlights the importance of being in community with other people who "understand the impact" of racism, such as the hurt that racism causes. Ayanna's and her friends' humor centers Blackness and speaks to the "nuanced" ways in which it exists.

Octavia also coped using humor. When I asked her how she coped with stressful events around race and gender, she responded,

> I have to laugh. I have to laugh because if you don't laugh at what happened, if you can't do one of [laughs hardily] those, I think [gendered racism] will eat at you. And so I have to sometimes see the humor in the ignorance, and keep it pushing. . . . I say that I'm on this journey, writing this anthropological research, on white spaces.

Emphasizing the role of laughter, Octavia's narrative specifically underscores Black womxn's and femmes' satirical aptitudes when surviving gendered racism at CU Boulder. Octavia wittingly reconceived others' gendered racism against her as "ignorance" and her experience as a Black womxn attending CU Boulder as "anthropological research on white spaces," despite others' intentions to sabotage her wellbeing through racially gendered violence. Octavia's use of humor pushes her to reframe racially gendered stressors, buffering her outlook and wellbeing from anti-Black gendered racism. When she says that she is on the "journey" of "anthropological research" about "white spaces," Octavia redefines her experiences with misogynoir as one where she plays on the misfortune of white ignorance and makes the situation more interesting by amusingly taking on the role of an anthropological researcher.

Discussion

I must point out the minutiae of Black womxn's and femmes' coping through the usage of self-education. Firstly, the overwhelming majority of narrators who described how they coped with anti-Black gendered racism by using education centralized discourses on race, gender, Blackness, power and oppression, and liberation. Many of these narrators named CU Boulder's Department of Ethnic Studies and Department of Women and Gender Studies when outlining the benefits of educational content that the university provided. The

significance of Ethnic Studies and Women and Gender Studies courses in narrators' self-education journeys is that they provided information for narrators to better understand power and oppression from perspectives similar to their own (Rojas, 2010; Ferguson, 2012; hooks, 2014). Ethnic Studies and Women and Gender Studies courses contributed to narrators' epistemic production by allowing narrators to theorize about their own realities and prepare for anti-Black gendered racism. In turn, Ethnic Studies and Women and Gender Studies pedagogies empowered narrators as creators of knowledge that is relevant to their lived realities as Black womxn and femmes.

Narrators employing self-education as a coping strategy contributed to a long lineage of Black womxn and femmes finding power in self-education, and particularly when educating oneself in community with likeminded people. From a Black feminist perspective, foremothers, such as members of the Combahee River Collective, contributed, upheld, and bestowed practices of self-education as a method of coping through anti-Black gendered racism in their reading groups and spaces where members acquired the language to understand their lived experiences and compounded identities as African American women (Combahee River Collective, 1977; Taylor, 2018; Khan et al., 2022). Narrators using self-education to cope outside of community found space and time for themselves, especially if they were student activists and organizers. For them, self-education helped to resist and survive the impact of activism, which could surface as doubt for the movement and neglect of wellbeing. Equivalently, Black womxn and femme narrators attending CU Boulder educated themselves to survive anti-Black gendered racism.

The findings demonstrate that retaliation from the campus community and the Angry Black Woman trope (Collins, 2009; Corbin et al., 2018; Perlow, 2018; Doharty, 2020) played a critical role when narrators utilized direct confrontation as a means to cope with gendered anti-Black racism. Regardless of narrators' gender identity and background, the campus community condemned most narrators who directly confronted racists, sexists, homophobes, elitists, misogynoirists, and others perpetuating anti-Blackness in its various forms. Retaliation involved interpersonal and systemic actions, ranging from threatening to report narrators to university personnel to projecting the Angry Black Woman stereotype onto narrators. The campus community's retaliation against Black womxn and femme undergraduates exists in contention with—and in reaction to—Black womxn and femmes exercising their humanity by defending themselves, surviving, and simply being. Universities may not perceive retaliation as acts of academic violence against Black womxn and femme undergraduates. Yet, retaliation against Black womxn and femmes occur often (Ahmed, 2021), illustrating a culture of censoring, surveilling, and silencing Black womxn and femme undergraduates' challenges to the university's *status quo*. Retaliation remains a

bleak reality of gendered anti-Black racism that the narrators in the study—and their foremothers—coped with.

In critical assessment of their realities as Black womxn and femme college students at a historically and predominantly white university—and confronting, assessing, and recovering from the effects of gendered racism—narrators coping through humor took gendered racism and flipped it on its head. In the words of the beloved writer, feminist, womanist, and activist, Lorde (2020), narrators stomached the "cacophony" of the world's hate for Black womxn and femmes and transformed it into a "symphony" through humor. Humor played a role in transforming the "cacophony" into a "symphony" for Black womxn and femme narrators at CU Boulder, reframing transgressive acts of gendered racism as absurd and antiquated shots at their humanness. Colloquially speaking, narrators "licked their wounds" through laughter and playfulness, which allowed them to continue living their lives and reinforced their dignity and humanity. Black womxn and femme undergraduates' humor as a resistance coping mechanism provides further implications on Black being, and Black joy as a means of liberating oneself and others from the impending impacts of anti-Black gendered racism, more specifically.

I hold concern when scholars study Black womxn's and femme's coping and survival in higher education institutions, and historically and predominantly white college and universities in particular. This is because of excessive emphasis on Black womxn and femme undergraduates' actions and behaviors, which we often conflate with solutions to gendered anti-Black racism in educational settings. However, students' acts of survival through coping are not sustainable methods of ridding college campuses of gendered anti-Blackness for two reasons. Foremost, the focus on Black womxn and femme survival as a method to improve racially gendered experiences is a distraction that excuses higher education institutions from redressing the harm against Black femme bodies they allow to persist. This also diverts us from holding higher education institutions accountable for creating and implementing solutions to gendered anti-Blackness at systemic levels. Secondly, the sensationalism of coping and survival neglects the strife that Black womxn and femme undergraduates endure during the process of coping with gendered anti-Black racism—which requires arduous labor mentally, emotionally, physically, academically, and socially—and allows it to fester for generations.

My intent here is not to belittle the significance of the resistance coping strategies that Black womxn and femmes use in their daily lives at historically and predominantly white institutions. Instead, I hope to call attention to the university's failure to acknowledge fault and rectify gendered anti-Black racism, often leaving Black womxn and femme undergraduates to fend for themselves when facing burdens that are not of their own volition, but of white supremacy's. Black womxn

and femme undergraduates' methods of coping and survival demonstrate Black youth claiming their humanity and dignity, finding ways to matter within educational settings that have devalued and demeaned us throughout time. It is up to historically and predominantly white universities to recognize and value Black womxn and femme undergraduates' coping strategies for what they are—human acts of surviving gendered anti-Blackness. Until colleges, universities, and society at large renounce white supremacy, they should provide resources for Black womxn and femme undergraduates that mirror their survival and being in higher education, at the very least.

Recommendations: Transformative justice, trusts, longitudinal data collection, and critical curriculum

It is pertinent to understand that today's colleges and universities are white supremacist institutions of the colonial state, and that we cannot conduct transformative justice in higher education without delinking from the colonial state (Carney, 1999; Dancy et al., 2018; Perlow, 2018; Lorde, 2020). For this reason, I call higher education personnel to rely on a transformative justice framework. This might encourage us to acknowledge that although colleges and universities remain unprepared to conduct true transformative justice, we should continue striving to change higher education systems perpetuating anti-Black gendered racism. Transformative justice is preventative, meaning that it brings the source of harm and violence to the surface so that we create solutions in community and without interference from the colonial state. Within the context of Black womxn and femme undergraduate coping, transformative justice allows us to understand the underlying conditions of anti-Black gendered racism, holding individuals and institutions accountable for the ways that we contribute to gendered anti-Blackness. Most importantly, a transformative justice framework allows us to uproot and mitigate anti-Black gendered racism without causing more violence in the process when applied to everyday praxis (Gready and Robins, 2014; Cullors, 2018; Stein, 2018; Kim, 2021).

Additionally, I urge colleges and universities to create and sustain monetary trusts for educational and social programming for Black womxn and femme undergraduates. In juxtaposition to grants for program development, a trust or endowment might garner buy in from the campus community and ensure that institutions secure monies reserved for exclusively Black womxn and femme spaces. Stipulations for trusts should be set by former and current Black womxn and femme undergraduates and their campus community partnerships. Building these types of trusts require higher education administrations to divest from

university entities that uphold white supremacy (e.g., the prison industrial complex) in order to reallocate funds to programming exclusive to Black womxn and femmes.

Thirdly, I advocate for longitudinal data collection on Black womxn and femme experiences with gendered anti-Blackness at historically and predominantly white colleges and universities. Although these studies do not have to capture resistance coping particularly, they should include implications on what it means for Black womxn and femmes to be. Because our being involves political resistance (Davis, 1972; Combahee River Collective, 1977; Crenshaw, 1990; Collins, 2009), a longitudinal approach would illustrate higher education's history of mistreating Black womxn and femmes. A longitudinal approach would also demonstrate the ways in which our antecessors survived, empowering us to do the same at historically and predominantly white educational institutions or institutions created for us and by us. We must involve personal and counter narratives, oral herstory, and storytelling (Wing, 2000; Pratt-Clarke, 2012) in longitudinal data collection on Black womxn's and femmes' experiences in the university to further critical implications about being for Black womxn and femme undergraduates.

Lastly, I recommend that colleges and universities offer Africana Studies, Ethnic Studies, and Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies courses to students regardless of their academic track. Colleges and universities must develop and provide—not merely offer—courses that aid in students' critical consciousness raising so that Black womxn and femmes do not have to seek content on their own. Courses and curriculum should be developed by persons with experience facilitating unorthodox pedagogies, including students (undergraduate and graduate) and community leaders. This may foster reading groups and spaces where Black womxn and femme undergraduates build community with one another while learning techniques for analyzing and navigating their racially gendered experiences.

Data availability statement

The raw data supporting the conclusions of this article will be made available by the author on reasonable request.

Ethics statement

Author contributions

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Freedom dreaming to STEM: A conceptual model for Black youth's racial and STEM identity development through social media

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Social media use has become increasingly enmeshed in the lives of youth. Although investigations in this area have tended to focus on risk (e.g., cyberbullying) and negative outcomes (e.g., in mental health and academic functioning), a growing body of literature suggests there may be positive developmental outcomes associated with Black youths' social media use. Social media may offer Black youth a means of resisting negative experiences, expand their opportunities to create and explore, and facilitate the integration of their racial and STEM identities. Aligned with PYD perspectives and PVEST, we suggest this dynamic process occurs iteratively within youth and bidirectionally between youth and their environment (online and offline) over the course of development. In this article, we present a conceptual model to guide future investigations to address gaps in the literature and elucidate the linkages between social media use, racial identity, and STEM identity among Black youth. We begin by reviewing two frameworks that provide the theoretical foundations for our model. We then discuss our outcomes of interest: racial identity and STEM identity. Given its rapidly evolving nature, we then proceed with a discussion about how social media may be operationalized, noting limitations in the current literature and highlighting the unique ways in which social media differs from offline contexts. Subsequently, we present our conceptual model, which we situate within distal, proximal, and individual offline influences. We also propose processes that may link social media use to positive identity outcomes. We conclude this article with recommendations for future investigations.

Introduction

Social media use has become increasingly enmeshed in the lives of youth. Converging studies suggest that the majority of youth (i.e., adolescents and emerging adults ages 13–24) access social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter) several times each day (Hill et al., 2016; Villanti et al., 2017; Anderson and Jiang, 2018; Twenge et al., 2019;

Auxier and Anderson, 2022). Further, Black youth, particularly adolescents, use social media at higher rates compared to their peers of other racial groups (Lenhart et al., 2015; Stevens et al., 2019). Over the past 2 years alone, social media has taken on increased importance for Black youth as a mode of support seeking (Parker et al., 2021) and social activism (Baskin-Sommers et al., 2021) in light of the ongoing dual pandemics of COVID-19 and anti-Black racism (Jones, 2021). Indeed, compared to their other-race and older counterparts, Black youth face unique racism-related (e.g., racial discrimination; Seaton, 2020) and age-related (e.g., restricted access to resources; DeJong and Love, 2015) stressors. As Black youths' social media use becomes increasingly prominent amidst these unique stressors, examining individual differences in their social media use as it relates to their developmental trajectories remains paramount.

Although investigations in this area have tended to focus on risk (e.g., cyberbullying; Edwards et al., 2016) and negative outcomes (e.g., in mental health and academic functioning; Rose and Tynes, 2015; Tynes et al., 2015; Riehm et al., 2019; Plaisime et al., 2020; Maxie-Moreman and Tynes, 2022), a growing body of literature suggests there may be positive developmental outcomes associated with Black youths' social media use. Some studies point to social media use as a tool in positive identity processes for Black youth, including the development of both *racial identity* (Harlow and Benbrook, 2019; Rogers et al., 2021b) and *science, technology, engineering, and mathematics identity* (STEM identity; Steinke, 2017; Nguyen and Riegle-Crumb, 2021). Racial identity (e.g., thoughts, feelings, and actions associated with racial group membership) has been shown to function as a protective and promotive factor (Sellers et al., 1998; Fergus and Zimmerman, 2005; Neblett et al., 2012) and is linked to positive indicators of health and academic achievement for Black youth (Jones and Neblett, 2016; Miller-Cotto and Byrnes, 2016; Loyd and Williams, 2017). Similarly, STEM identity (the extent to which one feels like a STEM person) is linked to an increased likelihood of pursuing a STEM major and engaged learning in STEM (Dou et al., 2019; Dou and Cian, 2022). Further, although distinct processes, there is evidence to suggest that racial identity may serve as a protective and promotive factor linked to Black youths' persistence in STEM (Morton et al., 2019; Ortiz et al., 2020), emphasizing the need to understand how these identity processes unfold concurrently over time. Though there is an extensive literature on the processes that drive positive identity outcomes in *offline* contexts (e.g., peer relationships in schools; Rivas-Drake et al., 2017; Dou et al., 2019), it is less clear how Black youth navigate social media contexts as a space for dreaming and positive identity development.

To guide future investigations in this area, we present a conceptual model on the linkages between social media use, racial identity, and STEM identity development among Black youth. We begin by reviewing two frameworks that provide the theoretical foundations for our model: *positive youth development* (PYD; Lerner et al., 2005) and the *phenomenological variant of*

ecological systems theory (PVEST; Spencer et al., 1997; Spencer, 2006). We then discuss our outcomes of interest: racial identity and STEM identity. Given its rapidly evolving nature, we then proceed with a discussion about how social media may be operationalized, noting limitations in the current literature, and highlighting the unique ways in which social media differs from offline contexts. Subsequently, we present our conceptual model, which we situate within distal- (e.g., digital redlining; Skinner et al., 2021), proximal- (e.g., access to mentors; Beauchamp et al., 2021), and individual-level (e.g., platform use motivation; Throuvala et al., 2019) offline influences. We also propose processes that may link social media use to positive identity outcomes and conclude with recommendations for future investigations.

Theoretical foundations

Our conceptual model is built upon two premises. The first is that social media contains contextual resources that Black youth can access and leverage to facilitate positive identity development. The second is that Black youth are active agents in shaping their social media landscapes by engaging social-cognitive and behavioral strategies to resist disempowering messages and maximize affirming experiences. Here, we discuss two theoretical frameworks to substantiate these premises: positive youth development (PYD; Lerner et al., 2005) and the phenomenological variant of ecological systems theory (PVEST; Spencer et al., 1997; Spencer, 2006).

Positive youth development

PYD builds upon the theoretical foundations of developmental systems theories by emphasizing that positive developmental trajectories for youth are driven by the alignment of individual assets with contextual supports (Lerner et al., 2005; Benson et al., 2012). Supportive relationships, particularly between youth and caring adults, are thought to bridge these individual and contextual factors and function as a scaffold for positive youth development outcomes (Bowers et al., 2015). Positive social feedback, often embedded in supportive relationships, supports positive identity development by signaling acceptance of youth's authentic self (Harter, 1999; Shernoff, 2013). The development of positive racial and STEM identities has implications for Black youths' well-being and persistence in STEM (Miller-Cotto and Byrnes, 2016; Dou et al., 2019). Thus, for Black youth, relationships with adults and peers who nurture and affirm their racial and STEM identities are a critical resource for positive youth development. The potential for supportive adults to foster positive racial and STEM identity development among racially diverse youth has been documented among out-of-school time (Loyd and Williams, 2017) and STEM programs (Price et al., 2019). We argue that social media, though fraught with risk factors, also contains

tools and resources that expand access to affirming relational networks and supportive social feedback that may similarly drive positive identity formation for Black youth (Williams, 2019).

Scholars have similarly advocated for the application of PYD perspectives to understand how youth develop within social media contexts (see Ross and Tolan, 2021). PYD perspectives offer a useful theoretical frame for researchers to broadly understand the potential for positive identity development when Black youth are connected to affirming contextual resources (e.g., supportive relationships) on social media. However, overreliance on PYD perspectives may limit the field's understanding of how Black youth cope with, navigate, and resist non-affirming social media experiences in the broader context of societal inequities. Specifically, PYD has been criticized for not adequately addressing the role of race and ethnicity (Williams and Deutsch, 2016) and structural oppression (Ginwright and James, 2002) in shaping access to opportunities for youth of color. Black youth face racism-related threats in multiple contexts across the life course (Jones et al., 2020; Seaton, 2020), and these threats manifest on social media in ways that are both interpersonal (e.g., online racial discrimination; Tynes et al., 2020) and structural (algorithm bias; Angwin et al., 2017; Peterson-Salahuddin, 2022). For example, algorithm bias on social media platforms has been shown to suppress the visibility of content from Black users (Peterson-Salahuddin, 2022). This threatens Black youths' ability to engage positively with race-and STEM-related content on social media. Additional frameworks are needed to account for the strategies Black youth employ to resist racism-related experiences and maximize affirming experiences on social media to achieve positive identity outcomes.

Phenomenological variant of ecological systems theory

The phenomenological variant of ecological systems theory (PVEST; Spencer et al., 1997; Spencer, 2006) compliments PYD perspectives by accounting for the roles of identity and oppression. PVEST emphasizes the importance of phenomenology (the social-cognitive process of meaning-making) for marginalized youth as they navigate, reflect on, and interpret their experiences with oppression in different social contexts over the course of development. In addition to dealing with common developmental stressors that all youth experience, Black youth are burdened with formulating coping strategies in the face of chronic, racism-related experiences that signal that they (and their dreams) are not valued across ecological contexts (Spencer et al., 1997; Seaton, 2020). This negative social feedback then triggers psychological defense mechanisms so that Black youth can continue to see themselves as valued contributors to their social space (Rogers, 2018; Jones et al., 2020). Spencer et al. (1997) note that the meaning-making processes that Black youth engage in response to racism-related stress informs the coping strategies they employ to ameliorate this distress. Racial identity formation is an inherently

phenomenological process for Black youth (Velez and Spencer, 2018). As they learn more about the historical, sociocultural, political, and economic dimensions around what it means to be Black in the United States, they are concurrently developing a social-cognitive frame that informs their interpretation of past, present, and future race-related experiences, including the modes of support available to them. For instance, scholars have noted that the development of positive racial identity is linked to collective, behavioral strategies of resistance against racial injustices (e.g., civic engagement; Hope and Spencer, 2017). Thus, the PVEST framework emphasizes the importance of Black youths' social-cognitive and behavioral strategies to attain support in light of racism-related stressors.

As Spencer et al. (1997) discuss, Black youths' meaning-making around racism-related stressors and available coping supports may differentially lead to adaptive or maladaptive functioning over time. As discussed, social media is replete with risk factors and opportunities for negative experiences (Rose and Tynes, 2015; Tynes et al., 2015; Edwards et al., 2016; Riehm et al., 2019; Plaisime et al., 2020; Maxie-Moreman and Tynes, 2022). However, we advance the idea that social media also contains protective and promotive tools for Black youth and their identity development, such that it functions as a "high-risk, high-reward" context. Specifically, social media may expand Black youths' perceived repertoire of support and facilitate positive development despite offline and online risks. Substantiating this notion, Evans (2022) used traditional and digital ethnographic methods to explore Black youths' (ages 14–24) social media use while they participated in a hip-hop based education program in Chicago. Though participants faced multiple offline (e.g., neighborhood disadvantage, school exclusion) and online (e.g., algorithm bias; see Peterson-Salahuddin, 2022) risk factors, the author found that Black youth employed multifaceted strategies (e.g., collective posting, intentional hashtag use, joining shared-interest groups) to resist algorithm bias, increase visibility of their music content, and connect with shared-interest peers both online and offline. These social media strategies helped facilitate Black youths' sense of connection to their racial and cultural identities while promoting their sense of efficacy as aspiring music professionals. These findings underscore how social media use, especially when combined with offline supports, can function as a promotive tool in Black youths' meaning making and facilitate positive identity development. Although Evans (2022) focused on Black youths' social media use in the context of hip hop education programming, we believe the emerging findings (e.g., collaborative social media use with same-interest peers and adults) have implications for STEM programming and Black youths' racial and STEM identity development.

