The Influence of Teacher Schema on Educational Outcomes for Students of Color:

A Critical Analysis of Racial Inequalities in American Schools

by

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Abstract

As the American student demographic continues to grow increasingly diverse, racial disparities in student outcomes indicate that public schools and White teachers across the country are struggling to provide quality education to students of color. A critical analysis of the widely recognized "achievement gap" and discipline gap reveals White educators socialized within a white supremacist society often adopt dominant deficit perspective schemas about people of color which inhibit teachers' abilities to provide effective, equitable educational opportunities to students of color. The dominant deficit schemas prevalent among predominantly White educators and administrators serve to obscure systemic racism, deny systemic and individual responsibility for perpetuating inequalities, and justify racial disparities as "natural". This thesis employs a critical analysis to explore the historical, social, and political constructs of race, historical and contemporary oppression of people of color and racialized educational opportunity gaps, the impact of socialization within a white supremacist society on teacher schema, the impact of teacher schema on the educational outcomes of students of color, and the role that critical consciousness and culturally relevant pedagogy can play in effectively addressing the learning potential of students of color. Through the development of critical consciousness, White teachers can learn to view students of color as capable, promising learners with important potential as future leaders; with critical schemas, educators can engage in pedagogy that in turn leads to students' of color development of sociopolitical consciousness, cultural competence, and academic success, thus effectively reducing gaps in achievement.

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Purpose and Significance

> *Education has substantial power to either challenge or to perpetuate societal injustices, the effects of which influence the schools again in a repeating cycle. In order to see the racially defined flaws of current educational norms and reform efforts, it is first necessary to demonstrate and accept that racism is still very real, common, and particularly endemic in education. (Rector-Aranda, 2016, p.3)*

The 21st century classroom features an increasingly diverse student demographic contrasted against a predominantly White, middle class, female teacher demographic. Over the last few decades, the U.S. Census Bureau statistics show a significant increase in the enrollment of students of color in elementary and secondary schools across the United States; 45% of those students have culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (Wilson, 2014). While students of color continue to constitute an increasing percentage of student bodies across the United States, the demographic of teachers remains predominantly White with a decreasing number of teachers of color (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. xvi; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012). This juxtaposition of teacher-student demographics challenges teachers to meet the needs of ethnically and culturally diverse students who often have very different lived experiences from their own.

Many contemporary attempts to rectify the disconnect between White teachers and students of color have been feeble and shortsighted, only addressing effects of the problem as opposed to confronting the source of the problems: an ineffective education system influenced by systemic institutional racism. Teachers and school systems too often look to culture and cultural differences as the cause of strain between students and teachers without ever addressing the underlying social, political, and historical factors contributing to racial disparities within the United States. Teachers, administrators, school systems, and policy makers who believe "celebrating" culture and diversity in schools will solve problems of equity and justice ignore the conditions of racism that underlie disparities in academic success and educational outcomes for students of color (Sleeter, 2011). Such efforts are about as useful as putting a bandage over a bullet hole. Teachers cannot effectively create change within the system of education without analyzing and understanding the causes and effects of systemic inequity and oppression in American education systems.

As Vaught (2011) aptly states, "Without knowing how a system is failing its children, we cannot begin to challenge that system and to promote change" (p. 3). This thesis employs a critical analysis to examine the effects of systemic racism and socialization of teachers on the contemporary state of American education,

addressing racialized disparities in student outcomes as represented in the well-documented "achievement gap" and discipline gap. Through critically questioning the role of teacher schema on student success and contextualizing and problematizing the contemporary and historical attitudes of White educators toward students of color, this thesis highlights the damaging effects of deficit schema on educational outcomes for students of color and asserts the need for the development of critical consciousness in White educators to provide effective, meaningful education to students of color across the United States.

In order to confront racial disparities within the United States' public education system, it is essential for teachers to develop critical consciousness to analyze systemic inequity, the political, economic, social, and racial structures that disproportionately restrict opportunities for students of color, creating a school culture and climate where pronounced disproportionality in discipline and achievement exist (Sleeter, 2011). Teachers must invest in analyzing their individual positionality, unpack their socialization, and engage in metacognitive thinking about their own biases, prejudices, teaching beliefs and behaviors as they interact with students and decipher what information to teach and how to deliver the curriculum. Teachers who do not develop a habit of critical consciousness will continue to perpetuate systems of oppression within their classroom, often "teaching the way they were taught," reinforcing negative stereotypes and unjust outcomes for students of color who deserve equity through education (Gonsalves, 2008). This thesis examines existing literature and stresses the need for critical consciousness and culturally relevant teaching within racially and culturally diverse 21st century classrooms to ensure that all students receive the quality of education they deserve (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Skiba et al., 2011).

Statement of Positionality

A key component of critical analysis involves the analyst's ability to recognize the social context of "knowledge" they were socialized into as well as how their position in society in relation to others impacts what they perceive and understand as "truths" about the world (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012). As a White, middle-class woman, it is crucial for me critically analyze my socialization and subsequent knowledge and assumptions in order to consider narratives, facts, and dialogues in literature counter to the dominant, white supremacist schema I learned about people of color. I recognize that my knowledge and schema about society and the people in it is "dependent upon a complex web of my cultural values, beliefs, experiences, and social positions" (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012, p. 8).

I was raised in a town in North Carolina that was ranked in a 2013 TIME Magazine article as one of the top ten cities to live in the United States. According to the 2010 census, my hometown has a population of 42, 214 citizens with a racial profile that is 79.5% White, 7.1% Hispanic, 7.1% Asian, 7.6% Black, and only 2.5% Biracial; the median household income in 2012 was $86,634. I grew up in what is considered a "good" neighborhood and attended "good" schools and had very little contact with people of color throughout my childhood and into adolescence.

Isolated in a bubble of White supremacy and "well-meaning White people" throughout my childhood, I internalized many deficit perspective messages about people of color. Between distraught mug shots of Black men on the nightly news and the fact that my mom always locked car doors while waiting at stoplights in downtown Raleigh when Black men were congregated on the street corner, I learned to internalize the stereotype that Black men are an inherently dangerous group of people. My parents discouraged me from driving through predominantly Black residential areas of Raleigh during high school and I received the message that if my car were to break down in one of "those" neighborhoods, I'd be in trouble. In school, the only Black students I had much contact with were athletes who seemed to totally disregard their education and constantly be in trouble for poor conduct in the classroom. My high school was sharply segregated and basic and remedial academic courses contained predominantly Black students while Honors and Advanced Placement (AP) courses consisted of predominantly White students. In all of my Honors and AP classes, I only ever had class with one Black peer. This lack of students of color within my academic courses and negative comments from teachers about their disrespect for school supported the deficit theory that students of color were academically lazy and

unmotivated. The Black and White students at my school didn't mingle much at all socially. The few White girls who hung out with Black students were treated with disgust by other White students for their believed lack of "class" and "self-worth".

Reflecting back upon my experiences with people of color before college, I realize that part of my White privilege was living in an affluent area and attending Honors and AP courses that my Black peers were not often able to frequent due to historical, societal, and political barriers that have shaped race relations and power within the United States since its conception. I recognize that my positionality as a White woman with a middle class background has influenced both my relation to others and how I understand society through socialization within a white supremacist system and within a conservative, White middle class family (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012). My positionality and familial lack of critical consciousness contributed to my limited interactions with Black peers throughout my adolescence. As Mcfalls & Cobb-Roberts (2001) explain, "Cultural isolation often leads to stereotypical, racist, and/or prejudiced attitudes toward those outside one's own group, especially when knowledge about others is derived from misleading and stereotyped media representations" (p. 165). In my experience, I did not have any personal or familial relations with people of color or an inkling of critical consciousness to contradict and counteract my subtle, subconscious exposure to socialization within the prominent deficit schemas of White society.

I did not grow up within an overtly racist home or community. My family and childhood friends can probably be best described as those who would like to be viewed as "politically correct" about touchy subjects like "race" without ever really questioning their beliefs, actions, or the society in which they lead privileged lives at the expense of minoritized groups of citizens. Our overall lack of critical awareness was protected by White privilege that meant we never had to question the equity of the social, political, and economic systems upon which our nation is built. Our Christian background and morals taught me to treat everyone equally and with the dignity and value I desired to be treated with; but I never questioned the justice of systemic oppression all around me and subtly did not view people of color as individuals with the same social standing or "class" as myself.

It was not until sophomore year of college that I began to think critically about race and how socialization has shaped my ideology, actions, and interactions for all of my life. I experienced the one "critical perspectives on learning and teaching" crash course our university requires for education majors, which first

opened my mind to a critical analysis of the messages and beliefs I learned throughout socialization within a predominantly White, affluent community and family. I extended my critical inquiry through an Honors course about "unlearning racism" the following semester and really began to engage in challenging critical analysis and reflection during that educational experience.

This thesis reflects my continued personal efforts in critical education and has played an instrumental role in deepening my understanding of the historical, social, and political contexts of systemic racism and the role a deficit perspective about people of color plays in maintaining and justifying racial disparities and systems of oppression.

Throughout this thesis, I focus primarily on the racial disparities in education between White students and Black students. I recognize that racial disparities occur throughout education between White students and Latino/Latina students and White students and Native American students. My review of the discipline gap focused primarily on Black male students amidst the disproportionality in discipline rates of students of color compared to White counterparts. I chose to focus on the educational climate for Black students after taking an Honors Course on Unlearning Racism, which sparked my interest in analyzing systemic racism within the American education system and unpacking my problematic learned beliefs about African Americans. With the highly racialized climate in the United States between Black and White citizens over the last few years and terrible ramifications in the justice system, racial profiling, as well as racialized murders plaguing the nation, I wanted to gain a deeper critical understanding of the role that education plays both in maintaining and creating this highly racialized society fueled off the systemic oppression of Black citizens and elevation of Whites with White superiority and White privilege.