To summarize, PVEST complements PYD by considering Black youths' social-cognitive and behavioral competencies in resisting oppressive forces and aligning ecological resources to achieve positive identity outcomes. In turn, identity functions as a psychosocial asset and cognitive frame that informs how Black

youth experience, reflect on, navigate, and respond to online and offline social experiences.

Identity development

Identity development, broadly, is a widely accepted developmental process for all youth, which involves crafting and understanding their place in the social world (Erikson, 1950). Across the life course, individuals' sense of self, which involves thoughts, feelings, actions, and behaviors, becomes more differentiated and complex but integrated over time (McAdams, 2013). The ways Black youth engage with and are affirmed by the social environment allows them to establish an identity that affords adaptive functioning, through a perspective of development that incorporates multiple dimensions of diversity (e.g., race, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, and interests; Spencer, 2006). Although many intersecting identity domains are important for individuals living in diverse historical, cultural, and political contexts (Galliher et al., 2017), in this article, we describe how this process may occur for two specific domains of Black youth's identity: racial identity and STEM identity.

Racial identity

Racial identity is a critically important facet of Black youth's identity development (Neblett et al., 2012; Williams et al., 2020). For Black youth, racial identity involves the *process* through which they explore, interrogate, negotiate, and come to understand the meaning behind their racial group (what does it mean to be Black?). Further, it involves the *content* of the meaning they derive that may include thoughts, attitudes, and feelings (what do I think and how do I feel about being Black?). Inevitably, this process also involves Black youth attempting to reconcile their thoughts and feelings based on their observations and experiences in society and in historical context (Spencer, 2006; Brittian, 2012). To date, most research suggests that racial identity is generally linked to positive developmental outcomes in Black youth, including higher self-esteem, academic achievement, and mental and behavioral health (Neblett et al., 2012; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014; Yip, 2018). Since the goal of this paper is to position social media as a place for Black youth to dream, we focus on the potential for positive racial identity development, although we acknowledge the potential for risk to exist as well (e.g., Tynes et al., 2020; Tao and Fisher, 2022).

Presently, the literature regarding racial identity considers this aspect of identity to be complex and multi-dimensional (Lee and Ahn, 2013; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014) and a facet of development that begins early for Black youth (e.g., Murray and Mandara, 2002). Moreover, the variability in process differentially links to indicators of well-being. For example, cognitive and behavioral actions such as exploration and interrogation do not conclusively or automatically lead to

positive feelings (also described as affect) or meaning making (Rogers and Way, 2018; Rogers et al., 2021a). In some cases, exploration may lead Black youth to discovering issues of historical and contemporary injustice (Mims and Williams, 2020). However, exploration can also lead to critical reflection about social inequities and for some Black youth become a catalyst for action and activism (Hope et al., 2019; Smith and Hope, 2020). Additionally, researchers have identified that variations in content also differentially relate to well-being. For example, beliefs and feelings around racial pride and affirmation are typically linked to positive development (Rivas-Drake et al., 2014). Some studies have identified negative beliefs and feelings around internalized shame can also be associated with racial identity development (due to racism-related experiences), which can consequently hinder or undermine other indicators of positive development (Johnson, 2020). While we recognize that social media has the potential to reinforce these negative evaluations through the proliferation of negative portrayals of Black people (Adams-Bass et al., 2014; Sullivan and Platenburg, 2017), our conceptual model explicates the ways in which social media also affords Black youth expanded access to a range of positive and affirming race-related content.

STEM identity

What does it mean to develop a STEM *identity*? Scholars have demonstrated that STEM identity development begins in childhood and continues through adolescence (Hachey, 2020). Children begin to formulate concepts about *what* STEM careers entail and *who* can be a STEM professional based on their early STEM-related experiences (Dou et al., 2019). Broadly, STEM identity has been conceptualized as having at least two components: STEM-related *skills* and sense of STEM *community*. Expectancy-value theory (Eccles et al., 1983; Eccles, 2009) situates STEM skill development within cognitive, motivational, and social processes. According to this perspective, youth develop appraisals of their STEM-related skills (e.g., mathematics, analytical reasoning; Siekmann and Korbel, 2016) and, consequently, expectancies around their ability to conduct STEM-related tasks. These expectancies are informed by social feedback received during educational experiences. The desire to further develop these skills is also motivated, in part, by the perceived value of these skills in achieving intrinsic (e.g., finding STEM fulfilling; Boekeloo et al., 2015) and/or extrinsic (e.g., STEM leading to good-paying jobs; Hossain and Robinson, 2012) goals.

STEM identity has also been conceptualized as developing within communities of practice. Wenger (1998) defines communities of practice as social networks that endeavor to build and refine practitioners with a repertoire of skills in service of shared goals and values. Communities of practice perspectives foreground the role of mentorship as a social process by which skills and knowledge are developed and transmitted (Kezar et al., 2017). Notably, access to mentorship has been identified as a

critical resource associated with Black youths' sense of efficacy and belonging in STEM (Martin, 2000; Brittian et al., 2009; Davis et al., 2019).

Two theoretical models have successfully synthesized and extended the skills and community dimensions of STEM identity in the context of Black youths' identity development: Content Learning and Identity Construction (CLIC; Varelas et al., 2012) and Black Student STEM Identity (BSSI; Collins, 2018). CLIC posits that Black youths' STEM identity develops through the ongoing process of meaning making, attending to both the content of the STEM community (e.g., tools, language, skills) and their relationships within the STEM community (e.g., connections to others in STEM; Varelas et al., 2012). BSSI foregrounds how contextual assets (e.g., mentors) and barriers (e.g., underrepresentation) differentially impact Black students' persistence in STEM as they attempt to integrate their racial and STEM identities (Collins, 2018). Both models emphasize how racial and STEM identities develop concurrently and bidirectionally among Black youth. We expand on this in our own conceptual model, advancing the idea that social media may serve as a resource in which Black youth can build their STEM skills, expand their sense of STEM community, and facilitate integration of their racial and STEM identities.

Conceptualizing social media

Over the past two decades, social media platforms have evolved rapidly. Compared to prior decades, Black youth now have access to a menu of social media platforms that have become increasingly interconnected and offer an array of content modalities that can be exchanged with remarkable speed. Though many social media platforms share similarities in this regard, Aichner et al. (2021) note that differences exist between platforms along several dimensions, including platform structure, primary content modality, target audience (s), and user motivation (s) for using certain platforms. Understandably, conceptualizations of social media use in the psychological literature have struggled to keep pace with the breadth and variability of social media use. For example, scholars have tended to operationalize social media use as a dose-effect construct based on frequency (e.g., time spent on social media per day; Riehm et al., 2019) or have focused on user experiences within a single platform (e.g., Black users' Twitter experiences; Harlow and Benbrook, 2019). While these operationalizations confer methodological benefits to their respective studies, they obfuscate user-level (e.g., frequencies, motivations) and platform-level (e.g., interface, algorithm) differences *between* social media platforms. In turn, variability in user-and platform-related aspects may be differentially associated with identity development processes for Black youth. Thus, we present a conceptualization of social media that attempts to account for the breadth and variety of online tools available to them.

Similarly recognizing the difficulty of conceptualizing social media, Carr and Hayes (2015) offer the following definition:

> Social media are Internet-based channels that allow users to opportunistically interact and selectively self-present, either in real-time or asynchronously, with both broad and narrow audiences who derive value from user-generated content and the perception of interaction with others. (p. 50)

This definition contains three conceptual points that are worth noting. First, it emphasizes the interactive and dynamic nature of social media. Traditional forms of media (e.g., film, television) have been characterized by a unidirectional flow of information from creators to consumers (Van Dijck and Poell, 2013). Notably, this unidirectional dynamic is also present in teacher-centered approaches to K-12 learning where student input is minimal (Serin, 2018). Thus, in contrast with both traditional media and educational contexts, social media offers users the opportunity to be both creators *and* consumers of content. Hypothetically, this feature has the potential to position Black youth as active and engaged agents who can dynamically and collectively shape the content and relational networks embedded in their social media contexts (Spencer, 2006; Halpern, 2017).

Second, it alludes to the role of anonymity (i.e., "selectively self-present") on social media platforms. Compared to in-person contexts, social media users are generally afforded more discretion in deciding the breadth and depth of personal information they would like to share with others (i.e., self-disclosure; Misoch, 2015). This aspect of social media may confer benefits to content exploration in social media contexts. Whereas participation in in-person activities tends to be readily observable by others (e.g., attending an afterschool science program), participating in activities on social media (e.g., viewing science content) is more difficult for outsiders to observe. The former raises the prospect of receiving social feedback which, in some cases, may not be desired. Thus, anonymity on social media may serve a protective function among users who are interested in exploring certain content while modulating unwanted social feedback.

Third, the definition by Carr and Hayes (2015) acknowledges that multiple audiences are embedded in social media contexts. Offline, Black youth are developing and navigating social interactions within multiple ecological contexts (e.g., families, schools, neighborhoods; Spencer, 2006; Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 2007). The increasing globalization of social media offers Black youth opportunities to connect with multiple social groups beyond their offline contexts. Although this aspect of social media has the potential to confer risks to Black youth with the prospect of hostile social interactions (e.g., experiencing online racial discrimination; Tynes et al., 2020), it may also connect them to supportive groups and positive experiences, particularly around shared cultural experiences. Notably, this may include exposure to the content of Black STEM professionals, which has implications for Black youths' racial and STEM identity development (Martin,

2000; Varelas et al., 2012; Brown et al., 2017; Collins, 2018; White et al., 2019). We expound upon this point in our conceptual model.

We augment this conceptualization of social media by Carr and Hayes (2015) by offering an additional dimension to consider: *content intrusiveness*. Derived from existing literature on social media advertising (Huang, 2019; Noguti and Waller, 2020), we define content intrusiveness as the degree to which users are exposed to content on a social media platform in a way that is unsolicited and not as a direct result of information-seeking behaviors. Said differently, it is the degree to which exposure to content on social media is driven primarily by the platform (i.e., high content intrusiveness) rather than the user (i.e., low content intrusiveness). Social media platforms that are high in content intrusiveness may have the potential to expose Black youth to both positive and negative messages related to their identity and interests. This may function as a "high-risk, high-reward" context for Black youth in the course of identity development as they navigate content that may contain novel identity-related information but may differ in socio-emotional valence (i.e., the extent to which content elicits positive or negative feelings; Michikyan et al., 2014).

In summary, current conceptualizations of social media in the psychological literature often obscure between-platform differences which, in turn, limits our ability to account for the tools available to Black youth for identity development processes. Compared to traditional media and offline contexts, social media platforms offer Black youth unique tools such as content creation, anonymity, and expanded access to diverse social groups. Further, content intrusiveness varies between platforms, which has implications for how Black youth are exposed to social media content and the different competencies they employ on each platform.

Conceptual model

In this section, we elucidate components of our conceptual model (Figure 1) as they relate to the development of racial identity and STEM identity in Black youth. We recognize this process as iterative and cyclical with changes in identity outcomes interactively influencing subsequent online and offline experiences in the context of racism-related stressors (Spencer, 2006). Multiple disciplines have examined offline influences on identity development long before the advent of contemporary social media platforms. These offline processes serve as both antecedents to and ongoing influences on Black youths' social media use. Here, we briefly acknowledge some of these influences at the distal (i.e., contexts furthest from the youth), proximal (i.e., contexts closest to the youth), and individual (i.e., within and between youth) level.

Distal influences

Black youths' social media use and identity development occur within a nexus of sociopolitical and economic structures that
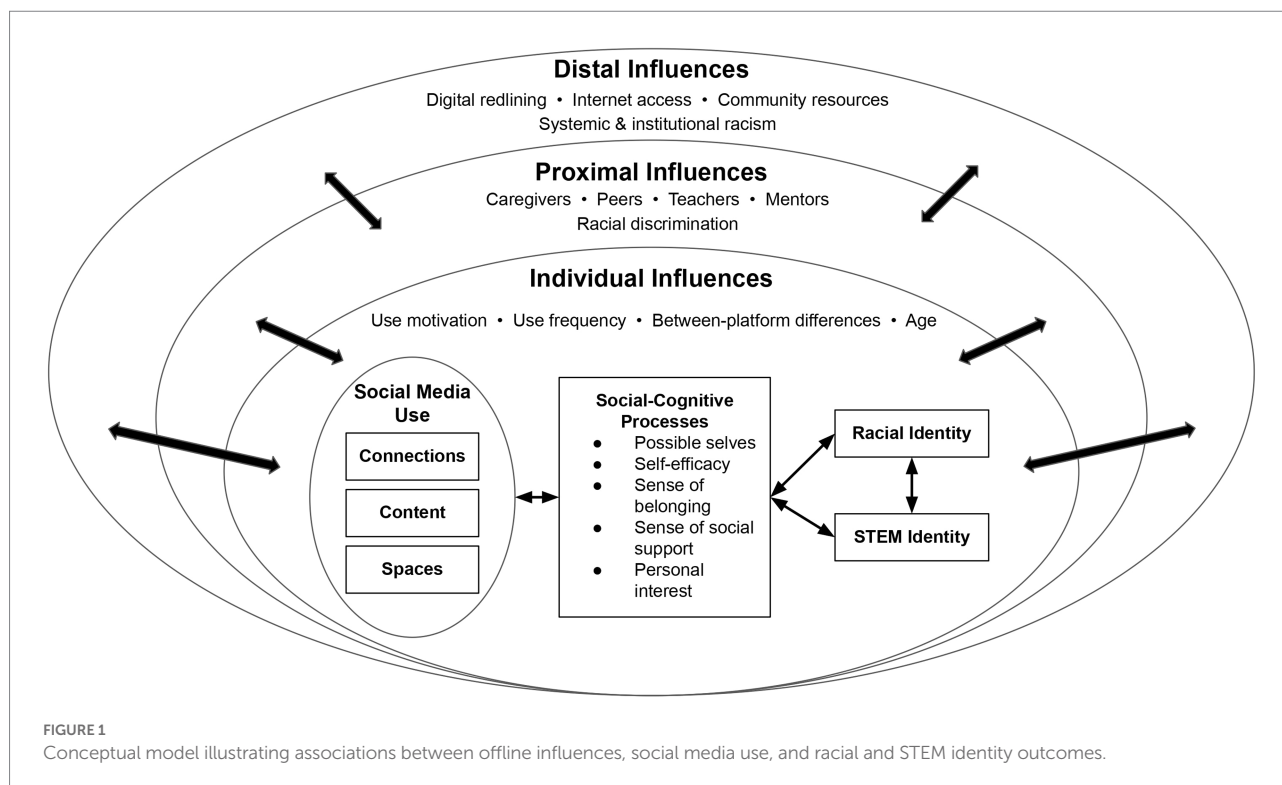
moderate their access to the Internet and other community resources. Internet access is facilitated by public investment in broadband infrastructure (Cambini and Jiang, 2009). Due to the intergenerational effects of redlining (Aaronson et al., 2021), Black youth may disproportionately reside in neighborhoods in which broadband infrastructure is poor or inaccessible. In a compelling analysis, Skinner et al. (2021) found that in-home broadband access decreased among urban and suburban neighborhoods that had been historically redlined by the U.S. government. Rural communities of color face even greater deficits in broadband investment (Friedline et al., 2020). The inequitable distribution of broadband infrastructure and Internet access is sometimes referred to as "digital redlining" (Skinner et al., 2021). Despite these barriers, Black youth may be adapting to digital redlining by accessing social media platforms in clever ways, such as through device sharing (Matthews et al., 2016) or by visiting public libraries (Hall, 2021). As interest in Black youths' social media use grows, scholars and educators should be mindful that these adaptive strategies may be formulated *in response to* historically rooted disinvestment in Black communities. Future studies should continue to consider the role of structural inequities on social media use and broader implications for Black youths' health, development, and adaptive functioning.

Whereas digital redlining presents a distal barrier to Black youth, other distal influences may enable access to race-and STEM-related resources in offline contexts. For example, public and private organizations can offer Black youth increased opportunities for racial identity exploration, such as through cultural events (e.g., festivals, celebrations), Black-owned businesses, and African American art and history museums. Access to racially affirming community spaces has been shown to play a promotive role in Black youths' racial identity development (Loyd and Williams, 2017; Mroczkowski et al., 2021). Relatedly, organizations can provide Black youth with STEM experiences through school-or community-based programming. Organizations such as *Girls Who Code* and the *National Society for Black Engineers* (both of which have thousands of local chapters throughout the United States) endeavor to provide culturally competent STEM mentorship to promote the retention of Black youth in the STEM pipeline. These offline resources represent opportunities for Black youth to access supportive adults and racially affirming communities of practice (Varelas et al., 2012; Bowers et al., 2015; Kezar et al., 2017). Both school-and community-based STEM programs have evidenced the potential to promote STEM identity development among Black youth (Martin, 2000; Loyd and Williams, 2017; Tan and Barton, 2018; Price et al., 2019). Thus, distal influences operate differentially to facilitate or obstruct opportunities for Black youths' racial and STEM identity development. Additionally, Black youth may access information about distal resources through social media.

Proximal influences

Relationships at the proximal level help bridge connections to distal resources (or overcome distal barriers) for Black youth. It is

FIGURE 1
Conceptual model illustrating associations between offline influences, social media use, and racial and STEM identity outcomes.

widely acknowledged that Black youths' identity development unfolds within meaningful relationships, including relationships with caregivers, peers, teachers, and mentors. The constellation of social processes embedded in these relationships, and their potential influence on Black youths' identity outcomes, are rich and nuanced (Lesane-Brown, 2006; Hughes et al., 2011, 2016; Smetana et al., 2015). We briefly highlight some of the identity-promoting processes that may occur in these relationships, starting with caregivers.

Through the process of racial socialization, Black caregivers (e.g., parents, grandparents) transmit a range of messages, values, and information about racial group membership to their children (Peters, 2002; Hughes et al., 2006). Racial socialization, in the context of a supportive caregiver-youth relationship, has the potential to shape positive trajectories in Black youths' racial identity development (e.g., enhancing private regard; Williams and Smalls-Glover, 2014). Black caregivers also equip their children with cultural coping skills (e.g., preparation for bias; Hughes et al., 2009; Anderson et al., 2020; Scott et al., 2020) to help them resist the detrimental effects of discrimination and unfair treatment. Similarly, caregivers facilitate the growth of Black youths' STEM identity by providing instrumental support (e.g., furnishing transportation to STEM programs; King et al., 2021), emotional support (e.g., affirming feedback on STEM interests; Park-Taylor et al., 2022), and access to social capital (e.g., STEM professionals in the family network; Saw, 2020).

Peer relationships become increasingly important during adolescent development (Brown and Larson, 2009). For Black youth, peer relationships represent a potential resource for positive racial and STEM identity development. The availability of Black peers, particularly in school contexts, is associated with higher racial identity exploration and affirmation among Black youth (Derlan and Umaña-Taylor, 2015). These relationships are also associated with increased racial centrality (i.e., importance of racial identity to the self), which may serve a protective function in school contexts in which same-race peer availability is low (Douglass et al., 2017; Santos et al., 2017; Hoffman et al., 2019). Similarly, the promotive role of peers has been documented for STEM identity development. Dou et al. (2019) found that children who talked about STEM-related topics more frequently with their peers were more likely to report a stronger STEM identity in high school, suggesting that peer dynamics feature prominently in youths' STEM identity development. Notedly, emotional and instrumental support provided by same-race peers is associated with Black youths' feelings of school belonging (Tatum, 2004), academic achievement (Byrd and Chavous, 2011), and STEM persistence (Lancaster and Xu, 2017).

Teachers play a powerful role in Black youths' racial and STEM identity development by shaping their sense of belonging in the classroom. Black students disproportionately face discriminatory and exclusionary treatment from their teachers (e.g., tracking and teacher bias; Lucas and Berends, 2007), which threatens positive racial and STEM identity development. However, scholars have also identified characteristics of the student-teacher relationship that may be promotive for Black youth. Legette et al. (2020) persuasively illustrate that a healthy student-teacher relationship is predicated on the teacher recognizing the humanity of their

Black students. One way that teachers may convey this message is by signaling that Black youths' racial identity is valued in the classroom, such as through the utilization of culturally sustaining curricula and race-affirming messages (Ladson-Billings, 2014; Quinn, 2020). Recognizing the value Black youth bring to the classroom also undergirds the strategies teachers can employ to nurture Black youths' STEM identity. Teachers may do this by taking the time to develop Black youths' STEM-related skills (e.g., science, mathematics; Richards and Robertson, 2016), recruiting and supporting them through advanced coursework (Davis et al., 2019; Grissom et al., 2020), sharing information about paths to different careers in STEM (Craig et al., 2019), and affirming their brilliance in STEM (Gholson and Robinson, 2019). Thus, when teachers celebrate the contributions of their Black students, and take the time to nurture their academic development, this has the potential to contribute positively to Black youths' racial and STEM identity trajectories.