I find this development of critical analysis particularly important as I will soon enter the classroom as a first-year teacher and will likely have a good number of students of color in the county I hope to teach in as well as in my classes throughout my life. It is part of my responsibility as a White educator to critically consider my schema about students of color. And to do this, I must first recognize and analyze my positionality and learned experiences about people of color. I am committed to continue critically analyzing the systems of oppression throughout the United States to understand the roles of dominant schema, power, and oppression as they function within American society and public schools in order to be a citizen and teacher who refuses to passively support systemic racism in my classroom, community, and country. The subsequent sections of this

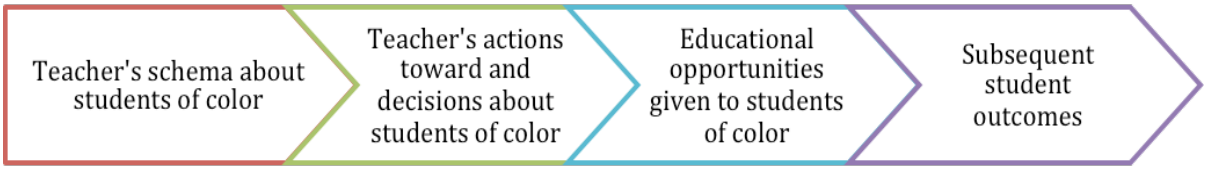
thesis explore such a critical analysis to problematize historical and contemporary racialized disparities in educational opportunities and outcomes and analyze key influences that uphold and maintain systemic inequities such as systemic racism, socialization, and teacher schema to better understand how to provide quality, effective education to students of color.

Chapter 1: Conceptual Framework

I would describe my conceptual framework much as Jabareen (2009) defines conceptual frameworks - as a "network, or 'a plane,' of interlinked concepts that together provide a comprehensive understanding of a phenomenon or phenomena" (p. 51). For the purpose of this thesis, my conceptual framework presents a critical analysis of the interrelated concepts and factors that contribute to the phenomena of racial disparities in student outcomes documented in data through the "achievement gap" and discipline gap. In the following paragraphs, I define key concepts featured in my conceptual framework and illustrate logical, sequential, and cyclical relationships between key concepts. Throughout the section I include schematic models to illustrate the relationships and interconnectedness of the complex concepts embedded in my conceptual frameworks. The schematic models represent the relationship between varying teacher schemas and student outcomes and the relationship between the development of cultural deficit perspective schemas, systemic racism, and socialization.

The conceptual framework I used to analyze the contemporary educational landscape focuses on interrelated concepts of schema, action, opportunity and outcome. White teachers and administrators make educational and disciplinary decisions for students based off their schema, or beliefs and assumptions, about different students. Subsequently, teachers' schema-driven decisions dictate students' educational opportunities, which ultimately affect student outcomes. Classroom teachers make referrals for special education, Gifted and Talented Education (GATE) programs, AP courses, and honors courses in schools across the nation. These decisions about students' classroom and program placements influence the level of rigor, teacher expectations, quality of curriculum, and often pedagogy students will experience. Teachers are also in charge of referrals for disciplinary procedures and decide which students and behaviors to punish and when to apply zero tolerance disciplinary policies and consequences which remove students from educational settings and negatively impact students' learning opportunities and connectedness to school. The type of educational experiences and opportunities teachers choose for students during their schooling greatly influences students' success and future academic endeavors (The Schott Foundation, 2016).

I developed Schematic Model 1.0 to demonstrate my conceptual framework for the role of teacher schema in student outcomes. As Schematic Model 1.0 shows, teachers' beliefs about students play a significant role in determining the quality of education students of color will receive. This model suggests that it is shortsighted and ineffective for educators, administrators, and policy-makers to look to improve students' educational outcomes without addressing the underlying teacher and administrator schemas biasing the educational process. To better understand racialized "achievement" and discipline gaps, Schematic Model 1.0 suggests a contextualized, critical evaluation of the prevailing teacher and administrator schemas to identify the role of teacher schema in the maintenance or deconstruction of racial disparities in educational success.



- Schematic Model 1.0

Developing a Critical Analysis

I conducted a critical analysis to evaluate the widespread schema held by many White teachers about students of color. As a White female and member of the dominant racial group, I could not engage in this topic or material critically without exercising critical consciousness, acknowledging my own positionality and socialization, and considering the bias and social construction of the pervasive negative stereotypes about students, families, and communities of color. My personal journey in developing critical consciousness has been much like drinking from a fire hose. As I mentioned in my statement of positionality, I grew up in a predominantly White community and attended predominantly White schools. My schema about students of color was strongly influenced by the media, particularly the evening news, and maintained through a chronic lack of interactions and relationships with people of color. The evening news taught me that men of color are dangerous, violent, untrustworthy and despicable. Grim mug shots of Black men flooded my TV screen each night while White, prim newscasters reported horror stories of shootings, burglaries, drugs, and domestic violence set in "undesirable", "dangerous" neighborhoods. Socialization in a White supremacist society and repeated exposure to predominantly negative associations to people of color strongly influenced my learned schema about people of color which remained largely unchallenged and unchecked until my sophomore year of

college during a crash course on critical consciousness and the major concepts of systemic oppression in the United States. Due to my personal socialization, positionality, and the topics at hand, I approached research and literature through a lens of critical analysis to deconstruct the systemic policies, practices, and commonly held beliefs of teachers and administrators that negatively impact educational outcomes for students of color.

A critical analysis is necessary as it employs critical consciousness to identify and deconstruct negative racial stereotypes and deficit perspectives used to obscure systemic oppression and injustices underlying American society. Freire's (2000) work on critical consciousness asserts, "one can only know to the extent that one 'problematizes' the natural, cultural, and historical reality in which s/he is immersed" (p. ix). Following Freire's assertions about critical analysis, this thesis employs a critical analysis that problematizes dominantly held negative schemas about people of color through analyzing the key concepts of race, racism, socialization, and cultural deficit perspectives in their social, historical, and political contexts.

According to Sensoy and DiAngelo (2012), critical analysis involves the identification and recognition of unequal social power that is constantly enacted at the micro (individual) and macro (structural/societal) levels to maintain oppression within a system. An effective critical analysis involves both research and careful consideration of the historical, cultural and ideological sources of power that underlie social conditions and facilitate "mainstream" socialization (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012). Critical analysis also warrants an evaluation of knowledge as socially constructed and reflective of the values and interests of those in power who produce it (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012). In this regard, a literature review conducted with a conceptual framework requiring critical analysis of the concepts within has challenged me to analyze the way that commonly held beliefs or "knowledge" have evolved over time to reflect the best interests of White people to maintain power, whether intentional or not. Sensoy and DiAngelo (2012) describe this process of critical analysis as follows: "Thinking critically involves more than just acquiring new information in order to determine which facts are true and which are false. It also involves determining the social, historical, and political meaning given to those facts" (p. 2). For example, a critical review of the research reveals that race is a social construction (Roberts, 2011; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). Fact: There is not enough biological differentiation between human beings to separate the human race into separate "races", and yet society believes in a "natural" categorization of humans into "races" which are subsequently rank-ordered and assigned different inherent social values (Roberts, 2011; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012). Critical analyses of these situates the

concept of "race" into its historical context to determine the social and political meanings given to "race" throughout history and the impact of this socio-political construction on the American people and contemporary crises in education.

Schema and Deficit Perspectives

Before moving on to divulge a critical analysis and conceptual framework of race, racism, socialization, and the construction of cultural deficit perspective, I want to explain the role of schema in teachers' educational decisions and define and explain the deficit schema about students of color prevalent among White teachers across American schools.

Our beliefs, ideologies, and theories about others and the world drastically influence our actions. As Sensoy and DiAngelo (2012) assert, "Theory can be conceptualized as the internal 'maps' we follow to 'navigate' and make sense of our lives and the new things we encounter" (p. 6). Our actions and decisions evolve from and reflect our theories and the schema we ascribe to consciously and subconsciously. Research indicates that many teachers hold deficit theories about students of color, which negatively impacts their subsequent educational and disciplinary decisions in regards to students of color (Volk & Long, 2005). As is such, it is crucial for teachers to examine their schema or belief systems about students of color to ensure students are receiving equitable educational opportunities. I developed Schematic Model 1.1 to illustrate this relationship between teachers' deficit schemas and educational outcomes for students of color.

- Schematic Model 1.1

Volk and Long (2005) concisely define a deficit schema as a belief system that attributes students' academic or behavioral struggles to socially constructed deficits "inherent" to students of color, their families, and their communities. In the contemporary educational context, a cultural deficit model deems cultural values of different groups of people of color as dysfunctional, negative, and ineffective. Furthermore, cultural deficit schemas assert that it is dysfunctional cultural values that cause low occupational and educational achievement for students of color (Solórzano & Yosso, 2011). Cultural deficit schemas deem the following values, among others, as "culturally deficient" compared to dominant White values: valuing collaboration and community over

competition and individual merit, present versus future time orientation, and placing less value on education and upward mobility (Solórzano & Yosso, 2011). In a deficit schema, students of color are categorized as "inherently deficient" because of their perceived variance from dominant culture expectations of behavior and learning; diverse experiences and values are seen as disadvantages to students and inconveniences to teachers as opposed to assets and strengths for exploration and capitalization in educational contexts (Fox, 2016).