Mentors (i.e., supportive nonparental adults) also feature in Black youths' identity development. Similar to caregivers and teachers, mentors may provide emotional and instrumental support to Black youth in ways that nurture racial *and* STEM identity development. Substantiating this point, Hurd et al. (2012) found that Black youth who reported having support from a mentor also reported higher private regard towards their racial identity and exhibited more positive long-term educational attainment. A close mentor-mentee relationship may be an important context in which mentors transmit social and cultural skills to Black youth which, in turn, enhances Black youths' social and educational competencies (Hurd and Sellers, 2013). Importantly, Black youth have identified access to mentors as integral to their persistence in STEM in previous studies (Martin, 2000; Brittian et al., 2009; Davis et al., 2019; Beauchamp et al., 2021). Notably, having access to same-race mentors in STEM may facilitate racial and STEM identity integration (see Collins, 2018) by expanding Black youths' range of possible selves (Oyserman and James, 2009; Burt and Johnson, 2018; Wade-Jaimes et al., 2021).

Individual influences

Black youths' social media use is influenced by individual-level interests and motivations that are developed within the distal and proximal influences previously discussed. Namely, Black youth may have differing motivations for using social media in ways that inform which platforms they use and how they use them. For instance, they may use platforms with a more user-driven experience to maintain offline relationships (e.g., Snapchat, Facebook; Butler and Matook, 2015; Throuvala et al., 2019) or platforms higher in content intrusiveness to explore new content and connections (e.g., Twitter, TikTok; Harlow and Benbrook, 2019; Klug et al., 2021). Further, a desire

to modulate social feedback by remaining anonymous might inform how Black youth navigate social media spaces (e.g., "lurking"; Edelmann, 2013). Lastly, Black youths' social media use frequencies and motivations may differ between platforms. These "use profiles" may be associated with different processes through which Black youth engage with identity-related content (Scott et al., 2017).

Social media use

As discussed previously, when Black youth use social media, they are entering an online context with unique features compared to their offline contexts. These features include bidirectional flow of information (i.e., content creation and consumption), the option of anonymity, expanded access to social groups, and content intrusiveness. Further, the preceding discussion foregrounds the importance of two aspects in Black youths' identity development trajectories: (1) supportive relationships with caring adults and peers, and (2) access to racial-and STEM-promoting contextual resources. We posit that Black youth may use the tools and artifacts available on social media to enhance these aspects of positive identity development by maintaining offline relationships, exploring new content and connections, and trying different modes of self-representation.

Before the advent of Internet-based technologies, the potential for Black youth to benefit from supportive offline relationships would have been contingent on their ability to connect in-person. If a close friend, family member, or mentor moved away, the ability to maintain the connection (and benefit from it) would have been limited. With contemporary social media platforms, Black youth can maintain and enhance these offline connections in dynamic ways. For example, Facebook allows users to create private groups (i.e., users must be invited to the space to interact with other users; Rothschild and Aharony, 2021). Black youth can create or enter these spaces to maintain contact with multiple family members or peers that they trust. Further, users can exchange, engage with, and comment on a wide range of text and audiovisual content in these spaces. This facilitates opportunities for Black youth to discuss race-and STEM-related content with supportive adults and peers that they know, but may not have direct access to, in their offline contexts. Of note, private social media spaces with trusted offline users may function as a space in which Black youth can receive positive feedback about their STEM interests and skills. This may be particularly beneficial if they are situated in educational contexts marked by exclusionary practices.

In addition to maintaining offline relationships, we posit that social media expands and offers additional opportunities for Black youth's racial identity exploration *via* access to new content and social connections. Based on prior literature, this may occur in two ways: as a context-driven process (e.g., racial socialization and exposure; Hughes et al., 2006; Neblett et al., 2009) and/or a youth-driven process (e.g., through youth's interest and agency; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2013). In the former, social media might implicitly

and explicitly expose Black youth to cultural content and information (e.g., historical and cultural knowledge, art, and music) that is not readily available in their immediate offline contexts, which can also facilitate racial pride and affirmation. For example, *Young Chicago Authors* is a non-profit organization that educates young people in the art of creative writing and the power of self-expression through workshops, events, and education. This organization has hosted spoken word events on Instagram. Representing mostly Black and Latinx youth and young adults, we believe that implicit and explicit racial socialization is likely occurring in these spaces. In the latter, as a youth-driven process, Black youth may also actively search for content that they find interesting and that speaks positively to their racial identity.

Similarly, access to racially affirming contextual support, particularly outside of schools, has the potential to keep Black youths' STEM dreams alive (Davis et al., 2019; Price et al., 2019; Young et al., 2019; Tan and Barton, 2020). We believe that social media has the potential to enhance and expand these contextual supports for Black youth by connecting them to racially affirming STEM communities. For example, the *National Society for Black Engineers* (NSBE) has a prominent social media presence on Instagram and Twitter. In these digital spaces, Auguste et al. (2018) found that users exchanged instrumental support (e.g., resume drafting, study tips), emotional support (e.g., cultural affirmations), and professional opportunities (e.g., college preparation, job openings). Thus, social media has the potential to facilitate STEM identity development for Black youth by providing access to positive feedback and social support that may be limited in offline contexts. Relatedly, social media may expand access to the programming efforts of offline youth STEM organizations. For example, *YOUmedia* operates as a digital extension of the Chicago Public Library and endeavors to serve as a space to connect youth with books, media, and skilled staff for STEM and academic development. Among Black youth who have access to this space, this facilitates opportunities to develop STEM-related skills and learn about different STEM fields (e.g., graphic design, 2D/3D design, etc.).

Another unique facet of social media as it relates to Black youth's identity development is the opportunity to create and alter one's representation more easily relative to one's offline representation. Being able to modify one's visual representations (e.g., avatars, thumbnails; Subrahmanyam and Šmahel, 2011) offers Black youth the opportunity to enhance, reinforce, reflect, represent, or display aspects of their appearance that speak to their positive racial identity. In this regard, programmers and developers should be sensitive to offering a variety of options that allow Black youth to freely explore and create a representation of themselves in virtual space, such as modifiable skin color, facial features, and hair textures and styles. The representations that Black youth create may or may not exactly replicate or reflect youth's offline physical appearance; exploration is indeed a normative process.

In summary, though social media platforms represent a place for negative experiences to occur, they also offer Black youth the opportunity to both seek out and create culturally affirming spaces. This may confer several benefits if they are situated in disempowering offline contexts (classrooms, schools, neighborhoods). Whether the process occurs through socialization or as a youth-driven process, we believe exposure may be particularly important for Black youth who are underrepresented in their schools or neighborhoods or for youth who do not readily have access to cultural or STEM information and role models. Importantly, culturally affirming spaces can also reinforce and celebrate Black youth for who they are and how they contribute to the collective space.

Social-cognitive processes

Thus far, we have advanced the notion that social media may serve to expand access to race-and STEM-affirming resources for Black youth and have implicated the role of social-cognition (e.g., meaning-making) in the identity development process (Spencer, 2006; Velez and Spencer, 2018). We propose five social-cognitive processes that may mediate or influence the associations between social media use and positive identity outcomes: possible selves, self-efficacy, sense of belonging, sense of social support, and personal interest.

Possible selves

Before the explosion of social media use, identity scholars acknowledged the role of possible selves in identity development. Possible selves (i.e., versions of the self that people may want to become in the near and distant future; Oyserman and James, 2009) serve self-regulatory functions by governing how one directs their cognitive, affective, behavioral, and social resources to bridge the discrepancies between their current self and desired future self (Oyserman and Destin, 2010; Frazier et al., 2021). From a young age, Black youth contend with negative messages about their race through exposure to negative media portrayals and discriminatory treatment (Adams-Bass et al., 2014; Seaton, 2020). Black children similarly attend to representations of STEM early in development and begin to discern *who* is represented in STEM professions (Aladé et al., 2020; London et al., 2021). Black Americans continue to be underrepresented in the STEM workforce (Rivers, 2017; Graf et al., 2018), which limits the visibility of Black STEM representatives in Black youths' offline contexts. Consequently, Black youth may struggle to craft a possible self in STEM when they do not see themselves reflected in these professions.

Social media may help ameliorate these barriers by connecting Black youth to cultural artifacts (e.g., hashtags) that expand the repertoire of possible selves (Gevisa, 2020). For example, social media campaigns such as "I, Too, Am" and @BlackInNeuro have increased the visibility of Black STEM professionals (Butler, 2014; George Mwangi et al., 2018; Diep, 2020; Murray et al., 2021; Carr et al., 2022). Although conducted with adults, we posit that these studies illustrate the potential to expand the range of possible

selves for Black youth by mitigating negative racial stereotypes and signaling who gets to become a STEM person (Ginwright, 2007; Oyserman and James, 2009; Collins, 2018; Schlegel et al., 2019). It should be noted that while the tools of social media (e.g., selective self-disclosure) have the potential to proliferate unrealistic portrayals (e.g., perfectionism; Harren et al., 2021), these same tools confer Black youth increased agency to author positive identities and counternarratives against negative stereotypes (Rogers and Way, 2018; Rogers et al., 2021b). We believe when Black youth can see it, they can *dream* it.

Self-efficacy

Black youth may strive for a desired future self to the extent that they view the path to get there as feasible and attainable, implicating the role of self-efficacy. Self-efficacy, or one's perception of their ability to achieve goals and effect change (Bandura, 2000; Eccles, 2009), is a prominent feature in theoretical and empirical work on Black youths' racial and STEM identity development (Spencer, 2006; Varelas et al., 2012; Collins, 2018; White et al., 2019). Black youth face racism-related stressors in their educational and social contexts that present obstacles to positive identity development. Their ability to resist these negative social experiences (e.g., cultural coping; Anderson et al., 2019) and believe in their STEM-related abilities (Corneille et al., 2020) is undergirded, in part, by self-efficacy. In turn, developing self-efficacy is scaffolded by supportive social feedback and relationships (Martin, 2000; Brittian et al., 2009; Bowers et al., 2015; Davis et al., 2019). Social media may enhance Black youths' self-efficacy by facilitating access to race-and STEM-promoting spaces. For example, digital learning spaces such as *YOUmedia* expand opportunities for Black youth to develop their self-efficacy in STEM by practicing skills and accessing supportive mentors and cultural artifacts. Similarly, the racially affirming social media spaces offered by organizations such as the *National Society for Black Engineers* may equip Black youth with a sense of efficacy in their abilities to meet the social and professional demands of STEM.

Sense of belonging

Belonging, or the feeling that one is valued in a social group, is widely regarded as a fundamental human need (Maslow, 1954; Allen et al., 2021). Identity development is intertwined with seeking belonging as youth gauge social feedback to determine which groups affirm their authentic selves (Spencer, 2006; Griffin et al., 2017). One aspect of Black youths' racial and STEM identity development is connecting with adults and peers who affirm these facets of their identity (Gray et al., 2018). Social media represents opportunities for Black youth to connect with content and communities that value their racial and STEM identities. Of note, the increased visibility of racially affirming support on social media may bridge connections to offline support in higher education. This is a critical resource for Black youths' persistence in STEM, particularly in predominantly White educational settings (Palmer et al., 2011; Morton et al., 2019). Interestingly, the

sense of belonging cultivated through social media use may occur even when other users are unknown offline (Watkins et al., 2017) or under conditions of anonymity (De Choudhury and De, 2014).

Sense of social support

Engagement with affirming spaces and content on social media may enhance Black youths' sense of social support. Social support has been conceptualized as consisting of emotional (e.g., offering comfort during emotional distress) and instrumental (e.g., helping with homework) dimensions (Taylor, 2011). Though social support and sense of belonging have conceptual overlap (Cohen and McKay, 1984), we posit that they operate as distinct processes in our model. Sense of belonging requires social interaction and connectedness with others. This may not be a prerequisite for social support in social media contexts, particularly for the dimension of instrumental support. For example, in the social media spaces described thus far, Black youth may be exposed to content that offers instructions (e.g., how-to videos) relevant to certain domains of racial identity (e.g., self-presentation, art, music) and STEM identity (e.g., application of scientific concepts, college preparation) development. The user who shares the instructional content may not be known to the youth. Nonetheless, this type of social media content may enhance Black youths' sense of social support by equipping them with tools to meet desired goals (e.g., expression, achievement) within their racial and STEM identities.

Personal interest

The last process we propose, personal interest, is built on a simple premise: for Black youth to pursue STEM, they must be interested in and enjoy STEM. Enjoyment of STEM is broadly recognized as youths' positive affect towards STEM tasks and activities (Falk et al., 2016; Burt and Johnson, 2018). Educators may facilitate children's enjoyment of STEM early in development through the use of fun and active learning strategies (Bedard et al., 2019). As Black children transition into adolescence, gaining the ability to evaluate their social world more critically, enjoying STEM becomes increasingly tied to its perceived relevance to and reflection of their lived experience (Eccles et al., 1983; Kumar et al., 2018; Mark, 2018; Gray et al., 2020). The use of culturally relevant pedagogy in STEM education and programming is associated with Black youths' increased interest, and persistence, in STEM (Mark, 2018; Gray et al., 2020; Younge et al., 2022). Engagement in racially affirming STEM spaces on social media may help facilitate feelings of enjoyment in STEM by linking its utility to Black youths' sociocultural background and lived experiences.

Intersecting racial and STEM identities

As suggested by the bidirectional arrow in our conceptual model, Black youths' racial and STEM identity development are not mutually exclusive processes (Martin, 2000; Syed,

2010; Varelas et al., 2012; Brown et al., 2017; Collins, 2018; White et al., 2019). Rather, they are intertwined and contoured by historical, sociocultural, and economic forces. At the distal level, Black youth are disproportionately represented in under-resourced schools and neighborhoods, which constrains resources available for STEM skill development (e.g., access to technology; Lukes and Cleveland, 2021). Further, Black youth often contend with devaluing social messages through discriminatory and exclusionary practices (e.g., tracking, teacher bias, harsh discipline; Lucas and Berends, 2007; Kupchik and Ward, 2014; Blake et al., 2016). These practices threaten positive racial and STEM identity development by restricting access to social support (e.g., peers and teachers) and effectively signaling that Black youths' STEM development is not valued in the education system. Over time, these negative social messages may contribute to STEM identity integration difficulties, particularly among high achieving Black youth, as they navigate the effects of negative stereotyping and differing attributions for their success in STEM (Larnell et al., 2014; Collins, 2018; Collins et al., 2020). Social media may offer Black youth a means of resisting these negative experiences, expand their opportunities to create and explore, and facilitate the integration of their racial and STEM identities (Syed and McLean, 2016). Future research might explore how these two domains of Black youth's identities develop separately or in tandem over time (e.g., Syed, 2010). Aligned with PYD perspectives and PVEST, we suggest this dynamic process occurs iteratively within youth and bidirectionally between youth and their environment (online and offline) over the course of development.

Discussion

Establishing a sense of identity is an important facet of development for all adolescents that involves crafting and creating, understanding, and negotiating their place in the social world (Erikson, 1950; Spencer, 2006). In this article, we focus on two prominent domains of identity for Black youth - racial identity and STEM identity - and present a conceptual model that elucidates how this complex and dynamic process may occur within youth and between youth and their environment. For Black youth, the process of establishing their identities around these two specific domains may involve resisting stereotypes and marginalization around race and STEM. At the same time, racial identity and STEM identity development can be a beautifully creative and affirming endeavor where Black youth forge a new and authentic path for themselves. Youths' identity formation also occurs in the context of proximal

influences, including youth's relationships with family, peers, teachers, and mentors, and distal influences, including school, community resources, and access to technology. Notably, social media offers new opportunities for creation, influence, and engagement (Deaton, 2015; Kenna and Hensley, 2019; Dragseth, 2020). Just as in offline contexts, distal and proximal influences differentially constrain or support positive identity development that can occur through social media. We view social media as a "high-risk, high-reward" context, where proximal and distal influences intersect and where Black youth can engage intentional strategies to resist disempowering experiences and access tools to support their interests and development.

Investigations into how Black youth use social media to create and explore for identity development represents an important and exciting avenue of research. While there are several research questions scholars could pursue in this area, we suggest four based on our preceding discussion. First, what roles do passive (e.g., content exposure) and active (e.g., content creation) social media processes play in Black youths' identity development? Second, what processes bridge offline and online experiences (e.g., caregiver conversations with youth)? Third, in what ways are Black youths' offline and online identities congruent, and how might social media facilitate integration with other facets of identity (e.g., gender and sexual orientation)? Fourth, what role does social media play in Black youths' development over the life course (e.g., from early adolescence to emerging adulthood)?

In conclusion, this special issue invites authors to consider the ways in which Black youth continue freedom dreaming. Both the online and offline world are replete with barriers and negative messages that threaten to minimize Black youths' dreams and visions for the future. Yet, as a rapidly evolving and increasingly globalized forum, social media also affords Black youth unique tools and opportunities to resist barriers and cultivate social and educational experiences outside of their classrooms, schools, and neighborhoods. When Black youth are told to make their freedom dreams *smaller*, our hope is that future investigations will continue to reveal how Black youth use social media to make their freedom dreams *bigger* early and often.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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Liberatory school counseling practices to promote freedom dreaming for Black youth

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The American School Counseling Association calls for professional school counselors to support the holistic development and success of all students. However, the field of school counseling is riddled with practices that have harmed and dehumanized Black students. For example, school counselors engage in practices (e.g., social–emotional learning and vocational guidance), which work to reinforce white supremacy and dehumanize Black students. Further, school counselors may also contribute to the ways that the basic and unique needs of Black students are overlooked, leading to the continued systemic adultification of Black students. What is needed is a radical imagination of school counseling, which centers on homeplace as the foundation in order to engage in freedom dreaming. In this article, the authors engage this radical imagination to detail an antiracist view of school counseling practice that embraces freedom dreaming and homeplace through healing and Indigenous educational practices, youth-led school counseling, and critical hip-hop practices to promote joy, creativity, power, love, resistance, and liberation.

KEYWORDS

freedom dreaming, school counseling, antiracism, Black joy, liberation

Introduction

The American School Counseling Association's [ASCA] ethical standards (ASCA, 2022) state that school counselors are advocates for systemic change who promote students being treated with dignity and provide access to services that support a safe school environment. School counseling, in its current form, is a program tailored to the academic, social–emotional, and career needs of students through continuous collaboration with students, families, and educators (ASCA, 2019). In this paper, we imagine the ways that school counseling programs can truly uplift the voices of Black and brown youth, support their healing as they traverse new pathways to learning, and protect them from systemic harm. We imagine school counseling programs that love and protect youth (Mayes and Byrd, 2022) by building on homeplace in an effort to promote freedom dreaming (hooks, 1990; Kelley, 2003). Considering about acts of love, we imagine a

school counseling world that incorporates historically valued practices, especially those still practiced within Indigenous communities, to ground the healing practices used to respond to youth's mental health needs. We also look at how school counseling can be shaped by youth, partnering with them to develop systems, and practices that are safe and welcoming for all students. We believe hip-hop culture can be the vehicle to engage youth in a continued interrogation of the world around them while also providing space where students are encouraged to have fun, be themselves, and experience joy.

The purpose of this paper is to freedom dream school counseling. We define this as a process of collectively envisioning school counseling as an act of love, dreaming of the school building as a place that protects and uplifts the various identities that students encompass; a process of radically imagining school counseling without focusing on the barriers that have historically plagued reform (Kelley, 2003; Love, 2019). Rather than focusing on the obstacles that Black youth have to overcome in education, freedom dreaming focuses on the school counseling we would like to see—one that imagines mutual respect, joy, and love at the center of all programming (Kelley, 2003). Although we recognize that our realities may be constrained by current and historical challenges present in K-12 education, we frame the work needed to actualize our dreaming in antiracism and antiracist practices.

We utilize Mayes and Byrd's (2022) framework to ground our understanding of antiracist school counseling. That is, we define antiracism as an action-oriented process that begins with the development of critical consciousness, focused on the continuous reflection of the school counselors' and their students' power, privilege, and oppression, and how it impacts their experiences within the school setting. School counselors reflect on how their programming centers love and protection of Black and brown youth. As school counselors focus on loving and protecting all students, especially Black youth, they advocate to dismantle systems and practices that are oppressive. Finally, school counselors work with various communities and educational stakeholders to build new programs that love and protect students.

Additionally, we assert that a goal within antiracist school counseling is to create and sustain a homeplace. We define homeplace as a space where students are seen as whole human beings, allowed to grow and heal. Homeplaces exist to center the joy and excellence of youth as they resist the dominant narratives that perpetuate negative stereotypes of Black youth (hooks, 1990; Carey, 2019; Love, 2019).

Although the paper will radically imagine a school counseling space that welcomes Black youth, important to note are the historical challenges Black youth have faced because of the United States (U.S.) education system, specifically in school counseling. Historically, in the U.S., Black Americans have been the only population criminalized for learning to read and write (Hannah-Jones et al., 2019). The remnants of keeping Black youth from learning continue through zero-tolerance

policies, standardized testing, and curriculum development that centers on whiteness and white societal norms. As such, school counseling practices, while attempting to provide more equitable services, have focused on interventions that change students to comply with the industrial model of education with little to no emphasis on changing the system to be more inclusive to students who identify as Black, Indigenous, and/or People of Color (BIPOC; McMahon et al., 2014).