A critical analysis of the role of deficit schema in American education reveals that White teachers and administrators commonly use a deficit perspective to justify racial disparities in student outcomes as "natural" and divert attention away from the responsibility teachers and administrators have in creating and perpetuating systemic educational inequities for students of color. Deficit schemas position the blame for "underachievement" on people of color. Deficit schemas serve to protect educators and school policies and practices from scrutiny which would reveal inequitable, biased educational and behavioral decisions about students of color (Ford & Grantham, 2003). Educators and administrators reveal deficit perspectives when they speak of students of color and reference negative racial stereotypes. Teachers holding deficit schemas may refer to students of color as "lazy," "less academically inclined," "behavior problems," "disrespectful," or "unreachable" to justify disparities in standardized test scores, graduation rates, GATE enrollment, and AP and honors course enrollment (Kozel Silverman, 2011). For example, a critical analysis of a student of color's educational experiences might read as, "Brandon isn't experiencing academic success because he was never identified as gifted and provided with quality educational opportunities to enhance his innate intelligence. Consequently, as his teacher, it is my responsibility to advocate for Brandon and ensure that he receives the quality and quantity of academic rigor, challenge, and support he needs to help him experience academic success and educational engagement." In contrast, a deficit perspective interpretation of the same student's academic struggles might read as, "Brandon isn't experiencing academic success because he is lazy and less academically inclined than his peers. His parents don't value education and clearly he doesn't either or he would try harder. Consequently, as his teacher, it is not my responsibility to ensure he is progressing academically or experiencing positive educational outcomes as this student and his family don't care and I wouldn't cover much ground with Brandon anyways." This example of deficit perspective schema in action illustrates the power blaming students has on teachers' actions; deficit schemas excuse educators from taking responsibility for their students' learning experiences and educational outcomes.

As Fox (2016) aptly states, "Within the educational framework, deficit perspectives deflects the responsibility from systemic failure to the learner's community and family inherited behaviors" (p. 641). In doing so, cultural deficit schemas ignore the role of teachers and administrators in ensuring the academic success of all students. When the teaching practices and educational and disciplinary decisions of teachers and administrators are called into question, research reveals a stark disparity in how teachers react to students of color versus how teachers react to White students (Howard & Navarro, 2016). Through deficit explanations of educational disparities, gaps in student outcomes and student discipline rates are dismissed as reflective of the natural differences in academic ability and behavior between students of color and their peers as opposed to manifestations of teachers' deficit perspectives about students of color and subsequent educational opportunity gaps. Ultimately, a deficit schema that "devalues" and "discounts" students of color "disqualifies" students from enriching educational opportunities and experiences sets students of color up for significant academic struggles and possible failure while decreasing teachers' willingness and ability to provide students with a quality education (Volk & Long, 2005).

The reigning deficit paradigm perpetuates systemic inequalities in education through justifying racial disparities and ignoring or rejecting the role that teacher and administrator bias plays in student outcomes. Because a cultural deficit schema denies systemic responsibility for the educational disparities between students of color and their White peers, it eliminates need for analysis of racial disparities in student outcomes and discipline as more than anything other than reflective of inherent differences between the values, efforts, and abilities of Whites and people of color. White teachers and administrators who hold a cultural deficit perspective about students of color and the racialized gaps in education mentally benefit from denying personal responsibility in perpetuating racial disparities in education. Ultimately, a cultural deficit schema protects its holders from having to analyze, acknowledge, and come to terms with the historical, social, political, and educational oppression of people of color (Rector-Aranda, 2016). As Sensoy and DiAngelo (2012) describe this, "Those who benefit from society's patterns of discrimination may be invested in NOT understanding the actual nature of discrimination" (p. 3). However it is only through critical analysis of society and identification of discrimination that a system can be changed for the purpose of equity.

Critical analysis of deficit perspective necessitates the contextualization of the phenomenon. Thus I updated my schematic model for the relationship between the schema of White teachers and educational

outcomes for students of color. I developed Schematic Model 1.2, as shown below, to depict the expansion of my conceptual framework to include the historical, political, and social context that affect White teachers' ideology about students of color. In the following section, I expand my conceptual framework of teacher schema and student outcomes through the definition and contextualization of key concepts such as race, racism, and socialization. The section then explores a critical analysis of the historical, political, and social development of race, racism, socialization, and the subsequent cultural deficit perspective to provide a conceptual framework and schematic model with which to analyze and contextualize the racial disparities in American education.

- Schematic Model 1.2

Development of Deficit Schema: A Critical Analysis of Race, Racism, and Socialization in the U.S.

Racism encompasses the historical, institutional, political and social beliefs and actions that uphold an unequal distribution of power, privileges, and resources between Whites and people of color. Audre Lorde (1992) defines racism as, "The belief in the inherent superiority of one race over all others and thereby the right to dominance" (p. 496). Guinier (2004) expands the definition of racism to address its structural elements, stating that it is a, "phenomenon that fabricates interdependent yet paradoxical relationships between race, class, and geography" (p. 100) which involves the "maintenance of, and acquiescence in, racialized hierarchies governing resource distribution" (p. 98) and power. Lorde's (1992) explanation of racism highlights a dominant schema, which assumes superiority to other races and supports racist practices. Guinier's (2004) explanation of systemic racism emphasizes the structural aspects of systemic racism in social and political constructs, which function to maintain power and the benefits of resources for the racial group in power. A major factor in racism is institutional power (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). Racism extends beyond the biases and actions of individuals and is firmly situated in the systemic structural policies, practices, and customs that create and maintain oppression of people of color in status, income, educational attainment, political power, and voice (Taylor, 2006). Within the United States, systemic racism can be defined as White racial discrimination and prejudices against people of color that is supported explicitly and implicitly through White institutional power and

authority used to elevate Whites socially, politically, and economically and simultaneously disadvantage people of color (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012).

As Audre Lorde (1992) recognized, the systemic oppression of people of color is based on a deficit schema about people of color that elevates Whites as the inherently superior racial group and positions people of color as dysfunctional, less valuable "others". This schema can be attributed in part to the social construction of race. United States history reveals that race is a socially constructed category or means of grouping and differentiating people that is used to show the superiority or dominance of one racial group above all the rest (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). Contrary to popular socialized belief, there is only one human race; human beings do not contain a high enough degree of genetic differentiation to be scientifically divided and classified as separate races (Roberts, 2011). The concept of race is in fact socially constructed as a means for classifying humans based on physical characteristics such as skin color, hair texture, and bone structure (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012). Throughout history, the criteria for different racial categories fluctuated, not as a result of scientific or biological advances in understanding human genetics, but as results of changes in sociopolitical agendas, which served to maintain White power through systemic devaluation of people of color (Roberts, 2011; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012). It is important to note that although race is not real in a scientific or biological sense, the sociopolitical groupings of people into races is a real phenomenon that has powerful consequences on people's social status, life opportunities, health, wealth, reputation, and education (Roberts, 2011).

Critical Analysis of Race and Racism

A critical analysis of the history of racism reveals that the development and hierarchy of "race" has political roots in slavery and colonialism (Roberts, 2011). White settlers used cultural deficit perspectives of Native Americans to justify the settlers' dehumanizing acts of murdering Native Americans and removing them from their homes and land. In order for Whites to justify their mistreatment and devaluation of Native Americans, the White settlers developed a deficit schema that labeled Native Americans as a barbaric, uncivilized, uncultured, and unintelligent race and therefore inherently inferior to Whites (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012). The White settlers engaged in social stratification as they grouped Native Americans and Whites separately and hierarchically ordered Whites as more valuable than the Native Americans to justify the unequal distribution of rights, resources, and dignity given to Whites compared to Native Americans (Sensoy &

DiAngelo, 2012). This critical analysis of colonialism reveals White settlers' use of deficit schema and power to justify their oppression of people and domination of land and resources.

Further critical historical analysis reveals that Whites engaged in a similar pattern of social stratification to devalue Africans and justify the abuse and dehumanization of Blacks during colonial slavery. White American slave owners had a deep-seated interest in maintaining and justifying the exploitation of Black slaves during colonial America as the early form of the American economy gained profits from forced slave labor; the settlers saw the continuation and expansion of their economy as contingent on the continued enslavement of African people (Roberts, 2011). To justify the abuse and enslavement of Africans, slave owners like Thomas Jefferson turned to science to try and prove a natural, racial "hierarchy" between Whites and Africans (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012). Though the scientific and medical studies of the mid-1800s did not yield true scientific or biological evidence that there was a hierarchy of races, the White public accepted the suggestion of Black racial inferiority as "scientific fact" to justify the enslavement and abuse of an entire group of people (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012). The prevailing deficit perspective of people of color asserted that Blacks were uncivilized, uncultured, dangerous, hypersexual, immoral, and inherently less intelligent than Whites (Green, 1998).

Scapegoating Blacks as inferior human beings at the bottom of the racial totem pole also played a political role in colonial America. The socially constructed racial hierarchy gave poor White laborers and indentured servants a social edge of value and power over Blacks in a White supremacist culture. This racial bond unified poor, disempowered Whites with wealthy Whites and secured the elite White man's position of power through ensuring poor Whites would never join ranks with Blacks to overturn the racial hierarchy (Roberts, 2011). Eventually, colonists passed statutes which assigned privileges and limitations to the different racial groups of "Whites", "Negroes", and "Indians" in order to legally ensure that Whites maintained political power and stayed in a seat of privilege "deserved" through the color of their skin and believed superiority in the "purity" of White lineage and blood (Roberts, 2011).

Socialization and the Maintenance of Deficit Schema and Systemic Racism

Though systemic racism has its roots deeply embedded in history, systemic racism is not simply a construct of the past. Systemic, societal, and institutional advantages and privileges continue to position Whites in a seat of power and success over people of color in health and life expectancies, accumulated wealth,

economic standing and poverty rates, criminal demographics, educational opportunities and outcomes, occupational and housing opportunities, and in available resources (Ladson-Billings, 2009; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012). A deficit schema about people of color, kindred to the one first used to justify slavery, has persisted throughout history and is employed to justify contemporary systemic racial inequities (Roberts, 2011). The endurance of a deficit schema about people of color is possible through the powerful process of socialization. Socialization within a White supremacist society serves to inundate generation after generation of Whites with a deficit schema that denies systemic racism as a reality and blames people of color for the struggles they face at the hands of systemic racism (Solórzano & Yosso, 2011). No human who lives as a part of a society can claim immunity from socialization. The concept of race is engrained in American subconscious and impacts the schemas through which we view others. Roberts (2011) attests to the influence of race on our view of the world stating, "Race is the first or second thing we notice about a stranger when we pass on the street or a new acquaintance approaching to shake our hand" (p. 3). Though children don't take crash courses in school to learn about the racial hierarchy, they are schooled in the racial, political, and social beliefs of their parents, friends, trusted adults, and inundated with the biases and schema presented in mainstream society via media, movies, and news.

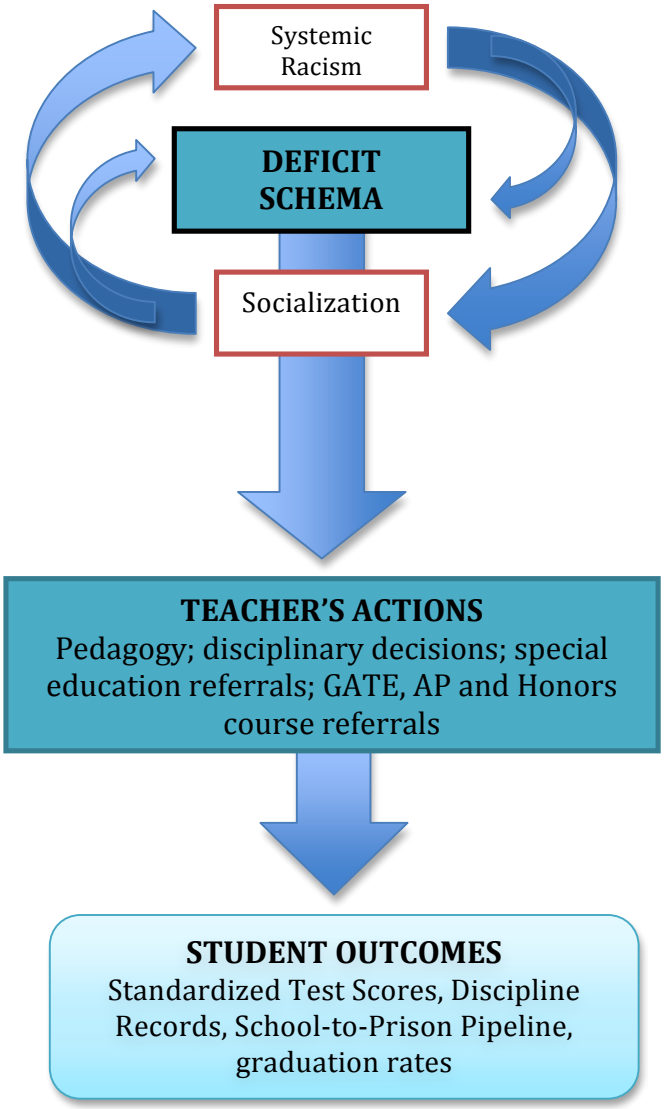
The process of socialization encompasses the systematic training of individuals into the "norms" of a given culture; it is the process through which individuals learn to categorize behavior, practices and characteristics into that which is "normal" or "appropriate" and that which is "deviant" and "undesirable" (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012). For the purpose of this thesis, I focus on the socialization of Whites as this helps contextualize the cultural deficit schema common in White teachers and administrators that is central to my analysis of American education. At the micro level of socialization, Whites learn about the social constructions of race through direct and indirect messages about people of color sent from family and friends. As children, we learn which peers we can play with and which peers to avoid. We learn which people are "bad people" and learn which negative stereotypes to associate with different racial groups. The macro level of socialization within the United States features messages from mainstream "American Culture" which are perpetuated in schools, by the government, and mass media (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012). The negative stereotypes, images, and emotions we learn to associate with people of color at a young age become the basis for our schema and how we make sense of the world around us (Juárez, 2013). As Whites are trained in the norms of dominant

White culture, we develop cultural deficit perspectives about people of color that enable us to ignore systemic racism and justify its effects.

The effects of systemic racism and a deficit schema about the conceptualized "inherent" inferiorities of people of color convince Whites that the negative outcomes experienced by Blacks are part of their inherent weaknesses as opposed to products of systemic racism. Roberts (2011) asserts, "The diabolical genius of making this political system (race) seem biological is that the very unequal conditions it produces become an excuse for racial injustice" (p. 24). For example, when Whites see the high incarceration rates and low academic success rates for Black students, they use those phenomena as evidence proving the inherent inferiority of people of color (Roberts, 2011). In this fashion, Whites can easily short circuit a critical analysis of systemic racism and never even consider the systemic inequities of power and oppression affecting life outcomes of people of color. When Whites hold a deficit schema about people of color, they justify the racial hierarchy in society as natural and rational; their explanation of glaring racial disparities in every aspect of American life is that the people of color are somehow responsible for and deserving of their perceived place in society. In this way, a deficit perspective about people of color serves to maintain systemic oppression in the United States as it protects Whites from questioning the socially and politically constructed value-hierarchy of races that this nation was built upon.

White socialization into a cultural deficit schema about people of color is often so internalized and subconscious that people believe their beliefs are natural and factual. In fact, Taylor (2006) asserts that the "racial hierarchy intrinsic to the political, economic, and educational systems is invisible" (p. 74) to Whites because of how central and widespread the devaluation of people of color is in American White supremacist society across micro and macro levels of socialization. Because this cultural deficit perspective becomes so engrained in mainstream, Whitewashed American culture, researchers argue that it is the "subconscious", "instinctive", "uncritical habit of minds" of White Americans that maintain systemic racism without ever questioning the racial inequities rampant in American society (Juárez, 2013; Rector-Aranda, 2016). More specifically, Juárez (2013) calls out White people's "shallow understanding and lukewarm acceptance" (p. 35) of systems of oppression as playing a large role in the maintenance of systemic oppression. The power of socialization lies in the fact that our socialized beliefs have real consequences on those around us, even if the beliefs are not inherently true or even remotely factual (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012).

I designed Schematic Model 2.0 to reflect my comprehensive conceptual framework that illustrates the relationships between race, systemic racism, socialization, and the cultural deficit perspective within the context of White teacher schema about students of color and subsequent educational consequences for students of color. An understanding of each key concept is crucial to a comprehensive critical analysis of the role of race and teacher bias in contemporary education. In the subsequent section, I engage in a critical analysis of the racial disparities in student outcomes and opportunities reflected in the "achievement gap" and discipline gap. I apply Schematic Model 1.2 and Schematic Model 2.0 along with a critical analysis of existing research and literature to debunk the common damaging deficit-oriented justifications White teachers, administrators, and policy-makers propose and believe about students of color and enact accordingly.



- Schematic Model 2.0

Chapter 2: Critical Analysis of Racial Disparities in Educational Outcomes – Problematizing the "Achievement Gap" and Discipline Gap

This section analyzes two educational phenomena commonly referred to in the literature as the "achievement gap" and the "discipline gap". Both the achievement gap and discipline gap are indicators of the imbalanced state of the American education system and highlight the stark discrepancies in the quality of education that students of color receive compared to their White counterparts. In the subsequent sections of this paper, I will analyze the relationships between deficit-perspective schemas and teachers' educational and disciplinary decisions about students of color and employ a critical analysis to contextualize the achievement gaps and discipline gaps in their historical and social contexts. Further, I discuss the interrelatedness of key concepts of systemic racism, socialization, implicit bias, deficit schemas, and racial disparities plaguing American public schools. Both the analysis of the discipline gap and achievement gap use the conceptual framework outlined in the previous section to uncover the relationship between teachers' schema, subsequent actions, resulting student opportunities, and student outcomes.

Defining the Discipline Gap

Racialized disproportionality in the execution of school discipline policies is a national crisis within American education systems. In January 2014, the U.S. Department of Justice Civil Rights Division and the U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights published national "guidelines" to remind public elementary and secondary schools of their Federal obligations to provide non-discriminatory student discipline practices (Rudd, 2014). These federal guidelines came in response to extensive research showing that students of color, particularly Black males, are overrepresented in *who is disciplined* and *how* schools apply disciplinary procedures (Hines-Datiri, 2015). This racial discrepancy in school discipline is referred to throughout literature and research as the discipline gap. The data reflected in the reveals harsher, more frequent application of Zero Tolerance procedures and policies to students of color compared to White peers (Hines-Datiri, 2015). A closer review of the statistics and practices underlying the discipline gap suggest that students of color who are over-represented in school discipline suffer negative outcomes as consequences from the effects of Zero Tolerance policies on student engagement, academic success, school attachment, and involvement with the juvenile justice system (American Civil Liberties Union, 2016; APA, 2008; Losen, 2010; Fabelo et al., 2011; Hines-Datiri, 2015; Porowski, O'Conner & Passa, 2014).

Research has examined the discipline gap's racial disparities in discipline rates between White students and students of color for over 35 years (Porowski, O'Conner & Passa, 2014). Over the last three and a half decades, discipline data from American public schools consistently shows that students of color, particularly Black males, experience longer and harsher exclusionary discipline consequences for the same infractions as White peers (Fenning & Rose, 2007; Gregory, Skiba & Noguera, 2010; Hines-Datiri, 2015; Hirschfield, 2008; Porowski, O'Conner & Passa, 2014; Skiba, et al., 2002; The Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2015). Data on Black male students reveal they are subject to suspension at rates two to three times higher than their White peers (Skiba et al., 2011). In a national survey of 74,000 10th grade students, results showed that 50% of Black students reported suspension or expulsion while only 20% of White students reported the same punishment (Gregory, Skiba & Noguera, 2010). Within North Carolina public schools during the 2008-2009 academic year, discipline records reveal Black students were suspended for minor infractions at rates significantly higher than White peers who committed the same infractions; discipline rates for Black students were eight times higher for cell phone use, six times higher for dress code violations, two times higher for disruptive behavior, and ten times higher for public displays of affection (Losen, 2010). Data also illustrate that Black middle school students are more likely to be suspended or expelled for abusive language, bullying, lying or cheating, and tardiness or truancy than White peers who engaged in the same behaviors but received warnings or less severe punishments (Skiba et al., 2011).