In response to the state-sanctioned murder of George Floyd by police officer Derek Chauvin in the summer of 2020, scholars in education and school counseling (re)viewed their practices in K-12 schools to focus on antiracism. Antiracism, while not a new concept in education, has recently made appearances in school counseling literature (Edirmanasinghe et al., 2022; Holcomb-McCoy, 2022b; Mayes and Byrd, 2022). Antiracist school counseling calls for school counselors to reflect on the ways racism intersects with other oppressions and how it impacts structures within K-12 school systems. Additionally, antiracist school counselors actively work to dismantle the policies and practices within these structures to center the needs of minoritized students (Holcomb-McCoy, 2022a; Mayes and Byrd, 2022). While communities of school counselors are developing more resources to implement antiracist school counseling practices, politicians are fighting against inclusion through legislation that criminalizes antiracist work. In the U.S., 17 states have signed into law or taken states to restrict teachers from teaching anything related to critical race theory (Schwartz, 2021). Additionally, states have proposed anti-Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and/or Queer (LGBTQ) legislation (e.g., Florida HB 1557, of the "Don't Say Gay Bill"), anti-Social Emotional Learning (SEL) legislation (e.g., Oklahoma SB 1442), and even anti-school counseling legislation (e.g., Alabama HB 457). Although this legislation sheds a light on the obstacles educators are facing in providing practices that uplift youth from various historically oppressed identities, in this paper, we focus on envisioning school counseling practices that support and celebrate Black youth despite the frequent challenges.

School counseling history

In the early 1900s, the profession of school counseling began with a focus on vocational guidance. More specifically, the "United States was in the throes of protest and reform stemming from "negative social conditions" related to the industrial revolution" and school counseling was seen as a way to help students prepare for new opportunities in an industrialized nation (Stephens and Lindsey, 2011, p. 15). As school counselors embarked on this vocational guidance endeavor, it is important to understand the social context in which it is rooted. Vocational guidance was shaped in predominantly white schools to meet the needs of white, often working class, students who were being served by white school counselors (Atkins and Oglesby, 2019). Governmental legislation, such as the National Defense

Education Act, shaped vocational guidance and situated the needs of predominantly white students and their families in the 1950s. As such, vocational guidance purposefully overlooked and excluded the vocational needs of BIPOC students. To further exacerbate inequities in vocational guidance, the onset of desegregation after the Brown V. Board decision may have allowed for Black students to attend white schools, but it did not necessarily mean that school counseling service delivery included Black students. In fact, even after the formation of the national professional school counseling organization, American School Counselor Association (ASCA), in 1958, there was only a desire to formalize school counseling but there was no guidance or training related to multiculturalism and racial equity (Stephens and Lindsey, 2011; Atkins and Oglesby, 2019).

Under the guidance of ASCA, school counseling has grown and shifted over the years to be more holistic and comprehensive, often through the advocacy of other organizations and leaders. ASCA expanded the school counseling profession to focus on vocational guidance (career development), socioemotional development, and academic counseling (Atkins and Oglesby, 2019). However, this focus was still short-sided as it did not account for the ways in which systemic barriers can interrupt and stifle healthy development, especially for BIPOC children. Thus, school counselors were more focused on "fixing kids" rather than the broken systems that render them vulnerable. However, with advocacy from the National Center for Transforming School Counseling (n.d.) housed within the Education Trust, there was a greater call for school counseling to be more impactful. In particular, the NCTSC called for school counselors to center the relationships between students and their school environment as a way to identify and reduce the effects of institutional barriers that harm students. More specifically, this is called for a proactive and intentional vision of school counseling that incorporated leadership, advocacy, teaming and collaboration, counseling and coordination, and assessment and use of data (National Center for Transforming School Counseling, n.d.). The advocacy of the NCTSC and Education Trust both propelled the field of school counseling forward as ASCA adapted these components to form a national comprehensive school counseling model to support the holistic success of all students through the use of data and systemic supports (ASCA, 2019; Hines et al., 2020).

Despite this growth in the school counseling profession, what is clear is that even at its best, it is imperfect. From the inception of school counseling, which is situated in American schooling, it remains inherently anti-Black. For example, despite their being school counseling roles in segregated schools, desegregation meant that Black students were pushed into white schools under the assumption that white schools were superior (Smith, 1971). While Black school counselors did exist in Black schools, they were often the first to be pushed out of desegregated schools. As such, Black students became subjected to white school counselors who, more often than

not, were "absent from the struggle of Black pupils to obtain their civil rights...simply because the results of their practices have been indistinguishable from the racist practices of the total society" (Smith, 1971, p. 348). While desegregation began nearly 70 years ago, school counseling practices continue to be indistinguishable from racism as counselors continue to overlook, exclude, and render Black youth as nonhuman bodies unworthy of support while perpetuating opportunity gaps and institutional racism (Drake and Oglesby, 2020; Gilmore and Bettis, 2021; Mayes et al., 2021; Washington et al., 2022). Anti-Blackness is particularly evident in the current literature that details the ways in which Black youth indicate the ways school counselors overlook their needs, refuse to work with them, and hold low expectations for their success rather than addressing the institutional policies and systems that trouble the waters (Gilmore and Bettis, 2021; Mayes et al., 2021). Anti-Blackness and the dehumanization of BIPOC students are a part of the troubled history of K-12 schooling which terrorized students through physical and psychological violence including forced assimilation [(Miller, 2017; Gone et al., 2019; Peters, 2019; Austen and Bilefsky, 2021); e.g., residential schools for Indigenous youth, mass graves of Indigenous youth who were murdered in residential schools, inadequate resources and dilapidated structures for schools that serve high minority schools, and the model minority myth and anti-Asian violence]. Further, school counselors often contribute to the policing of Black students through the implementation of comprehensive school counseling programs that center on compliance and whiteness rather than civic engagement and liberation from oppressive systems and policies (Atkins and Oglesby, 2019; Love, 2019; Drake and Oglesby, 2020).

We ought not to be surprised, then, that a field with beginnings steeped in white supremacy, racism, and sexism still operates in the same fashion to disenfranchise and excludes minoritized students, especially Black and brown children and adolescents (Atkins and Oglesby, 2019; Drake and Oglesby, 2020; Gilmore and Bettis, 2021; Mayes et al., 2021; Washington et al., 2022, etc.). Rather than being limited by the current system and its shortcomings, it is important to engage a radical imagination of what could be. Said differently, how might we invite the limitless possibilities of freedom dreaming to the center of the school counseling profession? Freedom dreaming is an opportunity to envision what could be without the constraints of what is, a way forward that centers intersectional Black joy, excellence, community, restoration, and resistance (Kelley, 2003; Love, 2019; Carey, 2020).

Antiracism and freedom dreaming in school counseling

As previously mentioned, school counseling history is riddled with exclusionary and discriminatory practices despite

shifts in the profession. However, school counseling need not be limited by its own history but rather liberate that history through the radical imagination of freedom dreaming to envision limitless possibilities. What is needed, then, is an understanding of both antiracism and freedom dreaming to guide this process to not only envision possibilities but also to work toward such.

Antiracism in school counseling

While antiracism is not a new concept, it was more formally introduced into the field of professional school counseling following the gruesome murder of George Floyd by police officer Derek Chauvin in April 2020. While this murder was not the first of state-sanctioned violence against BIPOC individuals, in particular, Black individuals, it sparked a racial reckoning that made real the often ignored racist realities that BIPOC face. With racist realities front and center, many individuals, including educators and school counselors, turned a critical eye toward their own practices and commitments to equity and social justice in their respective spaces. According to the EdWeek Research Center (2020), after the spring/summer of 2020, Black lives matter protests, more educators, especially white educators, were better able to see how schools were ineffective in bridging equity gaps. Further, while most educators identified themselves as antiracist/abolitionist and also were at least somewhat willing to teach/support the implementation of an antiracist curriculum, they also lacked training and resources to support such (EdWeek Research Center, 2020).

Foundationally critical on the path to antiracist school counseling is the work of Holcomb-McCoy (2007, 2022a), who called for professional school counselors to center social justice as a part of their work. As such, Holcomb-McCoy (2007, 2022a) provided a framework for social justice school counseling that highlighted the ways that students are impacted by systemic oppression and provided a pathway for school counselors to address such through culturally responsive practices. This framework included six components: counseling and intervention planning; consultation; school, community, and family partnership; collecting and using data; confronting and challenging bias; and coordinating student services and supports (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007, 2022a). These components provided a lens to which school counselors could not only understand systemic issues both inside and outside of school but also a framework to which school counselors could engage said system to work more comprehensively to remove barriers in order to support the success of all students.

While social justice and antiracism are not the same, antiracism builds on the work of social justice (Holcomb-McCoy, 2022b). In particular, antiracism in school counseling intentionally focuses not only on understanding the intersectional nature of racism (i.e., racism and ableism, racism and sexism) and its impact on policies and practices in K-12 schools but also calls for school counselors to proactively dismantle such while building new policies and practices that center the humanity of minoritized students (Holcomb-McCoy, 2022a,b; Mayes and Byrd, 2022). At its very core, antiracism involves an ongoing engagement with the following practices: (a) we must acknowledge that racism is real and present in all systems of society, (b) we must unlearn colonized ways of being and knowing, (c) we must learn about the roots of racism and understand the intersectional nature of oppression, (d) we must actively address our own internalized oppression and racist behaviors, (e) we must challenge ways of knowing and doing that has been normalized, (f) we must center critical theories as a way to develop our understanding and skills in identifying oppression, and (g) we must actively engage in dismantling oppressive beliefs, policies, and practices wherever we may encounter them (Bell, 1992; Kishimoto, 2018; Williams et al., 2021). As this is an ongoing engagement, antiracism calls for individuals to perpetually engage in these practices as a lifetime commitment rather than a one-time event in one's life.

In relation to school counseling, Mayes and Byrd (2022) describe how the aforementioned practices are foundational to antiracist comprehensive school counseling practice. In particular, Mayes and Byrd (2022) discuss the need for critical consciousness informed by Critical Race Theory (Ladson-Billings and Tate, 1995) and Ecological Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1992) to understand the ways in which intersectional racism is pervasive across multiple systems and subsystems and how such can impact the development of children, adolescents, and their families. In response to this understanding, Mayes and Byrd (2022) suggest that school counselors work to "love and protect" students through practices that create and build a homeplace (hooks, 1990), which supports the humanity, healing, and growth of students while also centering their joy, excellence, empowerment, and resistance to the dehumanizing sociopolitical context that exists outside of that space. It is important to note that homeplace guides not only the school counseling environment including relationships but also informs the curriculum. Using homeplace as a guide, Mayes and Byrd (2022) also charge school counselors to dismantle harmful policies and practices (i.e., discipline practices, dress code policies, and enrollment policies for rigorous courses) that perpetuate oppression and are a threat to homeplace. In the process of dismantling these policies and practices, school counselors should work collaboratively with educational stakeholders, including students and families, to build new policies and practices that create and sustain homeplace (hooks, 1990).

Freedom dreaming

Closely related to antiracist school counseling practice is the concept of freedom dreaming. Freedom dreaming, as a practice,

calls for children, especially Black children to matter, not only just to themselves, but also to their families, the community, and the larger society in a way that demands "the impossible by refusing injustice and … disposability" (Love, 2019, p. 7). Essentially, freedom dreaming engages a radical imagination that recognizes and catalyzes by the struggle for change while working toward a new future where humanity is restored and freedom, liberation, and joy are centered. This new future is not bound by the current sociopolitical and historical context of systems of oppression but rather embraces the creative capacities needed to focus on the possibilities rather than rationality (Kelley, 2003).

Beyond tapping into creative capacities, it is important to understand the collective nature of freedom dreaming. It is not about one person's vision, but rather, how we as a people engage our collective radical imagination to create and work toward a new vision, a new future together (Kelley, 2003). For example, in educational settings, administrators, educators, school counselors, students, and families should work together to not only dismantle inequitable policies and practices but to also collectively reimagine and rebuild a school that "truly loves all children and sees schools as children's homeplaces, where students are encouraged to give this world hell" (Love, 2019, p. 102).

The connection between antiracist school counseling practice and freedom dreaming cannot be overlooked. If a radical imagination is needed for freedom dream that radical imagination cannot be cultivated without homeplaces, without spaces of respite that center humanity, resistance, and joy. Homeplaces allow for protection from a harsh world and remind everyone, especially Black youth, of their human irreducibility, wholeness, and creativity (hooks, 1990). Said differently, homeplaces recognize the pain of oppression while also understanding that students are always more than their pain (hooks, 1990; Love, 2019). In fact, homeplaces intentionally recognize creativity, power, radical love, and joy can and do exist for students in spite of living a world set on their destruction. This creativity, power, love, and joy are critical as students engage their capacity for freedom dream as they create their blueprint for resistance while they work toward a new future (hooks, 1990; Love, 2019).

Antiracist school counseling practices to promote freedom dreaming

At the intersection of antiracist schooling and freedom dreaming is the shift to holistic healing in schools that not only takes into account the current collective knowledge but also honors ancestral knowledge as a pathway forward (see Figure 1). Practices outlined below center this collective and ancestral knowledge as a means to not only create homeplaces

for students but also cultivate the radical imagination and action necessary for freedom dreaming (hooks, 1990; Kelley, 2003). As such, these practices move away from the typical white supremacist status quo of school counseling to embrace Healing Centered Engagement. Healing Centered Engagement (Ginwright, 2018) is an asset-based and political framework that allows school counselors to rethink approaches for creating communities of healing, resilience, joy, and growth. Ginwright poses questions that align healing-centered engagement to freedom dreaming in school counseling: (1) How do we think about the environment where youth live, play, and work?; (2) How might the environment impact on our own well-being and well-being of others?"; and (3) "What's right with students? In reflection on those questions, it poses another question influenced by Mayes and Byrd (2022), how does the profession unlearn colonized systematic ways of school counseling to promote freedom dreaming?.

Revisiting indigenous education and healing practices

Below we describe educational and healing practices guided by Indigenous nations in the United States (e.g., Lenape-Leni, Mohawks, Oneidas, Onondagas, Cayugas, and Senecas). However, it is important to note that while the discussion below describes educational and healing practices collectively, each nation possesses its own unique culture and practices. The United States government and educational system are still attempting to reconcile with the massive intergenerational damage that many Native American children and families endured when forced to assimilate into Western Culture, specifically at boarding schools (Gone et al., 2019), another indication of the educational foundation created to promote white supremacy. In naming and examining the cruelty of colonization to Indigenous populations, there are many Indigenous healing and educational practices that school counseling can learn from as antiracist practices in order to promote freedom dreaming. Similarly, to the essence of antiracist school counseling, Indigenous populations center holistic traditions on healing, connecting, and regenerating trust, rather than punishing, disconnecting, and furthering distrust (Ross, 2014). Antiracist school counseling promotes, celebrates, and centers students' culture, voice, identities, and ancestral knowledge in the development process. For the Haudenosaunee Confederacy (called by the colonizers as the League of five nations), law, society, and nature are equal partners, and each plays an important role when blending the law (e.g., policies) and values. In the spirit of a systemic lens and approach in school counseling, creating and sustaining homeplace (hooks, 1990) (also referred to as *commonplace* in some Indigenous cultures) should be the essential value that

FIGURE 1
Freedom dreaming in school counseling. Adapted from: Mayes and Byrd (2022) antiracist school counseling framework.
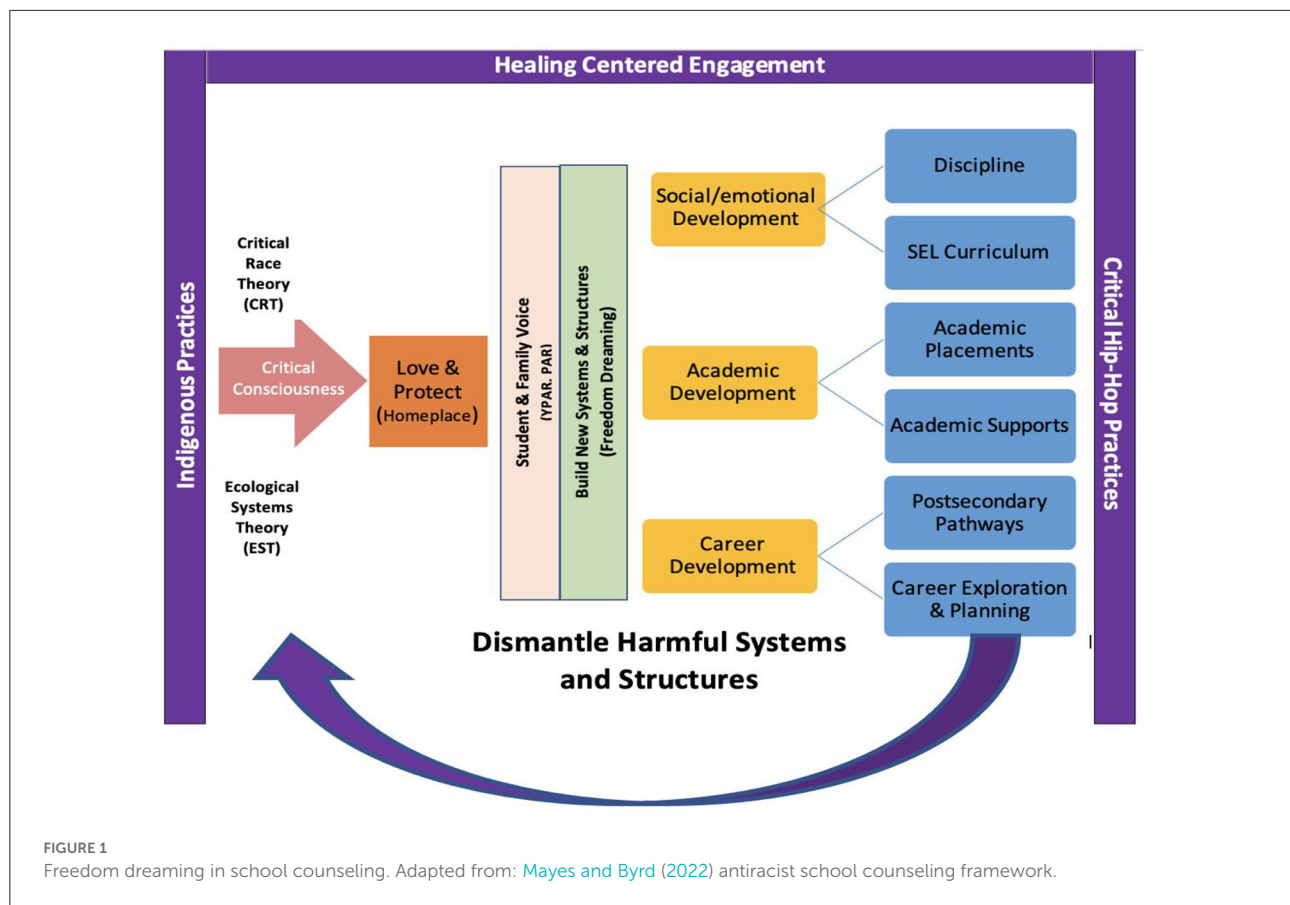
shapes all comprehensive programming and policymaking with a focus on BIPOC students, especially Black youth.

In working toward decolonizing and freedom dreaming, school counseling must build upon the notion of homeplace (hooks, 1990) with an inclusive focus that engages the school-family-community partnership in sustaining a community of collective learning and collective healing. One way to view this is through the Indigenous concept of preparing for "seventh generation." Indigenous cultures believe that we borrow the earth from our children's children, and it is our duty to protect it and the culture for future generations. Essentially, all decisions are made with the future generations, who will inherit the earth, in mind. Building a homeplace (hooks, 1990) with this central focus allows the community to engage in a way that fosters learning, growth, empowerment, and development by creating a physical and metaphoric space of care and regard for others, central to celebrating love and joy. Given today's rapidly changing global climate shift and the increasing need for collective healing, protecting the environment for future generations becomes a unifying way for the community to continually reflect on the consequences of collective and individual relations and actions. It models for students the idea that in taking care of both the earth and our own healing, we are creating a better and just world for

the future, while simultaneously respecting and incorporating ancestral homage.

Educational practices

Freedom dreaming in school counseling asks "what happens when you center and celebrate a person's language, cultural traditions, familial and ancestral connections, and cultural pride in academic learning?" Indigenous educational processes reflect a sophisticated ecology of education in alignment with developmental counseling. More specifically, *education* is the understanding of knowing and being through ongoing ways of learning both formally inside and outside the classroom (Pratt et al., 2018). One of the most important elements of Indigenous teaching and learning revolves around "learning how to learn," a key element in every approach to education. In each phase of learning along with the ecological continuum, learning how to learn is an internalized process. School counselors are tasked with promoting healthy identities, specifically academic identity, however, the internalization of students in today's schools can be harmful to Black youth students, especially with internalized oppression. To empower positive internalization, there are strategies to consider from tribal societies that school counselors can utilize for academic

identity development. First, emphasizing "willingness to learn" (as opposed to readiness; Cajete, 1994) is a part of the process. "Readiness to learn" and "career and college readiness," language often used in educational spaces, uphold internalized deficit thinking. Celebrating and normalizing students' unique individual learning preferences by exposing youth early on to specific academic, emotional, and spiritual tools (e.g., foot swing, visuals, text to speech, and emotional support stuffed animal) that could aid in their learning regardless of subject. Early exposure encourages the development of self-reliance and self-determination also present in indigenous educational practices (Cajete, 1994). By learning how one best learns and what one needs to operate in a homeplace (hooks, 1990), allows students the freedom to advocate for tools, while dismantling a system that waits for their failure to engage in an interventional process that might present them with similar tools.

Healing practices

As schools are working toward collective healing, there is a shift in responsibility for teaching and empowering students' social–emotional development. Historically, school counselors and early childhood educators were responsible, and since the onset of the pandemic, all teachers and staff are expected to teach social–emotional learning. Freedom dreaming for school counseling questions, "what are innovative ways to help students heal?" One of the first shifts is to revisit the term *wellness*. Indigenous cultures (origins from the Ojibwe nation) describe wellness as a holistic concept that includes physical, social, emotional, cultural, and spiritual well-being, for both the individual and the community (Gee et al., 2014). Wellness emphasizes the connectedness between these factors and recognizes the impact that social and cultural determinants have on health including the impact of colonization that perpetuates racism, sexism, and homophobia. Further described as the alignment of the four aspects of being: the mind (thoughts, concepts, ideas, habits, and discipline), body (air, water, food, shelter, clothing, and exercise), emotions (recognition, acceptance, understanding, love, privacy, discipline, and limits), and spirit (a sense of connectedness, purpose). To be in a good state of overall health, individuals must have an awareness of how they interconnect and relate to one another to operate in harmony. Specifically speaking to spirituality, schools are colonized to reject all aspects of spiritual practices (e.g., yoga, religion, celebrations, and nature), although there are many Christian influences seen in school spaces during holidays and ongoing throughout the year. When schools talk about wanting to partner with BIPOC communities through churches and religious organizations, it is self-serving and performative to gain access and resources on behalf of students, rather than seeking to understand how the beliefs and values impact BIPOC students, families, and school communities in their overall wellness. Denying access to one's central core being,

connectedness to others, and a greater purpose disables BIPOC students and families from utilizing the community's strengths to support all aspects of development and wellness.

Freedom dreaming in school counseling seeks to co-create with communities, inclusive homeplaces that center and value spiritual practices, often seen as healing practices, where students can be loved, celebrated, guided, and protected (hooks, 1990). This requires openness to allowing students to have input on creating multiple spaces that align with one's self where spirituality may be visible through creative arts, nature, songs, prayer, meditation, healing circles, music, movement, science creation, and dance. These school communal spaces are also inviting family and community to contribute to the healing energy. Equivalent to the allowance of "brain breaks" in schools, these spaces allow students to utilize culturally relevant coping skills through seeking, developing, and celebrating a sense of self. For example, a school counselor and BIPOC students, with support from the administration, co-created a recording studio to create a space that students can visit throughout the day to process emotions through song and/or hip-hop beats creation. The students reported feeling belonging, connectedness, and wanting to share with others how useful the space is to their overall wellness (Levy and Adjapong, 2020). In doing so, they saw themselves for what they created, continue to create, and how this practice helps fulfill their spiritual sense and increases motivation to continue to learn. While this may not be a practice helpful for all students, it allows other students to see that they have opportunities to co-create spaces that speak to who they are and what assists themselves in times of healing and provide that knowledge to other peers. Co-creating inclusive spiritual spaces and sharing practices may also be considered Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR).

Youth participatory action research in school counseling

In a similar vein to better understand how students' best learn, Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR), puts youth in the hands of developing their educational experience by co-collaborating on the development of solutions to problems that directly impact youth in schools. In the traditional classroom, students are constrained to learning state-sanctioned curriculum in the way that most suits the teachers and often centers on colonized ways of knowing. Unlike the traditional educational framework, YPAR is a framework where both teachers and students are actively learning from each other, working to co-construct knowledge in a learning environment that is intentionally created by members of the classroom. YPAR emphasizes the traditions of freedom dreaming, by encouraging youth and adults to collaborate as equals in changing schools to be homeplaces (hooks, 1990) for youth, developing spaces

that value students' various identities. Students are experts in their experiences and how systems impact their worldviews. As a critical pedagogy, educators have used YPAR to liberate the traditional classroom structure. This liberation of the traditional classroom structure allows not only for an understanding and effort to address institutional racism both experienced and observed by students and teachers but also leaning into existence beyond the pain of racism and into radical possibilities.

YPAR projects help youth develop skills to critically reflect and to creatively apply their knowledge to produce change also thought of as critical consciousness (Cammarota and Fine, 2008; Cammarota and Romero, 2011). Students engage in an investigative process that promotes an egalitarian approach to building solutions within the education sector (Rodriguez and Brown, 2009). YPAR is an approach to research where youth co-collaborate as researchers to investigate and address, or even dismantle, issues directly impacting them which includes intersectional racism (Langhout and Thomas, 2010). Foundationally, YPAR methodologists assume that those impacted by an issue would hold expertise about their own community, and therefore, would be the best researchers to resolve the problem (Rodriguez and Brown, 2009). Projects focus on the social contexts that may limit opportunities for youth to be successful, especially in an educational environment (Cammarota and Romero, 2011). At the end of their research process, youth present their findings and actionable recommendations to eradicate the issue they have researched. The adults, or group of adults, serve as a support and guide to help youth lead the research project, namely by providing them with tools they may need to conduct research and using their power and influence to provide spaces for youth to share their findings with decision-makers who can create change (Ozer et al., 2013). YPAR participants have shared that the process has facilitated active engagement in their community and fostered their confidence in their voice being included in decisions (Foster-Fishman et al., 2005; Wang, 2006). Additionally, YPAR participants contribute culturally relevant considerations to inform systemic decisions made for their community. YPAR can help raise students' critical consciousness and belief that they can change circumstances that affect their ability to succeed in school and their social context (Cammarota and Romero, 2006). YPAR can also narrow the power differences between school counselors and their students. Students positively impact their school and students can see how their school counselors hold respect for their cultural identity by including them in discussions related to schoolwide policy shifts (Wang, 2006).

School counselors are cultural liaisons between educators and families (Portman, 2009). As such, school counselors can partner with youth to develop policies, procedures, and practices through the use of YPAR that align with youths' perceptions of their needs. If youth led their school counseling experience, where the school counselor and Black students worked together

to identify gaps in support for Black youth, school counselors could shape their programs to actively engage in dismantling oppressive beliefs, policies, and practices while supporting the systemic and personal needs of their youth. School counselors could also use their role as school leaders to include spaces in policy and procedure changes for youth to express their needs to those who have the formal power to create systemic change in schools.

YPAR as a healing practice

Students not only inform changes in the school through their research but also process their experiences with the problem being researched. Thus, YPAR can also help heal students who have been harmed by schools. Love (2019) described wellness as a choice that Black youth make, in spite of the injustices and harm caused by racism and discrimination they endure regularly. When the systems, in this case, educational systems, do not seem to care about or value Black youth, Black youth must find spaces where they can center Black joy and Black love on their own. Centering this idea of wellness marries with the facilitation of YPAR. YPAR requires youth and facilitators to imagine what they want their schools to look like while providing space to process the harm done because of racism (Cammarota and Fine, 2008). Traditionally, small group counseling led by school counselors naturally has space to process and heal. YPAR groups not only provide the space for catharsis but also allow Black youth to engage in systemic change through the dissemination of products that highlight the solutions they create to eradicate the social ills they see occurring in K-12 education.

School counselors are typically trained in microskills used to support youth as they heal and group facilitation, that is, ways to support small groups of students as they process their shared experiences to heal and grow. Because of this training, school counselors can support youth participants as they research issues directly related to them in both their ability to conduct research (academic and career development) and their processing of the harm endured from the problem being researched. As previously mentioned above, Black youth have endured racism, discrimination, and trauma from the white supremacy baked into educational systems. YPAR can provide school counselors with tools to help undo the policies that perpetuate white supremacy, bring a partnership between youth and adults to schools, and help students heal from the past traumas of discriminatory practices in education.

Critical hip-hop practices

Hip-hop culture, broadly defined, encompasses myriad distinct and overlapping belief systems (e.g., peace, love, and having fun), customs (e.g., rapping, djing, and

education/enlightenment), and values developed, primarily, by people of African ancestry who were scattered and displaced across the African diaspora as a consequence of European colonization and the African Maafa otherwise known as the transatlantic slave trade. In this country, however, the Bronx, NY is widely considered the epicenter from which hip-hop emerged and burgeoned into a global phenomenon.

Hip-hop culture has become extremely relevant to the landscape of professional school counseling, especially within the past 20 years. The emergence of hip-hop culture in counseling, as an analytical framework with an array of potentially powerful clinical applications, was fostered by the proliferation of the multicultural counseling discourse and multicultural counseling frameworks. Hip-hop culture was considered a culturally appropriate resource that could be strategically integrated into counseling interactions with culturally, racially, and ethnically "different" clients to foster the therapeutic alliance (Day-Vines and Day-Hairston, 2005; Washington, 2018). At that juncture, hip-hop was viewed primarily as an overlooked and undervalued resource that would empower and enable clients from marginalized backgrounds to articulate truths, without compromise or in a way that felt culturally invalidating.

Recently, though, counselors and counselor educators who engage hip-hop in their work have adamantly championed the use of hip-hop culture to critically interrogate systems of power that perpetuate institutional racism and oppression. The nature of this work is not only to simply amplify students' voices but also to invite students to wield the indomitable nature of hip-hop culture to expose how systems that are already imbued with tremendous power (K-12 schooling) reinscribe preexisting narratives about students who are routinely racialized as "other" (Washington, 2021). This emphasis on critical interrogation and consciousness raising among students who suffer unrelenting racialization, inside and outside of school, is central to what has been described as critical hip-hop school counseling (Washington, 2021). Critical hip-hop school counseling aligns beautifully with the mission of antiracism and freedom dreaming (Kelley, 2003), the desire to both understand and abolish the legacies of slavery and racism that linger within K-12 education (Love, 2019), as well as the realization that Black children exist as fugitives within educational environments that are calibrated around surveillance and captivity [(Givens, 2019, 2021); e.g., police assigned to schools]. Critical hip-hop practices, then, do not only celebrate but also implore students to use languages that honor their cultures; critical hip-hop practices also encourage students to weaponize that language as a device to dissect predominant discourses about success and achievement, for instance, that attribute success and achievement to intrinsic characteristics (e.g., mindsets and behaviors) rather than predictable outcomes one would expect from a racially stratified society. In short, critical hip-hop practices are meant to reaffirm to racialized

students that the social world is malleable and that they do not have to resign themselves to accepting their place in it (Freire, 1985).

Conclusion

While school counseling historically has been riddled with anti-Blackness and harm toward BIPOC students, the aforementioned practices offer a pathway toward liberation and freedom dreaming. This is particularly important as the current climate shows a continued hostility toward minoritized students, especially Black youth. Anti-LGBTQ legislation (i.e., Florida HB 1557 -"Don't Say Gay Bill"), Anti-SEL legislation (i.e. Oklahoma SB 1442), Anti-school counseling legislation (i.e. Alabama HB 457), and even Anti-CRT legislation (i.e., Texas HB 3979) make it increasingly difficult for K-12 school professionals including school counselors to both see and serve Black youth holistically. More specifically, Anti-CRT legislation makes it such that the racial histories and realities that students and their families face are essentially erased for fear of white discomfort. Taken all together, schools continue to center colonized ways of thinking and knowing at the expense of the humanity of BIPOC children, especially Black youth.

To further complicate the impact of legislative harm, students are still reeling from the ongoing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Not only have there been substantial shifts in schooling and school-based service delivery, but also the impact of COVID-19 on Black youth and families exacerbates already existing structural and institutional racism. For example, Black youth and families are often mistreated in the U.S. healthcare system and are at an increased risk for economic instability due to racism not only in employment but also in housing (Hoffman et al., 2016; Do et al., 2019; Dorn et al., 2020). While the pandemic did not create such disparities, it exacerbates the effects of such and contributes to the already present mental health concerns of living in an anti-Black society (Do et al., 2019; Center for Disease Control, 2021).

It is clear that there is a great need for school professionals, including school counselors, to understand and address the needs of Black youth, especially in the current sociopolitical and historical context. As school counselors incorporate an antiracist lens to their work and practices that center the collective healing, knowledge, and action of students, they can offer respite from such legislation and related policies and practices that continue to harm students. This respite not only provides needed protection but also centers the voices and strengths of Black youth to engage in freedom dreaming. By engaging in healing-centered and critical hip-hop practices along with Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) in school counseling, school counselors center the power and creativity of students

needed for freedom dreaming. This freedom dreaming can push beyond the limits of the current moment and provide vision and action toward the future that collectively should be created.

Author contributions

RM provided overall leadership of the manuscript and contributed specifically to the following sections: School counseling history, Antiracism and freedom dreaming in school counseling, Conclusion, and Provided editing for the complete document. NE contributed to the vision of the manuscript and also wrote the introduction and YPAR sections. KI contributed to the vision of the manuscript and also wrote the Revisiting indigenous education and healing practices section. AW contributed to the vision of the manuscript and wrote the section on Critical hip-hop practices. All authors contributed to the article and approved the submitted version.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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"They just wanted to move on": A qualitative study on the experiences of Black students in classroom discussions on race

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The current study used qualitative methods to explore what classroom conversations around race and social justice look like for Black high school students and the role of technology in these conversations at a time when most students were engaged in hybrid or distance learning. Through semi-structured interviews, 16 students recounted their experiences discussing contemporary racial justice issues in school. Participants recalled experiences throughout their schooling in traditional classrooms and more recent incidents in the context of distance learning. Findings revealed that Black students take on much of the labor of educating their classmates and teachers about racial justice issues in class. They also highlighted the importance of safety when having these conversations. Concerning those discussions occurring in virtual settings, students described how technology promoted an environment in which Black students felt safer having these dialogues. Findings from this study emphasize the complex roles that Black students play in cultivating learning environments that raise the critical racial consciousness of everyone in the classroom, including teachers. Digital classrooms and spaces can also potentially serve as an environment in which Black students feel safe to explore and express their perspectives fully. These findings also further highlight the need to build the capacity of educators to facilitate conversations and hold space for all students to make sense of and cope when issues of racial injustice are at play and affecting students' lives and mental health.

KEYWORDS

classroom discussions, black student experiences, digital learning, racial justice, school ethnic-racial socialization

Introduction

In her book entitled *We Want to Do More than Survive. We want to Thrive: Abolitionist Teaching and the Pursuit of Educational Freedom* (Love, 2019), Bettina Love writes, "Children of color attending schools that do not help them interpret the racist, sexist, Islamophobic, patriarchal, homophobic transphobic, and xenophobic world in which they live is not only maintaining the status quo but also ensuring that whiteness, patriarchy, and hate are never

disrupted and challenged. Thus, white supremacy stays on track" (p.86). Love articulates the obligation of education to teach students of color how to interpret and resist oppressive systems to disrupt them. Beginning in 2020, Black students were navigating their social environments at the height of social unrest as racial injustice and antiblack violence were displayed internationally. Additionally, they were navigating learning in a global pandemic that was disproportionately affecting and continues to affect Black families and communities physically, financially, and emotionally. This unprecedented context presented an urgent research opportunity to examine Black students' academic experiences and how they navigated conversations about race-related topics in their educational environments. The current study used a qualitative approach to understand how Black high school students perceive discussions about racial justice issues in their classrooms.

A qualitative approach allows for an in-depth understanding of the experiences of Black students in academic spaces discussing historical and contemporary racial justice issues. Moreover, adolescence is a developmental period in which young people begin to think more critically and expand their social and political identities (Finlay et al., 2010). For Black adolescents, their experiences are racialized in ways that make race a salient social identity to explore. As such, school becomes a socializing agent in which Black students can make sense of their own experiences and apply them to those of Black people in their communities and the broader national context.

School racial-ethnic socialization

School racial-ethnic socialization (RES), a growing area of research, refers to the explicit and implicit ways schools communicate messages about race and culture (Byrd and Hope, 2020). These messages are conveyed by a pre-established curriculum and through norms, structure, and policies (Wills et al., 2004; Byrd and Hope, 2020). Early school RES scholars used research on parent RES combined with research on multicultural education to analyze school racial climate in five dimensions. These five dimensions include the promotion of cultural competence, cultural socialization, mainstream socialization, colorblind socialization, and critical consciousness socialization. One of the ways that school RES messages can be transmitted is through explicit conversations about racial justice issues in class.

Talking race in class

In a review of research on classroom conversations of race, Brown et al. (2017) situate race-related conversations in classrooms as being (1) curricular, (2) discursive, or (3) disruptive with implications for how students and educators understand a racialized society. Curricular conversations refer to the pedagogical strategies used to plan for these conversations, including texts, tasks, and concepts to highlight. Relatedly,

discursive conversations refer to the role of language and the linguistic tools used in these conversations. Disruptive conversations use critical approaches to interrogate and use counternarratives to move away from narratives and ideologies that uphold white supremacy. This category aims to leverage the complexity of racial justice discourse and allows for open discussion and unresolved dialogue. Additionally, disruptive conversations recognize silence and students' and teachers' strategies for using discourse to protect themselves and build community. This review explicitly highlights how teachers can or should facilitate discussions using these logics to disrupt inequalities. However, less is known about how students, particularly Black students, are contributing to and experiencing these conversations as they become more common in United States classrooms. While discussions of race have been more visible in the mainstream and social media over the last decade (Walters, 2007), events such as the killings of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor by police led to global protests and a national conversation about racial injustice in the United States. As a result, schools and educators have had to decide whether they will have conversations that address these events (Jones, 2021). Teachers have historically avoided these conversations as they are not always equipped with the tools to tackle these complex and sometimes controversial topics with students (Pollock, 2009).

Difficulty in talking race in class

Teacher educators have proposed and advocated for teachers to be adequately trained to teach and help students understand racial differences in ways that reduce prejudice (Banks, 1996). Given that the public school system in the United States serves a majority of students from racially minoritized backgrounds, these skills are more critical than ever before. However, discussing race and racism remains a challenge. The challenge of facilitating these discussions effectively is often seen as an added burden on teachers to include in an already packed curriculum, as opposed to being viewed as a central goal for student experiences (Bolgatz, 2005). Additionally, there is often a sentiment that discussing race and racism could potentially perpetuate racism (Hooks, 1994; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Bolgatz, 2005). Research has shown that white teachers often are uncomfortable talking about whiteness (McIntyre, 2003), avoid explicitly discussing race in the teaching of United States History (Almarza and Fehn, 1998), and will even avoid the topic of race when they are using texts with explicitly racial content (Ladson-Billings, 2003).

As a result of this discomfort, students of color have been shown to recognize this "silence" as it relates to issues of race and racism. In a recent study examining Black students' perceptions of school racial climate, Byrd and Hope (2020) conceptualize silence as "a noticeable lack of content about race from their teachers and school and ambiguity." Students can acknowledge they have heard messages about race while at school but cannot describe what they are or recount a more specific example. Students in the study expressed disappointment in the absence of meaningful discussions and curriculum addressing race and Blackness.

Talking race in digital contexts

In addition to considering the nature of race-related dialogue in traditional classrooms, it is imperative to consider other social contexts in which youth engage in discourse around race and racial justice. Notably, Black youth have become thought leaders and activists in digital spaces (Tanksley, 2016). Social media has become an essential space for discussing racial justice issues, and Black young people have been at the forefront of some of these conversations (Tanksley, 2022). Researchers have examined how race manifests in online discourse and experiences and how they intersect with those offline. Notably, scholars have found that racialized online experiences have implications for Black students' academic experiences (Tynes et al., 2013; Hurd et al., 2022). Less is known about the nature of conversations around race in virtual academic classrooms, particularly k-12 classrooms. The academic context in which the current study data was collected is non-traditional in that students were navigating virtual classrooms and learning management systems. The distance learning contexts provided a unique research opportunity to explore the nature of conversations around race and racial justice through the lens of Black students who have also navigated these conversations in traditional classrooms. This context also exposed a need to understand digital technologies' role in these conversations.

Current study

As stated above, the present study aims to explore the nature of conversations about race and contemporary racial justice issues in high school classrooms as perceived by Black students. Through semi-structured interviews with Black high school students, I aim to think critically about the role of technology in these classroom conversations. While I acknowledge that these discussions can be sources of socialization for Black adolescents, I also acknowledge that these discussions do not fit neatly within current conceptualizations of school ethnic-racial socialization in the literature. These discussions likely encompass multiple dimensions of ERS depending on how productive or helpful students perceive them. Research on multicultural education and related constructs suggests that teachers are often most comfortable with conversations that promote cultural competence and cultural socialization in schools (Byrd and Hope, 2020). Teachers are less likely to feel comfortable having conversations about racism and oppression. Thus, it is likely that such discomfort has implications for how these discussions are facilitated and their potential to be helpful or harmful for Black students, specifically.

The current study is guided by the following questions:

1. What is the nature of conversations around race in high school classrooms?
2. In what ways, if at all, are these conversations useful for Black students?