The graph below reflects the data published in the most recent Office of Civil Rights' Data Snapshot of School Discipline (2014) and illustrates the Discipline Gap. In 2011-2012, although Black students represented only 16% of the student population, they received a disproportionate percentage of disciplinary procedures: 32% of in-school suspensions (ISS), 33% of single out-of-school suspensions (OSS), 42% of repeated OSS sentences, and 34% of expulsions. In comparison, White students represented about 51% of the school population yet only received a range of 31 – 40% of school suspensions and expulsions.

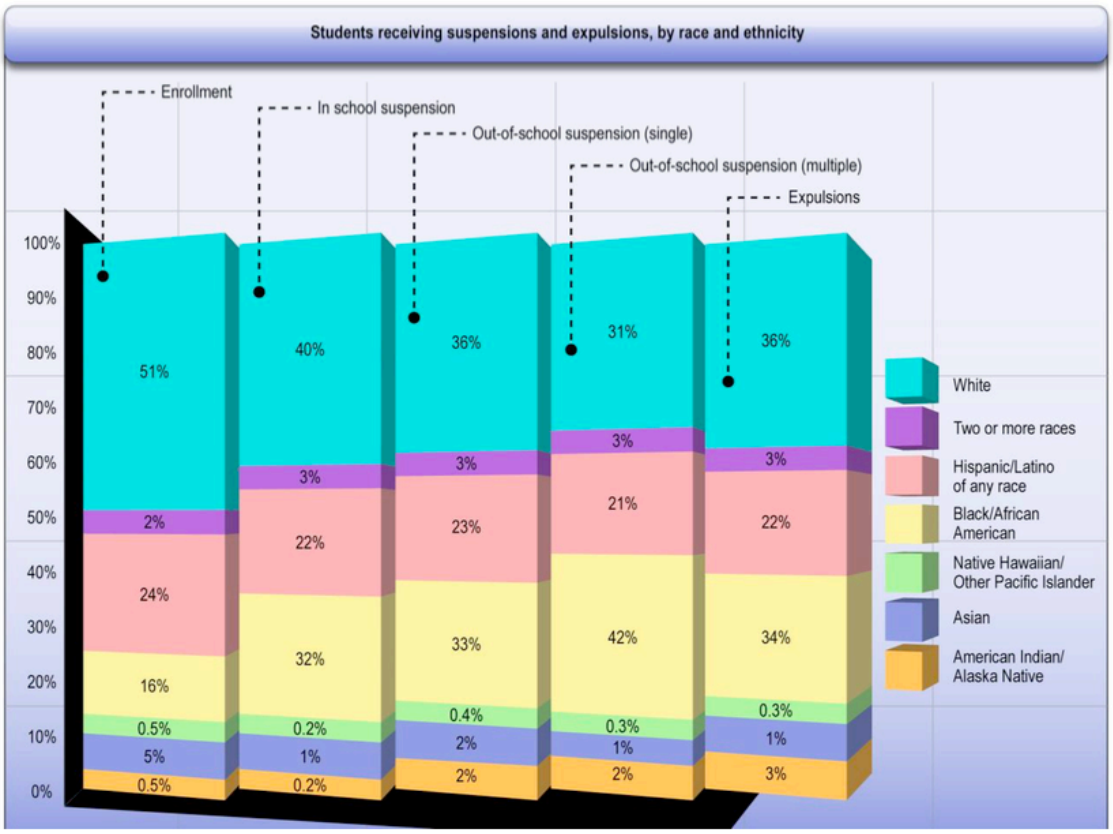
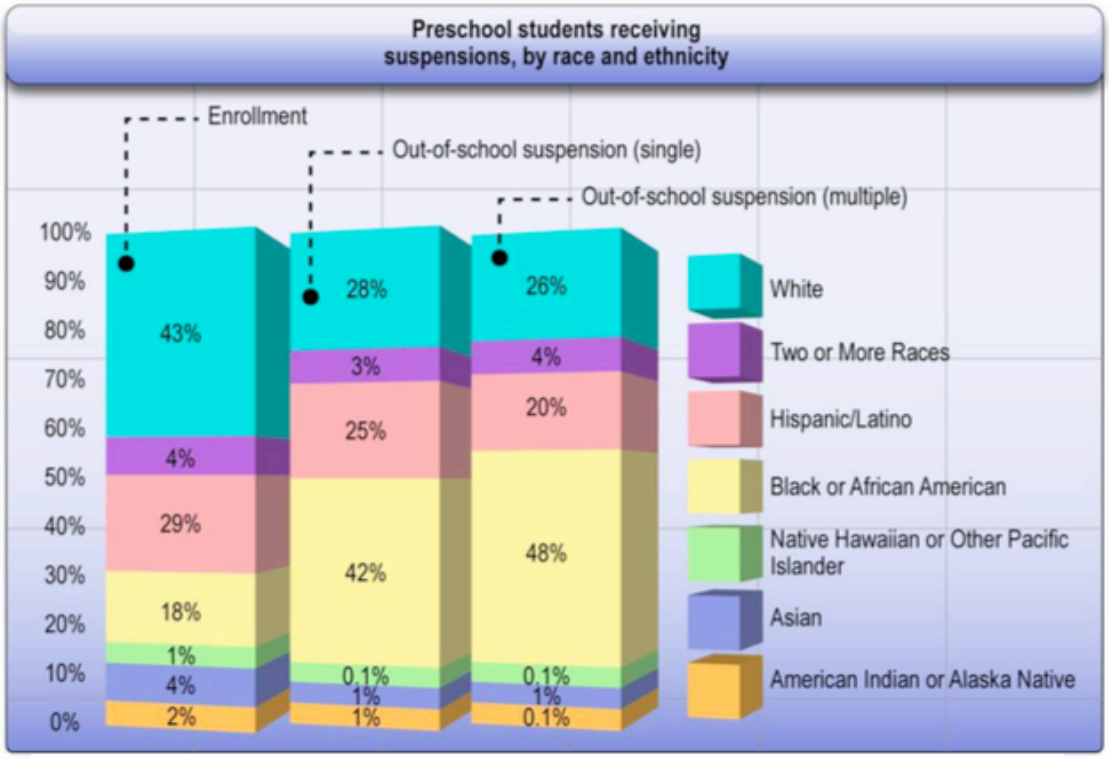


Figure 1: From United States of America, U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights. (2014). *Data Snapshot: School discipline*. Washington, DC: U.S. Dept. of Education, Office for Civil Rights.

The most recent national data published in 2014 through the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights also reveals that racial disparities in school discipline procedures between students of color and White peers begins as early as preschool. Although Black students represented only 18% of preschool students in 2011-2012, they constituted 48% of the students receiving more than one out-of-school suspension; White peers comprised 43% of the preschool population but only 26% of the children receiving more than one out-of-school suspension. As the graph clearly shows, students of color, particularly Black students, are subject to well above their equitable, statistical share of school discipline through Zero Tolerance policies beginning as early on in their public school careers as preschool.



NOTE: Detail may not sum to 100% due to rounding. Figure reflects 99% of schools offering preschool, including over 1 million preschool students, nearly 5,000 students suspended once, and over 2,500 students suspended more than once. Preschool suspensions and expulsions were collected for the first time in 2011–12.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, Civil Rights Data Collection, 2011–12.

Figure 2: From United States of America, U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights. (2014). *Data Snapshot: School discipline*. Washington, DC: U.S. Dept. of Education, Office for Civil Rights.

Critical Analysis of Discipline Gap and Deficit Schema

The racial disparities recorded in the schools' discipline records begs the question, "Why are students of color as young as preschoolers subject to higher rates of discipline than their White peers?" The common explanation for the discipline gap among White educators and administrators seems logical: disproportionate rates of office referral and suspension for African American students are due to higher rates of misbehavior in Black students than White students – Black students misbehave more frequently and are therefore rightly disciplined more frequently than peers, but this explanation of the discipline gap is false. No research has been found to prove that Black students misbehave more than their peers (Rudd, 2014; Skiba, 2000; Skiba et al, 2011). Fabelo and peers (2011) conducted research seeking to "explain" the discipline gap and controlled for 83 variables including socio-economic status to determine what factors contributed to the discrepancies in discipline rates. Even after controlling for 83 variables, the study found that Black students still had a 31 percent higher likelihood of receiving exclusionary discipline compared to similar White and Hispanic peers

(Fabelo et al., 2011). In fact, research shows that even though Black students do not misbehave more than their peers, they receive office referrals for minor infractions reflective of subjective disciplinary actions (Rudd, 2014; Skiba, 2000). The literature, anecdotal data, and discipline rates demonstrate that the disproportionate representation of Black students in schools' disciplinary procedures reflects pervasive, systemic bias against students of color evident through the deficit perspectives held and enacted upon by teachers and administrators (Claiborne, 1999; Rudd 2014; Skiba, 2000; Skiba et al., 2011).