3. What is the role of technology in these conversations in the context of distance learning?

Materials and methods

Participants and recruitment

The Institutional Review Board approved the current study at the University of Southern California, where the study was initiated. The sample included 16 self-identified Black students in grades 9–12, mixed in gender. Table 1 summarizes the gender, grade, age, and type of school participants attend. Of note, little is known about the specific racial demographics of the schools that participants attended. Students informally named whether they attended a school with majority white or Black students and whether they had majority white or Black teachers. Only three participants explicitly named attending a school where the majority of students were also Black. These students attended traditional public schools. The remainder of the students expressed that they were a numerical minority in their schools and classes.

Recruitment was done using snowball sampling. I initially advertised the study using my social networks online and offline networks that circulated the recruitment flyer to their networks. Interested parties reached out *via* email. Once an interested party emailed, they received and completed a google form that determined if they met the criteria for the survey, indicated whether they were 18 or 17 and under, and provided their contact information and contact information for parents if they were minors. For those who met the criteria, parents were emailed a consent form to be signed electronically by them and the student. Only once consent and assent were received were participants scheduled for zoom interviews. Participants who were already 18 were sent consent forms to be signed electronically and returned before scheduling an interview.

Materials and procedures

Once consent/assent forms were returned, participants received a zoom invitation *via* email that included the date and time of the interview. Once in the Zoom room, I reviewed the purpose of the study once more. I also asked the participant for permission to record the interview. If the participant granted permission to record, I asked them to choose a pseudonym and provided them with instructions to change their display name on zoom to that pseudonym. I then started the recording.

In these 45-min long semi-structured interviews, participants were asked to describe a time when they discussed race-related issues that were publicized in the news at school. Probes encouraged students to give details about the conversation, their perceptions, and their responses. The interview moved on to ask about what they would like to see from teachers and in classrooms as it related to learning how to discuss and address these issues.

TABLE 1 Sample demographics.

Pseudonym	Gender	Grade	Age	School type
Alexis	Girl	11th	16	Traditional Public
Anne	Girl	10th	15	Traditional Public
Brooke	Girl	12th	17	Traditional Public
Chanee	Girl	11th	16	Public Charter
Chloe	Girl	12th	17	Catholic Private
Donte	Boy	10th	15	Traditional Public
India	Girl	10th	15	Independent Private
Jamal	Boy	11th	16	Traditional Public
Justin	Boy	10th	15	Traditional Public
Kayla	Girl	12th	17	Traditional Public
Kelly	Girl	9th	15	Traditional Public
Lima	Girl	9th	14	Private Online
Megan	Girl	10th	15	Traditional Public
Mykia	Girl	12th	17	Traditional Public
Reilly	Girl	10th	15	Traditional Public
Shante	Girl	12th	17	Traditional Public

Each interview was transcribed and uploaded with no personal identifying information. Given the sensitive nature of race-related topics, participants were also given a list of mental health resources at the conclusion of the interview.

Analysis

I took a deductive and inductive analytic approach. Thematic analysis was used to systematically analyze the data (Braun and Clarke, 2006). First, transcripts were uploaded and stored in Nvivo. I, along with a research assistant who identifies as a Black woman, read interview transcripts and developed a coding scheme that included any topics related to classroom conversations around race, social justice issues, and the role of

technology. In the first round of coding, nine codes were identified: (1) race in the curriculum, (2) race in the news, (3) Black Lives Matter, (4) race on social media, (5) Donald Trump, (6) teacher silence on race (7) Conflict (8) Student Discomfort and (9) Teacher discomfort. Within each of these codes, subcodes were created to specify further how the data was categorized under each code. The creation of subcodes was informed by previous literature on classroom conversations of race and constructs emerging in the data as identified by the research assistant and me. I then re-read all 16 transcripts, engaged in another coding round in NVivo, and wrote memos noting trends while coding. I then read through the research assistant's memos and excerpts in NVivo to indicate observable patterns in the data. I reviewed these with the research assistant to share, discuss, and interpret the memos and excerpts coded. The final agreed-upon themes were chosen based on their relevance to the research questions.

Ensuring trustworthiness

Given the salient similarities and nuanced differences across my identity and the identities of my participants, I employed many approaches to strengthen the trustworthiness of this work using Nowell et al. (2017) approach to meeting trustworthiness criteria. For example, in preparing the protocol for this study, I commissioned a youth advisory board (YAB) of three Black high school students, two girls and one boy, who reviewed interview questions and consulted on the phrasing and wording of protocol questions to ensure questions were understood in the ways they were intended to be. The YAB also provided feedback on emerging themes and overall findings as their social identities reflected those of the study participants.

Positionality

The author, a Black woman, conducted all interviews. As a Black woman, who was at the time of data collection a graduate student researcher, I was empowered by my positionality in conducting this study. As is the case for all researchers, my identities and life experiences inspired this inquiry of research and how I collected, coded, analyzed, and understood the data. Additionally, as a researcher who examines the role of digital experiences on academic and digital development in Black youth, my expertise also informed my use of technology for participant recruitment and data collection. Lastly, my social position and identities also informed my engagement with participants during the interview process. As previously mentioned, data for this study was collected in 2021. More specifically, interviews were conducted just 2 months after the capitol insurrection while COVID-19 was devastating Black communities. The sociopolitical context and my identity as a Black woman, who is also a student shape the lens through which the data was collected, analyzed, and interpreted.

Results

The current study explored the nature and utility of classroom conversations about race. Generally, participants highlighted where and in what courses topics of race were most often discussed, as well as their roles as leaders in these conversations. Additionally, students identified moments in which teachers misstepped or did not correct students' missteps. In describing their most recent conversations often taking place in virtual classrooms, technology consistently came up as playing a role in how conversations were perceived, as well as the overall outcomes of the discussions. In what follows, I specify and describe these general themes in more detail.

The nature of race-related conversations in classrooms

The first research question was descriptive and the results described below highlight the academic context in which conversations about race were taking place. Students often highlighted (a) the curricular context or subject matter of the course in which the conversation took place, (b) missed opportunities for intervention, and (c) teachable moments in which students often acted as experts or authorities on matters related to racial justice.

Curricular context/course subject matter

When it came to discussing where and when conversations about broad racial topics o occurred, students mentioned History and English courses. Donte, 10th grade, said "Last time I can remember we talked about Black history would be like eighth grade, and that's because we were reading To Kill a Mockingbird or no. Ninth grade and it was in my English class. It wasn't positive history. It was slavery, so …." Here Donte reflects on the last time he remembers there being a conversation related to race, and specifically, Black history in his courses. He references his English course from the previous year and notes that it was not being discussed positively. Chloe, 12th grade, on the other hand, has had a different experience attending a Catholic school and shares her experiences talking about race-related topics in her classes. She shares:

> I would say because since most of what happened with the Black Lives Matter movement was in the summer, they did hold prayer services where again, they did pray about the situation, but it wasn't really like an open discussion kind of thing. But I would say that we do dwell on it in history class. So definitely in my history class, we do talk about race and how that plays a part in America and how some people have to work harder than others. We did talk about that in history, not so much in my other classes, not because I don't care about it, but it does not really go with their own curriculum. So I think that's why. Usually they do in English because it's

kind of like you are writing, you can be creative and write about your struggles, but I would say definitely in English and even religion, since I do take that, we do talk about it in, I would say History, Religion, and English more so just because you can kind of write about it and reflect on it and it kind of ties in with their curriculum.

Similar to Donte', Chloe identifies English as a course where conversations about race-related topics occur. Additionally, she names history and religion as courses where her teachers talk about issues related to inequality and oppression in the curriculum. Brooke, 12th grade, shares that her history teacher has not only discussed historical issues of race and racism, but they have also discussed more contemporary racial issues. She says, "I would say they did talk about racism prior to the Capitol and what has happened there. We did talk about the race issue in the sixties and even before that, but then also in history class, we'll talk about the race issue today. So you kind of talk about it in this class." In these examples of teachers making the effort to incorporate discussions of race or culturally relevant pedagogy into the curriculum, history, and English courses are most commonly named. When asked to describe the nature of her experiences in these classes related to race, Megan, 10th grade, goes on to describe an instance that occurred and left an impression before the beginning of the school year. Megan shares:

> But, when my English teacher put out the syllabus for this year, I kid you not, the first picture that was on there was of the Freedom Riders getting beat up. So, I was confused. I was like, "Wait a minute. This is the first time, this is your syllabus and your welcome letter. This is how I get to know who you are as a person and the first picture you want to show me is this? Okay."

In her description, Megan expresses confusion about the teacher's choice to use a violent image that is a representation of historical racialized violence toward Black people on the syllabus. In her statement, she expressed concern about the lack of contextual introduction to the image as it is the student's first introduction to the teacher and the course content.

Teacher missed opportunities for intervention

In discussing their experiences engaging in conversations or discussions related to race, Black students often indirectly described missed opportunities for teacher intervention. For example, Megan describes an instance where a white student in her virtual classroom, who she identified as a "proud Trump supporter" was making derogatory and inflammatory comments about the Black Lives Matter organization. It is important to note that Megan's choice to name her peer as a "proud Trump supporter" in the context of this interaction implies a connection that she is making between being a Trump supporter and having negative attitudes toward the Black Lives Matter organization. Megan shared that she responded to the student and was visibly

upset in the moment. When asked if or how her teacher responded, she shared:

> I mean, they did agree with me and say, "Yes, Black Lives Matter. It's true what they are saying," and they kind of just wanted to move on. My teacher called me and another student after class who had been the one speaking up to these people, and he told us that he does fully agree with us and he just doesn't want us to get attacked, because he said that based on a lot of the assignments that some of those students had turned in, he knows their points of view and he knows that it would not go well if we were to argue over distance learning, so he wants to protect us by just, everyone gets their say and then we move on.

In this excerpt, Megan shares that the teacher does verbally agree with her at the moment. However, there is no discussion about why the student made those comments or why they may be harmful to students in the classroom because "they kind of just wanted to move on." Megan also names the fact that the teacher called her and another student after the class to check in and provide affirmation to their comments and feelings. The teacher also justifies their actions or lack thereof in class by suggesting that engaging in further dialogue around the topic would potentially lead to an argument. Thus, suggesting that allowing everyone to "get their say" and move on was the best solution for everyone.

In another example, Alexis, 11th grade, describes an instance where a white student in her class would make comments about her hair and often self-identify as Black because her white grandmother lived in Egypt, but was not from there. Alexis often found those comments offensive given the historical racialization and subjugation of Black people in America. One cannot simply "take up" being Black. Additionally, when Alexis wore braids in her hair, the student would pat her own head mocking the gesture Alexis would do if her braids were itching. When asked if or how her teachers responded when the student would make those derogatory comments, Alexis replied "Most teachers did not do anything." Alexis goes on to say of her history teacher:

> I don't think he really understood what was happening, to be very honest. And, that's something I rarely ever say about somebody. But, I think he genuinely did not know that she was mocking me, at times. But then, I think sometimes he did know because then he would mock her right back and do like jabs at her. So I'm like, 'Okay, maybe he does know,' but, yeah.

Here, Alexis expresses that she cannot determine whether or not the teacher understands that the student is inflicting harm. However, she also notes that the teacher may understand to an extent based on his mocking behavior toward the student. Here is another missed opportunity for the teacher to intervene in a thoughtful and meaningful way to address the racialized nature of the comments and mockery toward Alexis.

Lastly, Chloe, a senior in high school, describes a recent incident following the Capitol insurrection which took place on January 6, 2021. Chloe shares that her school community talked about the insurrection in most of her classes the following day and describes a moment during the discussion in which she says:

> When we were talking about the Capitol, someone in my class brought up how some of the protesters are Antifa and no one said anything. And then one of my friends behind me texted me and was like. This was when we were virtual. So we were online, and she brought up how she heard that some of the protesters were Antifa, then my friend texted me and was like, "what? do you hear what's going on?" And I texted her back and I was like, "yeah I know because Antifa had nothing to do with that and they said that." I guess there are sometimes when it's not racist, but it's kind of dumb because some people like do not do their research. I would say it's a dumb comment where they just kind of do not pay attention to what's going on. Then they say a comment that's not true.

In this example, Chloe articulates that her classmate made a comment alluding to the fact that another organization, commonly associated with Black Americans, was involved in storming the Capitol in Washington DC on January 6, 2021. Chloe says "no one said anything." Here is just one more example of a missed opportunity for impactful dialogue in which students could have potentially learned more about how and from where these false narratives originate and the ways they are often racialized with deep roots in antiblackness. While this section has highlighted missed opportunities for teacher intervention, the following section highlights instances in which Black students took it upon themselves to speak up or "teach" their peers, and in some cases their teachers during race-related conversations.

Black students' teachable moments

Across interviews, Black students often highlighted instances during classroom discussions where they felt they needed to "educate" their classmates, and in some cases, the teachers on race-related issues. They also discuss moments where they were the only ones who spoke up in defense of themselves as Black students, as well as, the Black Lives Matter Movement when students were misinformed or made racist comments. For instance, Justin, 10th grade, describes conversations about George Floyd and police brutality that took place in his history class. He says:

> I don't really bring it up. I don't bring it up out of the blue, but there are a lot of people who have misconceptions in my grade and in my classes, and so when they say something false, I'm the first one to shut it down because I know for a fact it's wrong and I'm not going to let them tell other people something they don't even know anything about. So I'll unmute immediately and shut it down, and typically my teachers are on my side, so it's not too difficult.

In another case, Anne, 10th grade, explains that she is often the only person to acknowledge and speak out against issues of racism in her classes. However, she acknowledges that some non-Black students posted on social media in solidarity, particularly around the time of the racial unrest amid the killing of George Floyd last summer. Anne shares:

> I know that some post on their [Instagram] stories, especially, as I mentioned, closer to June of last year, but I don't know if there's actively someone who's not black who does that. I don't have any other black person in my class. All the other black people in my school are either a grade above or a grade below me. Actually, that's not true. Maybe there's one black person in my grade who still goes to this school, but if it's not me, then I don't know who else it is. Typically it's a person of color.

Anne names the fact that she is one of few Black students in her school yet takes on most of the labor required to address and educate students on race-related topics in her classes. Her experiences mirror those of other participants. Megan describes a time when she was assigned a group project in which students were to propose a solution to a social issue. While Megan wanted to propose a solution to police brutality, she explained that students in her group did not think that police brutality was an issue and instead wanted to do a project related to gun control. Megan shared that New Jersey already had some of the strictest gun laws in the country, but had a pervasive issue with police brutality. Megan pushed the group to reconsider and ultimately was able to convince her team to research and present on police brutality. Below is an excerpt of Megan's interview in which she describes her presentation to the class.

> So then, what I did was, which was petty, but it also did scar some children, which I feel really bad about, was I played the censored version of the Rodney King video, in class, part of my presentation. I played it. I made them watch it, for 42 minutes. We talked about it. And, my teacher let me….I was like, "Wait, you are going to let me do this?" So, she did it. And, that's when the offensive comments for that project stopped because I made them watch it. I was like, "Look, we have this project, and if we have a chance to talk to the people that run this state and possibly that run the country, then we are going to take it."

Throughout her interview, Megan describes moments like this one in which she is acting as an advocate and educator of social justice-related issues in her classes and school, writ large. She even talks about starting a Black Student Union at her school and encountering pushback from parents of non-Black students for their programming designed to celebrate African American culture and raise awareness of social justice issues in their community and the broader United States.

As described in each of these excerpts, Black students often feel like they are, in some cases, the only ones in their classes that educate students on these topics and work hard to make people understand the harm that is done to Black people in this country, even in the face of pushback from students, and sometimes authority figures. Shante, 12th grade, describes how she has to analogize Black people's experience with those from other groups to help students empathize and understand. Shante explains:

> One of the kids in my history class. So then, what I did was, he was Jewish, so I related it to the Holocaust. I said, "So, back then, the Holocaust was okay? It was okay to judge people because they were Jewish?" He said, "Well, no." I said, "It's the same thing."

> And people said, "Well, why didn't the slaves just leave?" I said, "Well, why didn't the Jews just leave? …" They said, "Well, their soldiers had their homes." I said, "Well, my ancestors' homes were in Africa, so …" And they are like, "Well, why didn't they just rebel?" My argument was always, because in this town they are mainly Jewish. My argument is always, "Well, why didn't the Jews just rebel?"

In each of these examples, Black high school students can identify and describe moments in which they have to choose whether to educate their peers or allow misinformation or harmful rhetoric to persist in the classroom. While they may not always be the person to initiate these conversations, Black students are playing important roles in shaping these classroom dialogues with little to no external incentives. In the following section, I describe students; perceptions of these conversations' usefulness in (virtual) classrooms.

Utility of Race-related conversations for Black students

The results in this section describe how students spoke about the utility of classroom conversations related to race and racial justice. When asked how useful these dialogues are, students often communicated mixed perspectives. They expressed that these conversations were necessary, but also identified potentially negative implications when they are not adequately guided and provided with accurate information.

Usefulness of conversations

Jamal, 11th grade, speaks directly to the ways that these conversations can potentially lead to uncomfortable interactions for him, personally. He says:

> I would say that sometimes it is a hurt because if I were to be asked to work with that student maybe in a breakout room, it would be much harder for me to be nice and participate with them, especially knowing that I can do it on my own. So I would probably leave them in the dark, but it could help also, just knowing who supports me or is just

not against me. They don't even have to like me. Just knowing that you are fine with my race is good enough for me.

Conversely, Mykia,12th grade, speaks in more pronounced ways about how these dialogues can be beneficial for students, particularly, white students. She also speaks about how, in some cases, these conversations can potentially lead to her feeling more supported by her white classmates and friends, Mykia shares:

I would say it's helped me kind of just open my eyes to certain things that have been happening in there, especially it's opened my friend's eyes to other things that happen in America. I know some of my friends are white, so I know some things they cannot relate to, but now it's kind of like, they all have been learning about it and reading about it and doing their research to see what goes on and what has been happening and how it affects them. I do know over the summer I was flooded with text messages from my friends who were white, just asking me if I was okay, if I needed anything if I ever needed to talk to, they were there just because they saw what was happening. I think it does, whenever we do have those discussions, it does help me see people in a different light and it does help me kind of grow as a person and kind of understand situations more on a deeper level.

Mykia and Jamal speak about how these classroom conversations around race have been useful and the implications for students, socially. Another student, India, discussed how these conversations can be beneficial for learning academic content, as well. India, 10th grade, shares:

I think it does. It kind of makes the class more interesting when we have discussions rather than kind of just listening to a teacher talk to you about. I mean I'm in a politics class, so it's kind of more interesting talking about things that have happened over the summer and that have been happening now instead of kind of just talking about politics. It does make it more interesting.

Here, India is speaking to the ways that bringing in relevant real-world examples can make the curricular content more interesting for students and foster deeper connections to academic material. Megan, like Jamal, has mixed feelings about having the conversations. She articulates the complexities of these conversations and the necessity of adequate support and education for them to be productive.

I think they are very useful and helpful because you are going to come in contact with people who are different than you. You're not always going to know what they are going through. Even with their race, you are not going to know. Because a

white person's not going to understand the pain that I feel. So, I think it's helpful, but only if the right education is given…

But, I think there's the wrong information. Then that's when it becomes more harmful than helpful. Because, then, they are not getting the issue.

Megan explicitly states that these conversations can be "harmful" when inaccurate information is being communicated or allowed in the space. However, she also expressed a belief in the promise of these conversations to help promote understanding and compassion across racial-ethnic groups. In a time where racial and social unrest is at its peak and a pandemic that is ravaging racially minoritized communities and families, creating spaces that promote empathy and understanding is critical.

The role of digital technology

Throughout these interviews, the role of technology came up both directly and indirectly. Across the described themes, students refer to the virtual classrooms and the roles they play in engaging in some of these difficult conversations regarding race and social justice issues as compared to in-person conversations. Themes including engagement, safety emerged, and technology as an extended classroom space are discussed.

Engagement

Students highlighted the ways that technology both promoted and inhibited engagement in race-related conversations. Chanee, 11th grade shared:

Distance learning and people not turning on their cameras, not turning on their mics, not typing in the chat, I really don't know how a lot of my other classmates feel. I know how my Black classmates feel; there are like five of us at school. I follow them on Instagram and I know how they feel, but otherwise, I have no idea if it's really a helpful conversation or if they're even listening.

Chanee describes what she perceives as a lack of engagement during some of these conversations as a result of the virtual platform they are using to interact. She expressed how some of the platform's features make it more difficult to determine how students are feeling about the conversations or whether or not they care to have them. Chanee also communicates that she knows where her Black schoolmates stand on these issues based on their social media presence, which underscores how technology and virtual communities can promote engagement in such conversations outside of the classroom and still have implications for how Black students experience these conversations inside of their classrooms. Megan shared a similar perspective related to not being able to have these conversations in person.

So, whereas, when we were in school, it was a lot easier to argue. I was able to get my point across, and you can't mute yourself. You can't turn off your video. When it comes to those conversations, I hate that we have to have them on Zoom. But, safety's first, of course. But, I'd rather have those in person, so I can make the person look at me.

Chanee and Megan, who are both outgoing and highly engaged students in their classes, find the virtual facilitation to be limiting in some ways as it relates to having meaningful dialogue.