Given the juxtaposition of majority White, female teacher demographic with diverse student bodies, racial stereotyping cannot be discredited as a factor that contributes to disproportionate office referrals and exclusionary discipline rates affecting students of color (Skiba et al., 2011). White teachers and administrators represent a majority of public school employees and develop deficit schemas about the behavior and character of students of color through socialization in a White supremacist society. Each professional's ideology about people of color was shaped through exposure to the media, their experience in school, their families, friends and communities and the plethora of explicit and implicit messages they received about people of color all throughout their life. This process of socialization in a dominant White society, or systematic training the norms of White "American" culture, reinforces negative stereotypes about the "otherness" and inferiority of people of color (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012). In particular, White educators learn to stereotype Black males as disruptive, defiant, and aggressive "problem students" (Skiba et al., 2011). An educator socialized to develop a deficit-perspective schema about African Americans could ascribe to assumptions that Black students lack respect for authority, are prone to making poor life decisions, and can be expected to misbehave in school (Kozel Silverman, 2013). As characteristic of a deficit perspective, teachers and administrators learn to not only associate students of color with negative stereotypes, but also to attribute students' behavioral struggles or perceived behavioral struggles to the student as "inherent deficits" assumed to be characteristic of the students' race (Volk & Long, 2005).

White educators socialized in a White supremacist society tend to view Black male students through a negative stereotype lens, believing students to be hyper-aggressive, threatening, and overtly disrespectful. Research reveals that White educators have developed such strong negative schemas about students of color that something as innocent as a student's walking style can trigger teachers' and administrators' unchecked implicit bias, predisposing Black students for higher disciplinary rates (Neal, et al., 2003; Rudd, 2014). A

study in 2003 discovered that teachers perceived students who had a "Black walking style" as lower academic achievers, highly aggressive, and more likely to need special education services (Neal, et al., 2003; Rudd, 2014). Once teachers and administrators buy into common negative stereotypes about students of color and peg students as inherently "defiant" because of their race, they are unable to apply Zero Tolerance policies objectively or fairly to students of color (Rudd, 2014). Deficit perspectives about students of color even influence schools' methods for handling disciplinary procedures - teachers and schools are quick to revert to police intervention in disciplinary procedures for students of color that would be handled by school staff without the involvement of law enforcement for White students (Hines-Datiri, 2015). A negative, deficit perspective about students of color allow teachers and administrators to believe that students of color are more dangerous, disrespectful, and defiant than their peers and these assumptions prompt the adults in power too often to engage in the unnecessarily quick and harsh discipline of students (Claiborne, 1999). Deficit perspectives about Black students influence the severity to which teachers apply Zero Tolerance policies and limit teachers' objectivity in determining consequences (Hines-Datiri, 2015).

Research indicates that teachers' assumptions and schemas about students influence which students are disciplined using Zero Tolerance policies and teachers' schemas tend to vary between White students and students of color (Hines-Datiri, 2015). Teachers who hold negative assumptions about a student's character and behavior would be unlikely to remain objective and impartial during the application of disciplinary procedures. Similarly, teachers who hold positive perspectives about a student's character and behavior are unlikely to remain objective and impartial during disciplinary decisions. White students' actions and misdeeds are not racialized or interpreted through a deficit perspective schema like the misdeeds of Black peers (Wise, 2013). Part of a White student's White privilege (protections and advantages acquired simply because the student is a member of the "dominant" racial group) involves White teachers and administrators making the least dangerous assumption about the student's choices and intentions. The data representing the discipline gap supports the fundamental difference in treatment that White students receive during disciplinary procedures; White students who get in trouble are given the benefit of the doubt while Black students are "presumed guilty" (Claiborne, 1999). When Black students are penalized for the same infractions as White students but White students are given grace and let go with a warning, teachers and administrators communicate two very different, fundamental assumptions about students. White students are given the benefit of the doubt, challenged to

higher standards, and told, "This isn't you. You are better than the decision you just made." In stark contrast, Black students penalized with suspension or expulsion for the same infractions are sent dangerous message: "You showed your true colors. You don't belong in school. You proved me right." These contrasting scenarios reflect the dangerous deficit schema behind the discipline gap and illustrate the effect of teacher schema on discipline decisions.

A deficit perspective about the character and behavior of students of color serves to justify or "normalize" the discipline gap and dismisses teachers' and administrators' role in perpetuating racial disparities in school discipline. Throughout history, Whites have used a pervasive deficit perspective schema about people of color to "normalize" racial inequities, justify the oppression of entire groups of people based off socially constructed stereotypes, and distract from theories that point out systemic racism and the role that people in power play in perpetuating injustice (Ford & Grantham, 2003; Roberts, 2011; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012). In a similar way, White teachers, administrators, and policymakers use their deficit perspectives of students of color to justify the discipline gap as reflective of a naturally occurring phenomenon based off the frequency of students' behavior and "innate" temperament of Black students to engage in more rule-breaking behaviors than White peers; though data disputes this theory, this widespread deficit perspective serves to justify the racial disparities in discipline (Skiba et al., 2011). In this way, a deficit perspective that situates blame for inequities in students of color dismisses teachers and administrators from ethical scrutiny as such an explanation warrants no further assessment. On a micro level of analysis, teachers' actions are never called into question when all the blame is on students, making the phenomenon of racial disparity in discipline seem "normal", even though it is the teachers and administrators who make the decisions about who to discipline and how. On a macro level, the systemic racism underlying society, impacting teachers' socialization and schema, and affecting institutional practices is also never called into question as a contributor to glaring racial disparities in student opportunities and quality of education (Fox, 2016).

A deficit perspective schema and uncritical analysis of the discipline gap serves to maintain racial disparities in school discipline procedures. A deficit perspective about students of color serves to obscure teacher bias and systemic racism; the over-representation of Black students in school discipline is twisted and used to help convince Whites that the negative outcomes students are experiencing are due to their inherent weaknesses (Roberts, 2011). Further then, when uncritical eyes view the data of the discipline gap, the data

showing Black students receiving more discipline reinforces their beliefs that Black students are more dangerous and disrespectful than their White peers. When the disciplinary decisions of teachers and administrators are called into question, research reveals that there is in fact a stark difference in how school employees react to students of color compared to White students (Howard & Navarro, 2016). Until teachers and administrators are considered key players in the creation and maintenance of the racial disparities in discipline across the United States, efforts to diminish the discipline gap will fall short.

Contextualizing the Discipline Gap

It is important to extend a critical analysis beyond the effects of teachers' schema on disciplinary decisions to evaluate the impact of teachers' disciplinary decisions on student outcomes. For this analysis, in-school suspension and out-of-school suspension rates are not deemed as reflective of the entirety of the crisis of racial disparity in discipline; ISS and OSS rates represent a direct consequence of teacher schema and actions, but do not capture the breadth of negative ramifications affiliated with the discipline gap. To truly grasp a more complete understanding of the danger of the discipline gap, the next section focuses on the impact of teachers' disciplinary decisions and actions on students' resulting educational opportunities and outcomes. A narrow focus on discipline rates as the outcome of the Discipline Gap is short-sighted and trivializes the impact that Zero Tolerance policies have on students' future experiences in school and beyond. As Gutiérrez (2008) asserts, "gap gazing", over-fixating on racial disparities in data in an isolated context, serves to uphold deficit perspectives about students of color, provides only a static, surface-level illustration of inequities, and distracts attention and reform efforts away from underlying, systemic oppression and problematic schemas and actions that uphold racialized disparities in education. This thesis strives to contextualize the Discipline Gap within the racial disparities in student outcomes it triggers to avoid gap gazing or ignorance of the ramifications of such racial disparities on the lives and educational outcomes of students of color. The subsequent critical analysis moves beyond the discipline gap to explore and problematize the host of negative consequences associated with Zero Tolerance policies, such as the School-to-Prison Pipeline, which Black youth of America are forced to experience at disproportionate rates.

Consequences of Zero Tolerance discipline practices can be divided into two main categories: effects on students' opportunities and outcomes. Student opportunities refer to the educational experiences students receive during their time in school. Students may be given an abundance of quality educational opportunities, a

scarcity of quality educational opportunities, or experience restrictions of their educational opportunities. Student outcomes refer to the educational and social success students experience as results of student learning, which is greatly influenced by the type, quality, and quantity of educational opportunities students receive during their time in schools. In the context of the discipline Zero Tolerance policies can affect the educational opportunities of students of color through removing students from educational settings and introducing students to law enforcement (American Civil Liberties Union, 2016; APA, 2008; The Advancement Project, 2000; The Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2015). Resulting educational and social outcomes include increased academic struggles and failure, increased dropout rates, decreased attachment to school, and involvement in the School-to-Prison Pipeline (The Advancement Project, 2000; Fabelo et al., 2014; Hines-Datiri, 2015; New York Civil Liberties Union, 2008; Porowski, O'Conner & Passa, 2014). The following sections define key concepts such as Zero Tolerance policies and School-to-Prison Pipeline to analyze and contextualize the impact of Zero Tolerance disciplinary procedures on the educational opportunities and outcomes for students of color.

Zero Tolerance Policies and Student Opportunities

Zero Tolerance policies are widely used and accepted in public schools across the nation. In essence, Zero Tolerance policies assert that school staff and administration will not tolerate any student violations of school rules (Curwin, 2015). Zero Tolerance policies gained popularity in the 1990s in response to school shootings and widespread fears about crime; their premise asserts that cracking down on minor infractions will prevent serious crimes (Gjelten, 2017). Though specific Zero Tolerance rules may vary from school to school, policies follow a "one strike and you're out" formula that punishes students with suspension or expulsion for a wide range of conduct: talking back or swearing (insubordination), disruptive behavior, any talk perceived as a threat, minor scuffles to full-scale fights, and possession of drugs, alcohol, or anything considered a weapon on school premises (Gjelten, 2017). Effectively, Zero Tolerance policies serve to escalate disciplinary actions, bypassing a range of alternative consequences and enforcing the harshest levels of punishment for students' misbehavior: in-school suspension (ISS) and out-of-school suspension (OSS) (Curwin, 2015).

Exclusionary discipline practices uphold Zero Tolerance policies through removing students from educational settings and placing them in separate in-school suspension rooms or dismissing them from school altogether (OSS and expulsion). ISS and OSS punishments restrict students' learning opportunities through removing students from valuable instructional time. ISS and OSS sentences can eliminate a student's

instructional time for anywhere from one class period to a few weeks at a time. Harsh Zero Tolerance penalties remove students from their peers and teachers and limit students' educational opportunities and right to receive instruction. Exclusion from school, instruction, and peers sends the devastating message to students that they are not wanted or welcome at school and that they are not worthy of their school's educational resources (The Advancement Project, 2000). Meanwhile, there is no data that shows ISS or OSS sentences reduce rates of misconduct or improve the school climate; existing data supports that Zero Tolerance policies and removal of students from the classroom for disciplinary purposes has a negative influence on student outcomes and detracts from the learning climate (APA, 2008). Because Zero Tolerance policies favor unjust, harsh punishment over guidance or instruction, exclusionary discipline creates distrust in students toward adults, educators, and administrators and often breeds an adversarial, confrontational attitude toward authority (Civil Rights Project, 2000). Furthermore, studies show that students who have been suspended or expelled have less positive social bonds to school, are less likely to feel a sense of belonging in their school, and are at an increased risk for dropping out (The Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2015). These research findings summarize the ways that Zero Tolerance policies and exclusionary discipline procedures restrict the educational opportunities and experiences of students. Contextualized within the discipline gap crisis, dominant negative schema causes White teachers and administrators to subjectively apply Zero Discipline consequences at higher rates to Black students, causing these students to face the brunt of the negative educational opportunities associated with exclusionary discipline (Porowski, O'Conner & Passa, 2014).

Zero Tolerance Policies and Student Outcomes

Experiences with exclusionary discipline create devastating effects on student outcomes. One dangerous outcome associated with Zero Tolerance policies is referred to in the literature as the School-to-Prison Pipeline. The School-to-Prison Pipeline refers to the common phenomenon in which students who experience exclusionary discipline are at higher risk for dropping out and ending up in trouble with law enforcement. Review of existing research indicates that suspensions and exclusionary discipline measures are often the "first stop" along the School-to-Prison Pipeline as students who are pushed out of school are often pushed into the criminal justice system (New York Civil Liberties Union, 2008). Students who are suspended and miss instructional time are three times more likely than their peers to drop out of high school by 10th grade; subsequently, dropping out of high school triples the likelihood that a student will be incarcerated at some point

during their life (New York Civil Liberties Union, 2008). The New York Civil Liberties Union (2007) describes the essence of the Pipeline as such: as schools rely on exclusionary punishment and arrests to handle disciplinary problems such as using cell phones and electronic devices, smoking cigarettes, and skipping classes, students who easily could have been disciplined by conferences with administration end up in trouble with law enforcement and in juvenile detention centers. Such injustices and risk factors apply to all students who are subject to exclusionary discipline regardless of race. However, students of color, particularly Black males, are subject to the highest rates of disciplinary action and therefore are at the greatest risk for experiencing the School-to-Prison Pipeline associated with exclusionary discipline (American Civil Liberties Union, 2016).

The School-to-Prison pipeline is fueled both directly and indirectly by exclusionary discipline and Zero Tolerance policies. School discipline indirectly feeds the School-to-Prison pipeline through drastically increasing a student's likelihood of involvement in the juvenile justice system during middle school and high school as students who have been suspended or expelled have a one in seven chance of involvement in the juvenile justice system (Hines-Datiri, 2015). Studies and trends also reveal that students who have been suspended are more likely to fall behind in school due to missed instructional time and decreased attachment to school and subsequently are retained, drop out of school, and become incarcerated as adults (The Advancement Project, 2000). Students of color are particularly vulnerable to push-out trends through the discriminatory and disproportionate application of exclusionary discipline procedures (American Civil Liberties Union, 2016). More directly, schools that use Zero Tolerance policies to criminalize minor misconduct in schools involve law enforcement in school discipline that could have been handled through teachers, administrators, and support staff, resulting in the criminalization of student behavior and the unnecessary introduction of youth to the juvenile justice system (ACLU, 2016). Zero Tolerance policies that involve police officers in disciplinary procedures send students straight into the juvenile justice system. Not only are Black youth targeted in schools with harsh disciplinary sentences, but they are also targeted unjustly by law enforcement. Wise (2012) summarizes existing research, stating, "Black youth are nearly fifty times as likely as White youth to be incarcerated for a first-time drug offense, even when all the factors surrounding the crime (like whether or not a weapon was involved) are equal" (p. 35).

National data supports the notion that Black students are subject to disproportionate rates of arrests and referrals to law enforcement compared to White peers who engage in similar rates and types of misconduct. As the graph from the U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights (2014) reveals, in 2011-2012, though Black students comprised only 16% of the student bodies, they represented 27% of students referred to law enforcement and 31% of students subjected to school-related arrests. White peers represented 51% of the student bodies but only 41% of referrals to law enforcement and 39% of school arrests. This data coupled with a critical analysis of the effect of teacher schema about students of color on students' outcomes reveals that school staff members who hold negative, discriminatory beliefs about students of color will criminalize students' minor acts based off a deficit schema and subjective conceptualizations of "acceptable" behavior (Hines-Datiri, 2015).

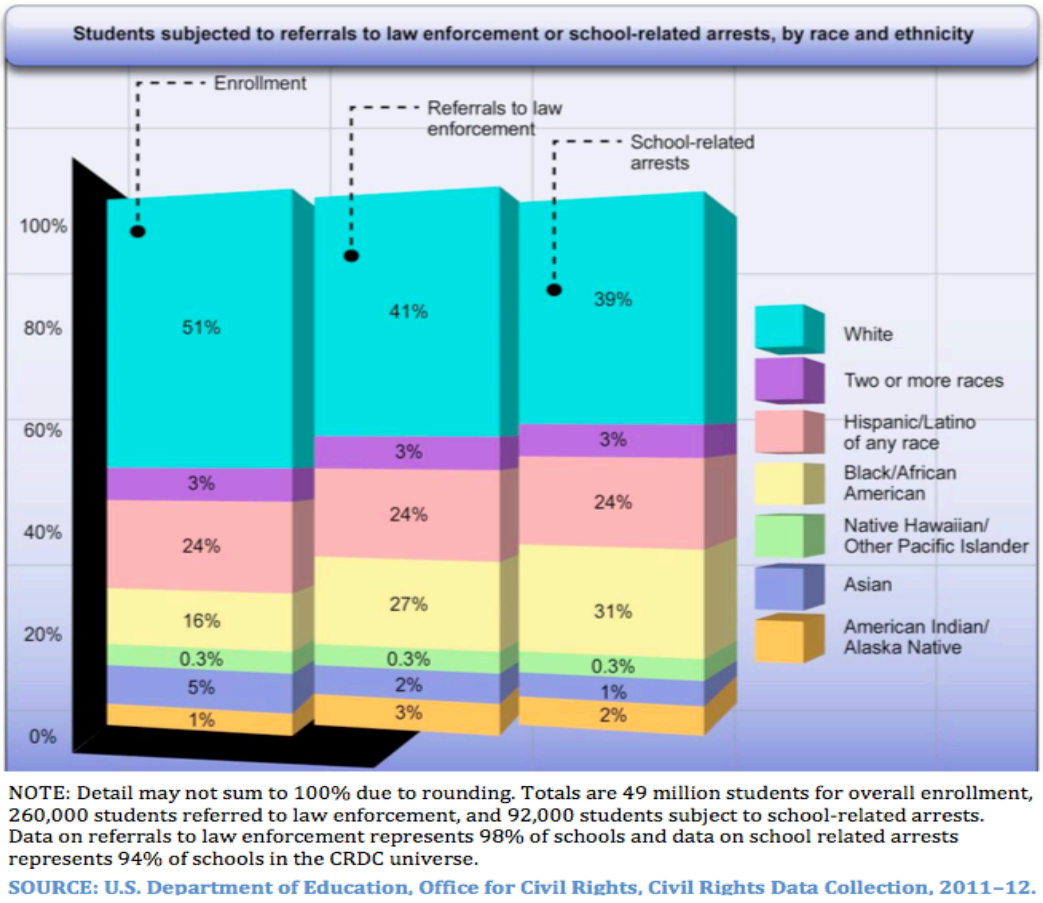
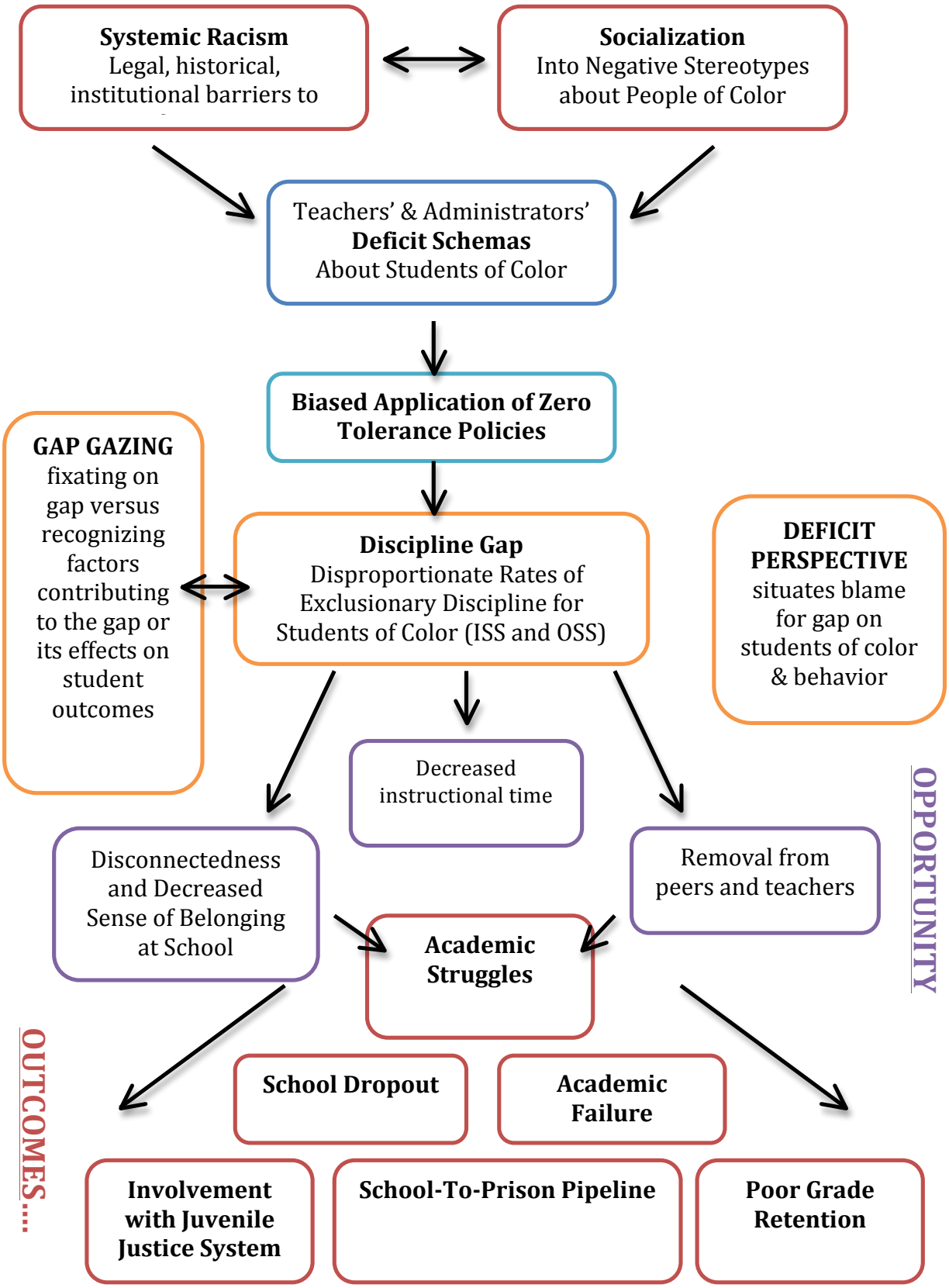