Safety

Themes surrounding "safety" also emerged. Anne, speaks about how technology has made her feel safe in expressing her thoughts during race-related conversations in school. She says:

I feel like having these conversations through distance learning is easier for me. If we had to do it in school, I would in a heartbeat, but it's just easier knowing that if anyone attacks me, I can mute them, but also if we were in school, I don't know what would happen to me because there are a lot of Trump supporters who are proud, and they make their intentions clear. So I don't know if they would just do something crazy like those people at the Capital. I really don't.

In this quote, Anne is speaking about the ways that technology can promote safety for Black students engaging in conversations with students from other racial-ethnic groups. She references the insurrection at the capitol building in Washington DC on January 6, 2021, which was 2 months before data collection, and compares the insurrectionists to Trump-supporting students in her classes. However, she says that having these conversations virtually allows for a level of distance and protection from being "attacked." She also mentions that when someone says something harmful, the mute feature on Zoom helps minimize the potential severity of the harm. Kelly, 9th grade, speaks, similarly, to the ways that virtual classrooms have allowed students to feel safe to express themselves in these conversations. She references the benefits of the private direct messaging function for communicating points anonymously to the class through the teacher and having the autonomy to be able to choose whether they want their identities attached to their comments. Kelly says:

Normally when we have conversations like these if we don't want to have our name attached to it, we could send a private chat to a teacher and they can just read. They could just read what we typed and not say our names to it. If people don't want to know what other people said, they don't really have to know, but if we do feel confident enough to share with everyone, we are allowed to do that too.

In this instance, Kelly recognizes the vulnerability that these conversations require, and the importance of feeling safe to express your opinions and concerns related to race and social justice issues. In her interview, Lima, 9th grade, describes a moment when her teacher, a white woman, read "the N-word" aloud while reading an assigned text. She expresses that students were visibly upset and addressed her. Lima says, "Because, in other classes when she said the N-word from the book, they had gone off on her in the Zoom, and then they left." (Lima says that students "left," meaning they left the zoom room). This is important because the virtual context shaped the way students were able to react to this teacher. Students may not have felt as empowered to stand up for themselves or leave a physical classroom and would have been made to sit with their discomfort and triggers.

Another student, Chloe, talks about another approach to responding to harm during these conversations. In this case, technology continues to provide opportunities for students to deal with their emotions in these moments. Unlike Lima who described how students reacted in a zoom classroom in the moment, Chloe references how she and her classmates have used group chats to validate one another and share their concerns or disagreement with how a teacher addressed a Black student who did not have their zoom camera on during class. Chloe shared that the teacher commented on the student not having money to afford broader bandwidth for her family's wifi. Students took offense to this comment and took the conversation to their group chat.

Chloe: We didn't really respond to her, but we do have a group chat. In the group chat, a lot of people were saying, "Why did she have to say it like that?" We did actually tell my friend about what had happened and what she had said.

In this scenario. Technology is again being used to create safe spaces for students outside of the "classroom" to discuss what is taking place in the "classroom," particularly when the harm is being done by a teacher or another authority figure. Students take it upon themselves to create these spaces.

Discussion

The current study used qualitative methods to explore what classroom conversations around race and social justice look like for Black high school students and the role of technology in these conversations at a time when most students are engaging in hybrid or distance learning. Overall, students expressed that these conversations typically took place in English and history courses, which is consistent with literature exploring classroom conversations of race (Bloome et al., 2005; Bolgatz, 2006). However, some participants also mentioned that teachers in other courses outside of English and history made attempts at facilitating dialogues when there were highly publicized race-related incidents, such as the capital insurrection or a police shooting. While generally, it seemed that Black students perceived their teachers as well-intentioned, they also described moments where teachers missed opportunities for intervention. In these

cases, students had to act as experts on these issues in the classroom. These findings reflect literature that suggests that teachers in the United States often shy away from conversations about race due to feelings of discomfort or fear of being perceived as racist, as well as, the fact that schools rarely take a critical approach to racial justice issues (Ladson-Billings, 2004; Byrd and Hope, 2020).

The teachers described in this study seemed to have the desire to introduce some of these topics of race and diversity but did not necessarily have the skill or training to manage these conversations in ways that make Black students feel safe and seen. Black students described moments where tensions would arise between students in class, and the response from teachers would be to end the conversation. In these moments, students were asked to move on to another topic. However, for many of them, it is very difficult to continue with the course content as usual after experiencing harm from the comments of a classmate with no direct response from the teacher at that moment. Students' acknowledgment and naming of these moments in this study support research that shows that high school students understand when teachers are not equipped or supported in discussing racial injustice and oppression in school (Hope et al., 2015). Findings indicated that teachers and other non-Black students would reach out to Black students after class to check in or express their agreement with their perspectives, but in those moments of the incident, Black students felt they were alone in their perspectives and their support of racial justice and Black Lives.

The analysis also revealed safety was a concern for Black students engaging in these dialogues. Notably, students were vocal about the recent insurrection that took place in Washington and made comments about not knowing what [white] people might do after witnessing that incident. However, students rarely mentioned shying away from these conversations. They advocated for having them and spoke in depth about the importance and utility of having these conversations in class as a means of demonstrating a commitment and valuation of Black people and the urgency of finding a solution to racial violence and injustice. Students often took up this work themselves by speaking out in class and creating groups and clubs, in person and virtually, that provided learning experiences for their classmates and entire school communities around issues of racial justice and antiblackness. Additionally, these groups allowed Black students to celebrate their Blackness and culture by, in one case, providing Black History Month programming for the entire school, to which they experienced pushback and negative responses from adults in the community. These findings are consistent with early education research on classroom dialogues around race in higher education classrooms that show students of color, and Black students in particular, often take leadership and guide conversations around race and racial justice issues (Tatum, 1992). This research also explicitly names the creation of a safe classroom atmosphere for all students in preparation for these discussions (Tatum, 1992). Findings in this study are also consistent with the work of developmental scholars whose work

indicates that Black youth and children have more advanced conceptions of race and discrimination (Brown and Bigler, 2005; Dulin-Keita et al., 2011).

In addition to the themes described above, it is important to note the context in which these conversations are occurring. Students in this study were navigating high school amid a global pandemic that was and continues to disproportionately impact Black communities (Dyer, 2020). Students were attending school virtually using digital technologies that they, as well as their teachers, were learning while also learning course content. In describing conversations that had taken place in virtual classrooms, students often, directly and indirectly, mentioned the role of technology. Specifically, students mentioned that they felt safer from attacks when engaging in these conversations in virtual classrooms and said that teachers and students can be muted, use anonymous chats, or leave the virtual classroom altogether. Conversely, students also indicated that lack of video and audio can, at times, be perceived as a lack of engagement or care for these issues directly affecting Black people, which has left students feeling unsupported or feeling as if their classmates or teachers may hold racist beliefs about them and Black people, more broadly.

Black youth perspective: Experiences and implications of classroom conversations of race in virtual settings and beyond

There are several key findings of this work that emphasize the complex roles that Black students play in cultivating learning environments that raise the critical racial consciousness of everyone in the classroom, including teachers. While Black students took the initiative of often speaking out against racist or harmful comments or treatment, they did so in the face of teachers and administration either not responding or inadvertently inflicting more harm. Black students in this study were acutely aware of the possibility that students in their classes or their teachers could potentially hold similar racial attitudes to those who "stormed the capitol," and what that might mean for them as Black students in the space. Students referred to the virtual classroom as being a "safer" way of having these conversations. However, as students begin to enter in-person schooling and issues of racial violence and injustice persist, educational leaders and scholars must find ways to make these classrooms safe spaces for Black children to advocate for themselves and others. Additionally, although teachers are making attempts at facilitating these conversations, their discomfort with the tensions that arise during these dialogues limits their possibilities for helping students to think critically about the topics they are discussing. Furthermore, continuing to not intervene in the moment that a student is making harmful, racist, or inaccurate comments might create an environment in which Black students feel uncomfortable or unsafe, and non-Black students think those types of comments are appropriate.

Another area of concern is the curricular content around race and racism. Some of the students in this study voiced concern regarding the pedagogical strategies being used when it came to curricular content that engaged issues of historical racism. This finding is consistent with previous studies that highlight the voices of Black high school students and found they were discontent with the ways that race, culture, and class were engaged in core courses (Hope et al., 2015). Students described moments when teachers would blatantly use the "N-word" when reading assigned texts and students were visibly uncomfortable and upset. These moments do little to build students' confidence and trust in their teachers and the learning environment.

Finally, throughout the interviews, students made references to their peers as Trump supporters. Embedded in these references are assumptions about the racial attitudes of those who they have identified as "Trump supporters." While they are describing their lived experiences and interactions with these individuals, their evaluation of what it means to be a "proud Trump supporter" is consistent with research highlighting the "Trump Effect" (Costello, 2016). This phenomenon refers to the belief that the 2016 presidential election had negative effects on the social climate in schools with educators citing a rise in incidents involving racist and xenophobic rhetoric (Costello, 2016). For the students in the current study, recent viral videos and media of individuals storming the capitol building in Washington in support of Donald Trump were also salient. To that end, these findings should also be considered carefully within the sociopolitical context.

Limitations and future directions

Through this exploration, Black high school students describe the nature of classroom conversations as it relates to race and contemporary racial justice issues in traditional classrooms, as well as in the context of distance learning. While this study offers critical insights into the perceptions and experiences of Black high school students engaging in these discussions, it is not without limitations. One such consideration is that most of the students in this study attended schools in which they were one of few Black students in the school. Only three of the students in this study attended schools that primarily served Black students. Scholars should continue to examine what these conversations look like in classrooms where the majority of students are Black or their teachers are Black to determine whether Black students are having similar experiences as those in this study. We also had limited representation of boys and no representation of students who identified as nonbinary or gender non-conforming. Future work should also consider, more explicitly, the experiences of Black boys also engaging in these conversations in academic settings as it has been established that they have unique academic experiences (Chavous and Cogburn, 2007).

Taken together, findings from the current study suggest that Black adolescents have an advanced critical analysis of the racial history of this country and its application to contemporary racial injustice. They are also able to make connections to their own experiences in their schools and communities. Black adolescents in this study also take lead roles in facilitating these conversations and teaching their peers in class and, in some cases, teachers by addressing misinformation and harmful or racist rhetoric in the moment. This study also highlights the role of technology as a tool that allows students to feel safer while having these conversations. Future research should explore what safety might look like for in-person classrooms where these conversations are taking place. Lastly, district leaders and administrators should prioritize supporting and training teachers to be able to effectively have these conversations in ways that cultivate safety for Black students and foster students' critical thinking skills as it relates to issues of racial justice.

Ethics statement

The studies involving human participants were reviewed and approved by IRB Office at University of Southern California. Written informed consent to participate in this study was provided by the participants' legal guardian/next of kin.

Author contributions

AS conceptualized the study, collected and analyzed data with the help of research assistant, and wrote the entirety of this manuscript.

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Conflict of interest

The author declares that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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Appendix A: Interview protocol base questions

1. Can you tell me a little bit about your schooling experience?
2. Can you talk a little bit about what kind of school you were attending?
a. What has the virtual experience been like compared to the in-person experience.
3. How, if at all, does race come up in your classes?

Probe: How have those conversations come up in school?

4. How, if at all, have you discussed what occurred at the capitol building in Washington on January 6 in school?

Probe: How have those conversations been initiated?

5. In what ways, if at all, have your conversations at school around race been useful?
6. How are you feeling when having these conversations?
7. In what ways have these conversations prevented you from being more engaged in class.
8. What would you like to see from your teachers during these conversations?

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Facing the rising sun: Political imagination in Black adolescents' sociopolitical development

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Black adolescents occupy one of the most precarious and marginalized social locations of society, yet they remain vigilant against oppression. Indeed, Black youth have a vast history of political action and activism around domestic and global issues. Existing scholarship frequently examines the sociocultural and cognitive factors associated with Black adolescents' political and civic engagement and related outcomes. Lost in these interrogations is an examination of the psychological processes that undergird adolescents' sociopolitical visions. To address this gap, this conceptual analysis examines political imagination and its role in Black adolescents' sociopolitical development. Political imagination is the cognitive space and process where people consciously distance the present moment to engage, explore, examine, and (de)construct sociopolitical worlds or realities.

KEYWORDS

Black adolescents, youth activism, political theory, sociopolitical, imagination (psychology)

Introduction

Black adolescents occupy one of the most precarious social locations of society, yet they remain vigilant against oppression. Black youth have a vast history of political engagement and activism where they have addressed a multitude of issues, such as educational equity, environmental justice, juvenile justice reform, and school police abolition (Braxton, 2016; Anyiwo et al., 2018; Turner, 2018; Franklin, 2021). As righteous rage and demands for social transformation in the United States and global context continue, Black youth are watching, processing, learning, and responding to these situations with their futures in mind.

Concerningly, society mainly focuses on politically enfranchised adults' reimaginings of the sociopolitical landscape (Bertrand et al., 2020; Clay and Turner, 2021; see also Rodela and Bertrand, 2021). This is a shortsighted approach that limits social progress. Adults are not the only persons capable of reimagining, nor the only persons for whom reimagining is consequential. Indeed, many youth-serving organizations have expressed commitments to reimagining their youth work with focuses on social justice, diversity, equity, inclusion, and antiracism. Yet, during the reimagining, those institutions often fail to acknowledge, cultivate, and leverage Black youths' sociopolitical voices, visions, and agency. They ignore a simple, continuous truth: Black youth have politics.[1]

As various stakeholders move to reimagine many aspects of society, Black youths' political visions must be made more central to that restructuring. This paper's purpose is to situate the concept of

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1 Here, the term *politics* refers to the strategies and motives for organizing and influencing people, power, and resources for collective interests (Wiley, 2016).

political imagination (see Wiley, 2016) within developmental science literature to further nuance academic discourse and inform entities supporting Black youth's political engagement and activism, particularly Black youth in adolescence. Here, political imagination is the cognitive process and space where people consciously distance the present moment to engage, explore, examine, and (de)construct sociopolitical worlds or realities. The political imagination of Black adolescents is important and warrants particular attention, given their unique status within the United States and global contexts where they often are marginalized under anti-Black racism and youth-targeted ageism (Sallah et al., 2018; Velez and Spencer, 2018). Drawing on the research from political theory and psychological science, we integrate political theory's concept of political imagination into Sociopolitical Development Theory (SPD; Watts et al., 2003), highlighting its implications for Black adolescents' transition from critical social analysis (CSA) to critical action (CA).

There are three premises underpinning our conceptualization of Black adolescents' political imagination within the context of SPD: (a) imagination's relevance to adolescence, (b) imagination's relevance to politics and transformative action, and (c) adolescence's relevance to politics and transformative action. First, we briefly present an overview of SPD to introduce the central framework and guide readers to our more particular focus on Black adolescents' transitions from CSA to *CA*. Then, we discuss the imagination as it pertains to Black adolescent development and transformative political action, which is necessary given the current disconnect between imagination and adolescent development research (see Appendix A). Lastly, we address the dynamics between youth and adults directly by providing examples about engaging political imagination across various developmental settings and include recommendations for future research. Ultimately, this is a call to affirm Black adolescent political imagination.

Sociopolitical development theory

The SPD model was developed through research with Black youth with a focus on the recursive relationship between critical analysis of social conditions and critical action—liberatory praxis (Watts et al., 1999, 2003). SPD incorporated tenets of liberation psychology into developmental psychology during adolescence by focusing on "exposing social injustice, creating just societies, promoting self-determination and solidarity with others, and ending oppression (and healing its effects)" (Watts and Guessous, 2006, p. 60). SPD has been refined into a developmental model and undergirded by four propositions: (a) analysis of authority and power are central to informing one's critiques of extant political structures; (b) a sense of agency is critical to motivating political action; (c) action requires opportunity; and (d) commitment and action are desired developmental outcomes.

While SPD frames the developmental process well, SPD literature often focuses on *either* the action element *or* the analysis element of the model, usually placing more emphasis on the reflection. Diemer et al. (2020) highlight this bifurcation in their call for SPD and critical consciousness researchers to recenter action in this work. While the call for more action-focused research is warranted, there also is a need to ensure scholarship is not solely focused on youth resistance but also considering their freedom vision and wellbeing. Critical action ought not only be driven by what youth want to be *liberated from* or *free of*, but also must consider—even center— what the youth want to be *liberated for,* what they want to be *free to do* or *be* or *experience*. This is best understood when we consider the worlds envisioned between critical reflection and critical action.

Political imagination: Bridging critical social analysis to critical action

Political imagination provides a way to think about that space between CSA and critical action—the bridging. We argue that Black adolescents form and refine their vision of a just society and liberation through political imagination during SPD. The figments of Black adolescents' political imagination are the result of being in their particular sociopolitical location (i.e., Black youth in adolescence) at a particular moment in time and critically reflecting on their social condition (Hope and Bañales, 2019). Informed by social factors, political imagination is the process in which Black youth explore their social justice interests, establish their demands, experiment with revolutionary strategies, and conspire for exodus or revolt. Black adolescents outline the intentions and goals that orient their social justice leadership during political imagination. Black adolescents' political imagination is enabled when they suspend (a) presentism, (b) determinism, and (c) disbelief. Then, they can engage the imaginative field in the mind that is the ground of their new world (Root-Bernstein, 2013). Ideally, imagining would be approached conscientiously as to also avoid replicating or merely evolving the status quo. In doing so, Black youth can build and experience the world as they want it to be.

Political imagination is a distinct yet interrelated concept from CSA or critical reflection. Watts et al. (2003) wrote, "Liberation requires vision—a transition from critique to creativity. Critique reveals the need for new ideas and action, but creativity is required to envision a better cultural and moral order" (p. 187). Critical Social Analysis (CSA) relates to political imagination because it is a cognitive rupture that leverages both past and the present to launch Black youth's minds to a different reality (imaginative field). CSA is the point in the SPD process where Black youth can benefit the most from (re)membering the stories of Black youth activists' wins, critically reflecting on the tradition of social justice movements led by Black youth.

Connecting political imagination to SPD does not fundamentally create a new theory or model, but rather it deepens and enhances the existing one. Political imagination is a tool Black youth (can) use both during and after critically analyzing social structures to then inform their subsequent action. Imagining allows Black youth to reorient themselves, their consciousness and understanding, to time and possibility. For example, Black adolescents can look back and recognize the miseducation of their community and its link to the present conditions of Black people. One's understanding of and connection to community is one of the most influential elements of societal development (McBride, 2005). Developing a sense of group identity, including racial or ethnic identity, also is a key part of adolescent development (Anyiwo et al., 2018). Relatedly, Black youth also can look forward. Political imagination allows Black youth to practice centering and creating *possibility*, unbound by present reality while critically aware. In fact, it is a critical awareness of reality that drives Black adolescents to procure the alternative and recognize it as it materializes. Several Black scholars in various disciplines (see Hooks, 2000; Dawson, 2001; Kelley, 2002) have mentioned imagination and similar concepts in their discussions of social change, yet here we focus specifically on Black adolescents and their political imagination's contributions to that endeavor.

On Black adolescence and political imagination

Growing up Black in a relentlessly anti-Black and Eurocolonized world means Black adolescents also are regularly exposed to

discrimination, which has detrimental health effects (Sellers et al., 2006; Hope et al., 2018, 2019; Seaton and Iida, 2019; DeBower et al., 2021). The developmental attributes of adolescence can be leveraged for Black youth to explore their sociopolitical interests and create a new world through imagination. Imagination is the process of mentally transcending time, space, and circumstance to examine past histories, test ideas, and create alternative worlds (Taylor, 2013; Hawlina et al., 2020). Scholars (Zittoun and Cerchia, 2013; Kind, 2016) generally agree that imagination is best conceptualized as a process, rather than simply its products. The imagining mind is both fully conscious of the present and able to move across time. The imaginative process allows individuals to engage and exploit the temporal space between *what is* and *what could be*, between present and possible (Zittoun and Cerchia, 2013).

From a philosophical standpoint, imagination's content has been most simply understood as a reflection of the condition of one's consciousness (Kind, 2016; Zittoun and Glăveanu, 2017). There is a dearth of research that focuses on imagination during adolescence (Gajdamaschko, 2005, 2006), and imagination also is an essential yet understudied concept in politics (McBride, 2005; Wiley, 2016). Extant research on imagination predominantly focuses on imaginative processes and outcomes of youth from infancy to middle childhood (Root-Bernstein, 2013; Taylor, 2013; Weisberg, 2016). Adolescents maintain their ability to imagine beyond childhood, but nurturing their imaginative capacity typically is not prioritized by society (Gajdamaschko, 2005; Eckstein et al, 2012). To the contrary, scholars (Zittoun and Cerchia, 2013) note how the proclivity for imagination often is socialized out of adolescents.

Supporting Black adolescents' SPD requires providing the opportunity for Black youth to support one another in critically interrogating the past and present to imagine the possible. Critical political discourse informs the political imagination. Black adolescents' political imaginations are the nurturing soil for the seeds of critical hope (Duncan-Andrade, 2009) that mature and manifest new worlds. With adolescence comes an increase in both personal and sociopolitical awareness, which often catalyzes a personal investment in combating injustice for Black youth (Anyiwo et al., 2020; Plummer et al., 2022). Adolescence often brings about the social expectation of being *logical* and *concrete* in one's thinking, reinforcing those *framings* of cognition as the basis of producing pragmatic solutions to common problems (Gajdamaschko, 2005; Zittoun and Cerchia, 2013). The limited research on adolescent imagination generally notes the influence of sociocultural context, cultural knowledge, or history (Gajdamaschko, 2005, 2006; Zittoun and Cerchia, 2013).

Indeed, Black adolescents are well situated to capture and digest the nuances of the sociopolitical landscape because of their unique social location and cultural background. Cammarota (2011) leverages W. E. B. Dubois' concept of *second sight* which helps frame the heightened social awareness that Black youth experience. The term second sight gives language to Black folks' vision of and for self beyond subjection to oppression; they simultaneously see the realities of oppressive systems and their commitment to experience life without subjugation (Cammarota, 2011). This second sight compounds the heightened social awareness and sensitivity of adolescence, suggesting that contextual factors would have a particularly significant influence on Black adolescents' political imaginations. Increased capacity for abstraction also helps Black adolescents understand that *the past* is continuously being made *at* the present, so the trajectories set in previous historical moments can be changed, which stands to alter outcomes of the future. These understandings reflect their ability to suspend presentism and determinism. Suspending disbelief creates an unobstructed stream of

thoughts where the youth can freely interact with the imaginary worlds they create. Youth draw on complex linguistic, reasoning, semiotic, historical, social, and cultural knowledge and skills to navigate the here-and-now (i.e., to manage the present); they also leverage those knowledges and skills to regulate their relationship to the here-and-now (i.e., to leave the present while still having those resources; Zittoun and Cerchia, 2013).

Zittoun and Cerchia (2013) wrote, "Imagination always seems to open a different space, or a different modality of thinking, which eventually terminates when the person 'comes back' to reality. Imagination can be seen as an excursion" (p. 306). They refer to imagination as a mental loop out of the present. People begin imagining when something disrupts or ruptures their flow of thinking and attachment to the temporal present (Zittoun and Cerchia, 2013). The rupture can be chosen by the youth as well as imposed by a circumstantial occurrence or other individuals (Zittoun and Cerchia, 2013). Zittoun and Cerchia's loop concept presupposes certain ontological assumptions about temporality and consciousness, yet there also is a need to recognize the cognitive skills imagining requires: (a) Suspending presentism; (b) Suspending determinism; and (c) Suspending disbelief.

Adolescence is a prime developmental opportunity to support and reinforce Black youths' political imagination and engagement (Eckstein et al., 2012; Hope and Bañales, 2019; see also Walker et al., 2021). While adolescents are not old enough to engage in certain civic activities, such as voting, they are able to amplify their voices through other avenues, such as speaking at city council meetings, corresponding with governmental leaders, and protesting. Adolescence brings: (a) significant increases in sensitivity and awareness of social dynamics and rewards; (b) increases in their ability to think abstractly and understand complex ideas; (c) reduced inhibition regarding risks; and (d) increased desire to test social boundaries and explore social groups to cement their identity (Watts and Flanagan, 2007; Steinberg, 2011, 2014; Hope and Bañales, 2019).

Each of those developmental changes enhances Black youth's ability to conceptualize complex social justice issues and imagine possibilities other than the current sociopolitical conditions. Desiring autonomy as well as relationships with individuals who share common interests and concerns is found among politically engaged adolescents, and this is reflected in the contemporary moment where Black youth are organizing communities in the movement for Black lives. When collectives of individuals desire sociopolitical change they: (a) form political communities, (b) organize around a particular issue or identity, (c) establishing a common understanding or collective consciousness, (d) imagine an alternative social and political order, and (e) act to reform or replace their current sociopolitical environment and the institutions therein (McBride, 2005). However, supportive contexts and relationships are important for counterbalancing the demands associated with adolescents' developmental transitions which will be discussed further below.

Affirming Black adolescents' political imagination

Framing spaces to engage black youths' political imagination

There are two particularly helpful frameworks to guide how youth-serving organizations can best support Black youth in political imagination toward transformative, social-justice oriented action: Youthtopias (Akom et al., 2008) and Youthspaces (Goessling, 2020). Both of these concepts are rooted in the belief that youth have the

capacity to positively contribute to society and their agency is most effectively enacted when environments are deliberately created with such in mind.

Youthtopias

Grounded in ongoing work in youth activist educational spaces, Akom et al. (2008) proposed a theoretical framework that centers youth's skills, passion, knowledge, and overall assets "to lay the foundation for community empowerment and social change": youthtopias. Youthtopias merge Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR), Critical Race Theory, and critical media literacy all in the interest of promoting youth SPD. Critical Race Theory is an analytical lens that addresses the ubiquity and persistence of racism in every dimension of power in the United States and the broader Western world. Critical media literacy is another analytical, methodological, and pedagogical tool that engages participants in understanding, critiquing, and re-understanding all forms of media (Anyiwo et al., 2021). The tool aims to guide participants through uncovering truth as it relates to power in all forms of media and its consumption. Taken together with YPAR, youthtopias are spaces where Black youth: understand multiple intersecting oppressions, challenge traditions, co-construct and engage new possibilities, and commit to social justice (Akom et al., 2008).

Youthspaces

Goessling (2020) conducted a study to recount her work with youth to create *youthspaces*. Youthspaces are co-created spaces intentionally designed to facilitate critical inquiry about their lived experiences in creative arts and treating those creative arts *as* healing practices. The goal of these spaces should be to center the youths' interest, issues, and priorities. This is done through the messages, teaching, artifacts, storytelling, affirmations, and modeling of collective-being in Black adolescents' communities. Goessling's (2020) youthspaces framework draws on both sociocultural theory and Freire's concept of praxis for critical consciousness. In youthspaces, the deterministic outlook of trauma's impact is rejected, and instead, youth are assumed capable of learning and acting in ways that leverage their personal knowledge and experience for their collective healing and social transformation. Contexts purposefully designed to promote Black youths' sociopolitical development will focus on bolstering and refining their understanding(s) of the political dynamics and the role of their political action in instigating sociopolitical climate change.

Supportive developmental contexts for political imagination

Black adolescents are most effectively aided in building a free(er) new world when in contexts that reinforce a fervent pursuit of liberation. However, it is antithetical to the liberation project to *force* adolescents to lead social justice movements (Cohen, 2010); there is dialectical tension of ethics in forcing people to be free. Instead, Black youth must be presented with opportunities that prompt political imagination and that privilege the youths' freedom vision as the inspiration and compass for their transformative action. Those who support Black youth activists must affirm their efforts to push and advance our community in news ways (O'Donoghue and Strobel, 2007). Respectable resistance often is an expectation imposed on Black youth responding to injustice (Duncan-Andrade, 2009; Cohen, 2010; Harris, 2014; Clay and Turner, 2021). A recent example is found in

critiques of the Black youth mobilizing as a part of the Movement for Black Lives who are castigated for being too radical, too de(con) structive. Black youth often are socially reprimanded for their political engagement (Cohen, 2010; Nummi et al., 2019). This reprimand certainly comes from some popular news outlets, but also from veteran mobilizers who subscribe to particular politics about direct action. In this respect, some within the mobilizing community have adopted a practice of policing Black youth political action that mirrors the government. When ideas from Black youth's political imaginations are enacted, there often are positive sociopolitical consequences; affirming such reifies Black youth's collective political efficacy and asserts their agency. The longstanding history of Black youth mobilization suggests that Black communities already consistently promote Black youths' pursuit of freedom, yet it also is important to support youth in refining their freedom vision. Given this reality, both individual efforts and large-scale programming can and should be explicitly focused on facilitating Black adolescents' early political engagement and SPD (Akom et al., 2008; Cohen, 2010). We attend to the particularities of efforts in key contexts of importance such as families, faith communities, youth-serving organizations, and schools, which are discussed below.

Families

Racial socialization is one mechanism by which parents might foster political imagination. Dimensions of racial socialization capture the ways in which parents prepare Black children for environments that are hostile to their racial ethnic group, and instill cultural knowledge, values, and pride, promotion of mistrust (e.g., encouragement to exercise caution in interracial relationships), and egalitarian values. Racial socialization has shown to be beneficial for a variety of outcomes for Black children. Healthy racial identity development (Huguley et al., 2019), academic success (Wang et al., 2020b), psychological adjustment (Wang et al., 2020a), and positive coping strategies (Anderson and Stevenson, 2019) have all been linked to parents' racial socialization practices. Racial socialization also has benefits for Black youth's sociopolitical development. Racial pride messages received from parents are associated with greater racialized critical social analysis (Lozada et al., 2017). Racial centrality is associated with civic engagement *via* Black consciousness, a construct inclusive of sociopolitical beliefs (Chapman-Hilliard et al., 2020). Scholars have begun to make the argument that racial identity and critical consciousness constructs overlap in youth's critical reflection and likely develop in tandem (Mathews et al., 2020). Links between racial identity, youth activism, and civic engagement support this assertion (Hope et al., 2019). By extension, racial socialization, racial identity's precursor (Neblett et al., 2009), shares in this overlap with the development of sociopolitical beliefs in Black youth as parent racial socialization predicted increases in Black youths' critical analysis of systemic racism (Bañales et al., 2019b). These findings offer fertile ground for the socialization of political imagination.

Racial socialization is necessary to Black parenting practice. Black youth navigating racism and bigotry suffer racial stress and trauma, and racial socialization supports children's coping processes (Anderson and Stevenson, 2019). However, what if we could imagine that Black youth did not have to navigate racism and bigotry? What would that look like? In part, it would look like some of what we have seen in extant Black political movements where Black youth imagine and work toward overcoming oppressive systems with the support and confidence of the adults around them. Black families serve as a conduit for political

imagination-preparing change agents that are not shackled to broad American or White political imagination limitations and work to hold America accountable on the promise of freedom.

Schools

Schools present a rich context for adolescents to develop their political imagination. While many scholars have noted the many ways schools (Coles, 2016) fail Black youth, school contexts that consider adolescent's developmental needs alongside school policies and practices that promote equity and inclusion can be sites of liberation (Cammarota, 2011; Love, 2019). Indeed, schools such as the Children's Defense Fund Freedom Schools demonstrate the ways students develop critical consciousness and civic engagement skills through teacher practices and curricular materials (Jackson and Howard, 2014). Moreover, given the increasing amount of time adolescents spend within these spaces, it is a key site of socialization and their experiences within these spaces will affect a range of outcomes that extend far beyond academic achievement.

Given this reality, schools are fertile grounds to develop adolescents' political imagination. Importantly, this can and should be done across levels (e.g., classroom level, school level, district level). For example, at the classroom level, given the centrality of the dialectic process among peers in the construction of Black youth's political imagination, teachers can carve out space for this process to occur. In addition, given the importance of CSA in the process, teachers have the opportunity and responsibility to present students with meaningful, nuanced historical, social, and political content that provides insight into the issues of today (Bañales et al., 2019a). In addition, teachers can provide students with tangible research skills (e.g., navigating online, open source databases) necessary to engage in their own quest for answers. As noted earlier, it is an undue burden to make Black youth assume responsibility for social movements. Thus, teachers' presence as co-conspirators can be much-needed support to adolescents. This can be as simple as allowing adolescents to express their ideas in explicitly judgment-free zones or as integrated as working in tandem to implement the fruits of adolescents' political imagination.

Importantly, this responsibility to students does not simply lay at the teachers' feet. School leadership can also implement policies that facilitate this process. For example, high schools often have extracurricular clubs housed within and approved by school leadership. Schools can provide needed funds and, if need be administrative support to around a school club that provides Black youth a safe space to process these ideas (this especially important in economically depressed areas in which Black youth have limited safe spaces). School administrators can also invest in training for teachers and school personnel around key concepts such as socio-political development theory and relevant programming like youthtopias. This professional development would ideally extend past core subject teachers (e.g., reading, math, science, and social studies) and engage all adults who work with youth in the school building. Ideally, by equipping *all* adults with the pertinent practical and theoretical knowledge to help foster Black youth's political imagination, everyone has a stake in the process.

Youth-serving organizations

Youth-serving organizations are often seen as optimal spaces for sociopolitical development and by extension political imagination (Ginwright, 2007). From mentoring programs to community centers to after-school programs and high school-to-college pipeline programs, youth-serving organizations are diverse in the aim and scope of services provided (Kirshner, 2008; Ngo et al., 2017; Walker et al., 2021). At any

given time, these spaces are simultaneously the source of mentoring, leadership development, academic support, counseling and socioemotional support, movement, general community, a meal, and other necessities to youth wellbeing (Kirshner and Ginwright, 2012; DeBower et al., 2021). Given their established range with youth and their families, youth-serving organizations are commonly mentioned sites of resistance (Ginwright, 2007; Nicholas et al., 2019). However, the work of nurturing and facilitating imagination in the context of resistance is a constant (and sometimes unrealized) challenge in the tradition of resistance in youth-serving organizations (Kirshner and Ginwright, 2012; DeBower et al., 2021). To that end, we offer three interconnected recommendations for organizations serving and guiding Black youth in their sociopolitical development.

First, youth-serving organizations should focus on developing authentic youth leadership and direction. Many of these organizations already include models of leadership development as part of their curricula. When we say authentic, we are calling for leadership that is grounded in the principles, concerns, and goals as formed by Black youth. One of the challenges youth-serving organizations face are their agendas and curricula that may be of minimal interest to the youth they serve. Moving forward, innovation in these organizations can look like listening to youth instead of programming them—this call for leadership development looks like working with youth to develop their own direction and vision.

To support this development of leadership, second, youth-serving organizations can develop more activities that facilitate a suspension of disbelief. These activities involve a guided move from CSA to imagining an ideal future absent from oppression and full of hope. This requires a facilitation that prioritizes limitless collective and individual creativity over established rules. Finally, to actualize the first two recommendations, we recommend that youth-serving organizations constantly (re)expose youth to narratives of previous success. Paired with creativity and imagination that reject perceived barriers to liberation, previous narratives of success serve as possibility models with useful methodologies and epistemologies for Black youth's liberation. Taken together, these recommendations are designed to encourage the development of Black youth's vision as well as their activism.

Faith communities

Religion often is central to the formation of political ideologies (Pearson-Merkowitz and Gimpel, 2009), and faith communities have long served as sites of political socialization and engagement for Black people specifically (Smith, 2003; McClerking and McDaniel, 2005; Harris-Lacewell, 2007; Todd, 2011). Black Christian churches, for example, have been central to the formation of some notable civil rights leaders, such as Martin Luther King Jr. and Fannie Lou Hamer, both of whom began their political engagement in their youth. The Black Muslim community laid the foundation for leaders such as Malcolm X, Betty Shabazz, and Muhammad Ali to fight for the global liberation of Black people (Auston, 2017). Then, a recent literature review by Pearce et al. (2019) also affirms that spiritual formation is strongly related to adolescent moral development and political ideologies. Pearce et al. (2019) noted, however, that there is limited research directly connecting adolescents' political activism to religion or religiosity, calling for more work in this area. Still, the relationship between religion, moral values, and political ideology gives sufficient ground for suggesting that faith communities and Black adolescents' political imagination be further explored (see Dean and Andrews, 2016).

Youth ministries in Black churches stand and a key site for potential political formation for Black youth. As youth's faith

communities teach concepts of justice, freedom, safety, and community through their particular religious lenses, one can reasonably infer that this has a consequence for how youth envision communities, enact advocacy and resistance, and what they conceptualize as the *end* of those efforts (Verma and Maria, 2006; Todd, 2011). Thus, faith leaders serving the youth in their faith communities ought to design their programming and faith education curricula in ways that leverage the strong connection between cultural values, social responsibility, political vision, and their faith tradition (Junkin, 2002; Verma and Maria, 2006; Pearce et al., 2019; King et al., 2020). It seems reasonable to infer that political imagination is an outgrowth of youth's eschatological vision and the hope found therein.

King et al. (2020) studied the relationship between religiosity and hope among Salvadorian adolescents who participated in the faith-based youth development organization, Compassion International. King et al. (2020) used a structural education model to examine how the levels of religiosity both directly and indirectly related to the youths' hope for the future. Results indicated that higher levels of religiosity are found among youth supported by Compassion International and there were significant direct and indirect relationships between youth's level of religiosity and youth's hopefulness. This study has implications for SPD and political imagination among Black youth because it highlights the role that active participation in faith-based service activism has on youths' political outlooks and the moral convictions governing their engagement (also see Smith, 2003; Ginwright, 2011).

Implications for future research

Watts et al. (2003) assert, "SPD is not limited to resisting oppression in the interest of justice, however; the capacity to envision and help create a just society is an essential part of the process as well" (p. 185). Studying Black adolescents' political imagination is significant because their imaginations have served as the source of momentum for the revolutions that lead to social progress, the fuel of social justice (Turner, 2018; Hawlina et al., 2020). Based on our conceptualization of political imagination, we offer five considerations for scholars moving forward in this work: (1) prioritizing Black youths' wellbeing; (2) honoring Black youths' vulnerability in the imaginative process; (3) mindfully collaborating with Black youth in ways that advance their leadership and causes; (4) critically engaging the institutions and other stakeholders who impact this work; and (5) preserving opportunities for Black adolescents' to experience the fullness of adolescence.

Though Black youth can (and often do) thrive, they do so in spite of endemic misrepresentation, marginalization, disenfranchisement, and dehumanization. When researchers request access to Black youths' political imagination, the process or content therein, researchers are requesting access to what is often their only safe haven, their only fugitive space. Researchers also are asking Black youth to be emotionally vulnerable and engage in significant labor. As such, Black youths' needs and wellbeing must be prioritized in this work. One of the reasons we struggle with the execution of collaborations or solidarity between youth and adult political actions is that we do not focus closely enough on the nature of alliance. Here collaboration, solidarity, and alliance should be understood as interrelated concepts. We do not take up the task of defining these concepts, but rather move to call for political engagement researchers to think more deeply about

what collaboration looks like with Black adolescents when engaging in collective political action. To that end, a real-time understanding of what Black youth activists actually go through while doing and being so also is needed.

Citing YPAR as a common mode of studying Black adolescents' sociopolitical development, researchers must guard against YPAR becoming another means of scientific voyeurism that fails to afford Black adolescents collaborative sociopolitical agency and dignity. This means the participatory research focusing on youth sociopolitical development must not only be youth-centered, but as much as possible, also youth-directed. Further, when we assert that Black youth should have sociopolitical agency, we also assert that their political interests are worthy of investment apart from the convergent interest of enfranchised adult co-conspirators (see Clay and Turner, 2021). Simply put: What are the youths' concerns, goals, and desired approaches to resistance and reconstitution?

Finally, youth activism and political engagement researchers must (continue to) resist a grotesque proclivity to charge solely Black youth with redressing the immoral and inhumane systems and institutions spawned from the white political imagination, historically. This creates a quandary. Racism is the product of centuries of work interweaving white supremacist ideologies and reinforcing white dominance in every institution. Combating those systems and moving to dismantle those institutions is righteous and just. Yet, in efforts to upend racism and white supremacy, scholars may also conscript Black youth into another form of labor. This is a labor that potentially snuffs their childhood and adolescence. What does it mean for Black adolescence to be preoccupied with the atrocities inflicted by White adults? How can society better create space for Black youth to learn and practice resistance and envision a world free of these atrocities while also preserving/promoting/ providing the *childness* of their childhood? Given the grave responsibility of this research, we also acknowledge the constraints of researchers who take up this work. As we push researchers to be just in their interactions with youth, to fully engage their stories and not exploit their labor, we also push the systems that regulate and support research activities. Simply put: We must hold funding agencies, promotion and tenure policies, advising and mentoring structures, academic journals and other power structures accountable for seeing, valuing, supporting, and protecting this research.

Conclusion

This paper advances a developmental approach to understanding (a) political imagination, (b) its role in Black adolescents' sociopolitical development, and (c) opportunities for adults, communities, and youth-serving organizations to effectively partner with Black youth. This research can support Black youth and their political mobilization by deepening our understanding of how one can cultivate and sustain Black adolescents as political visionaries and social justice leaders. Black youth have dreams of what their nation(s) ought to look like, and their dreams can inform how adults and organizations partner. The tasks of youth studies researchers, caregivers, educators, youthworkers, and even the youth themselves, is to push youth's imaginations as far as it can see, and then create space for youth to apply the strategies that advance us toward that vision. Preparing Black youth to build a new world starts with childhood's castle of Legos, Black history story time, and playing schoolhouse. As they mature—grow in their understanding, abilities, and desire to transform this complex world—Legos become letters of

demand, story times become congressional hearings, and playing schoolhouse becomes organizing protest and teach-ins. The political imagination is used at each step.

Author contributions

ES contributed to the conception and design of the manuscript as well as wrote the first draft of the manuscript. CS, JH, and LR wrote sections of the manuscript. All authors contributed to the article and approved the submitted version.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

The reviewer CM declared a shared affiliation to the CS to the handling editor at the time of the review.

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Supplementary material

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