Figure 3: From United States of America, U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights. (2014). *Data Snapshot: School discipline*. Washington, DC: U.S. Dept. of Education, Office for Civil Rights.

The research literature is clear - exclusionary discipline is statistically linked to undesirable student outcomes such as poor academic achievement, grade retention, recurrent misbehavior, higher dropout rates, and increased juvenile delinquency (Porowski, O'Conner & Passa, 2014). Students who experience suspension or expulsion are twice as likely as their peers to have to repeat a grade (Fabelo et al., 2011) and 10 times more likely to drop out of high school than their peers (Porowski, O'Conner & Passa, 2014). The more time that students of color spend in ISS and OSS settings, the more instructional time they miss with their peers in an academic setting and the less likely they are to keep up with their courses and graduate from high school. Exclusionary discipline sentences trigger a negative, downward cycle, increasing the risk factors that contribute to students failing classes and dropping out of school. As Black students' disproportionate referrals for ISS and OSS have remained constant during more than 30 years of research, educators and administrators must seriously consider the effects that implicit bias and deficit perspective against students of color plays in disciplinary procedures (The Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2015). On the subsequent page, Schematic Model 3.0 grounds the discipline gap within my conceptual framework to illustrate the relationship between systemic racism, socialization, and the development of teachers' deficit perspectives about students of color on teachers' discipline decisions and subsequent effects on students' educational opportunities and outcomes. I developed Schematic Model 3.0 to show that teachers' schemas play a crucial role in determining students' educational and life trajectories.



- Schematic Model 3.0 - Teacher Schema, Discipline Gap, and Student Outcomes

Suspensions have life changing implications for many students of color. Zero Tolerance policies do not facilitate healthy learning communities and the consequences of exclusionary discipline such as school dropout and incarceration are felt through individuals, families, and communities (The Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2015). In order to truly address the racial imbalance in school discipline and quality of education, teachers and administrators must push back against implicit racial bias and deficit-perspective mindsets and view the discipline gap critically as a symptom of a dangerously biased education system (Rudd, 2014). Reviewing the data without action will only allow the maintenance of Zero Tolerance policies which White school employees subjectively enforce, resulting in the systemic oppression of students of color and Black youth in schools across the nation. The discipline gap is an undeniable representation of the racial bias rampant in schools that must be addressed to provide equity in education (Rudd, 2014). As The Schott Foundation (2015) highlights, "Black boys who are pushed out of school have greatly diminished chances to realize their full personal or economic potential and their communities, as well as our country, are robbed of their leadership and contributions" (p. 31). Educators across the United States need to carefully examine their underlying biases and assumptions about students of color in order to truly provide students with the meaningful, empowering, relevant education they deserve.

Problematizing the "Achievement Gap"

The following section explores the "achievement gap" through a lens of critical consciousness to analyze the historical and contemporary disparities in the type and quality of educational opportunities provided for students of color. Here, I begin with a definition of the "achievement gap" and analyze contemporary scores reflecting the disparity in standardized test scores between White students and students of color. I then analyze how teachers' deficit schemas about students of color maintain racial disparities in educational outcomes through justifying the "achievement gap" and ignoring the role that teachers' schema and systemic racism play in creating racial educational disparities. The section recognizes and evaluates the effect of teachers' educational decisions in creating a problematically under-recognized "opportunity gap", which underlies the well recognized "achievement gap". The section analyzes current research illuminating the educational opportunity gap and its effects on student outcomes as well as the role that the discipline gap plays in the opportunity gap and subsequent "achievement gap". Lastly, the section summarizes the enduring legacy of the historical oppression of people of color in the context of Gloria Ladson-Billings' (2006) explanation of the

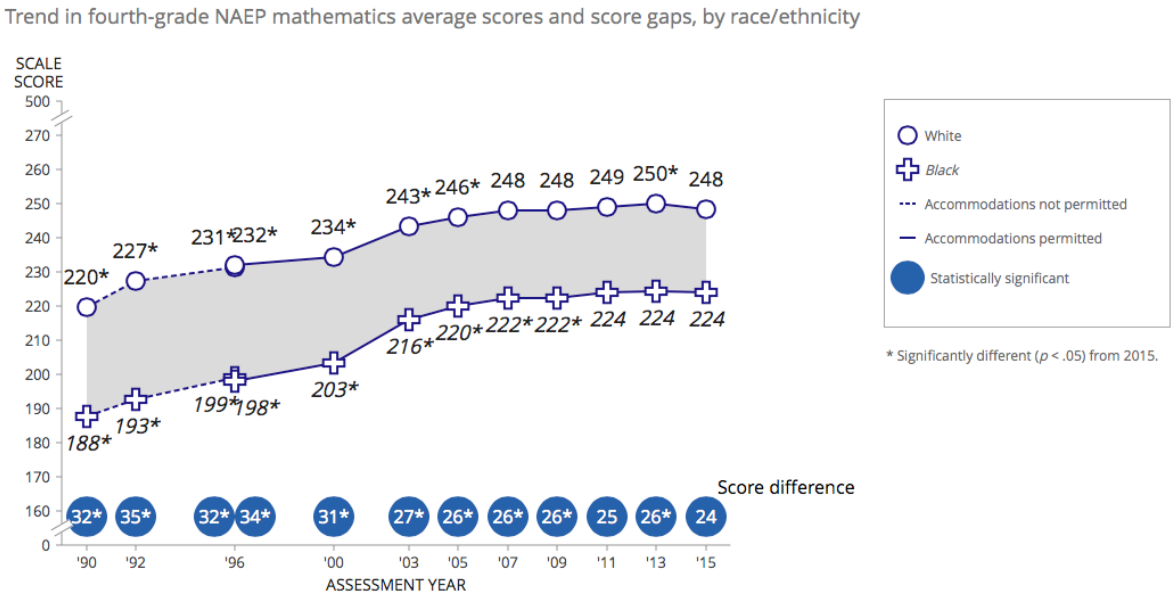
Education Debt, illustrating the historic, chronic pattern of systemic racism and oppressive socialization used to deny a quality education to students of color. A comprehensive, critical analysis of the historical and contemporary educational opportunities available to students of color compared to their White peers is crucial to developing a realistic understanding of the educational inequities underlying racial disparities in student outcomes.

The term "achievement gap" is widely used to refer to the sizable disparities in standardized reading and math test scores between Black and White students, Latina/Latino and White students, and recent immigrants and White students (Ladson-Billings, 2006). Disparities between the standardized test scores of students of color and their White peers persist over time and are documented and analyzed in educational research. Over the last three decades, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) documented disparities in standardized test scores in successive cohorts of 9-, 13-, and 17-year-old students in reading, science, and mathematics (Boykin & Noguera, 2011). The "achievement gap" has received national attention and federal strides have been made to address the educational crisis represented in the racialized disparities in students' standardized test results. The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2001) placed federal accountability measures on schools for student achievement in standardized testing in hopes of closing pervasive, persistent test score disparities and President Obama made it clear throughout his 2007 campaign and subsequent presidency that closing the "achievement gap" and improving the standardized performance of U.S. schools would be a national priority for years to come (Boykin & Noguera, 2011). Despite the national attention the "achievement gap" received in the last decade, the gap persists and demands critical analysis to provide insight in how to effectively change the American education system to protect the right of each student to a quality education.

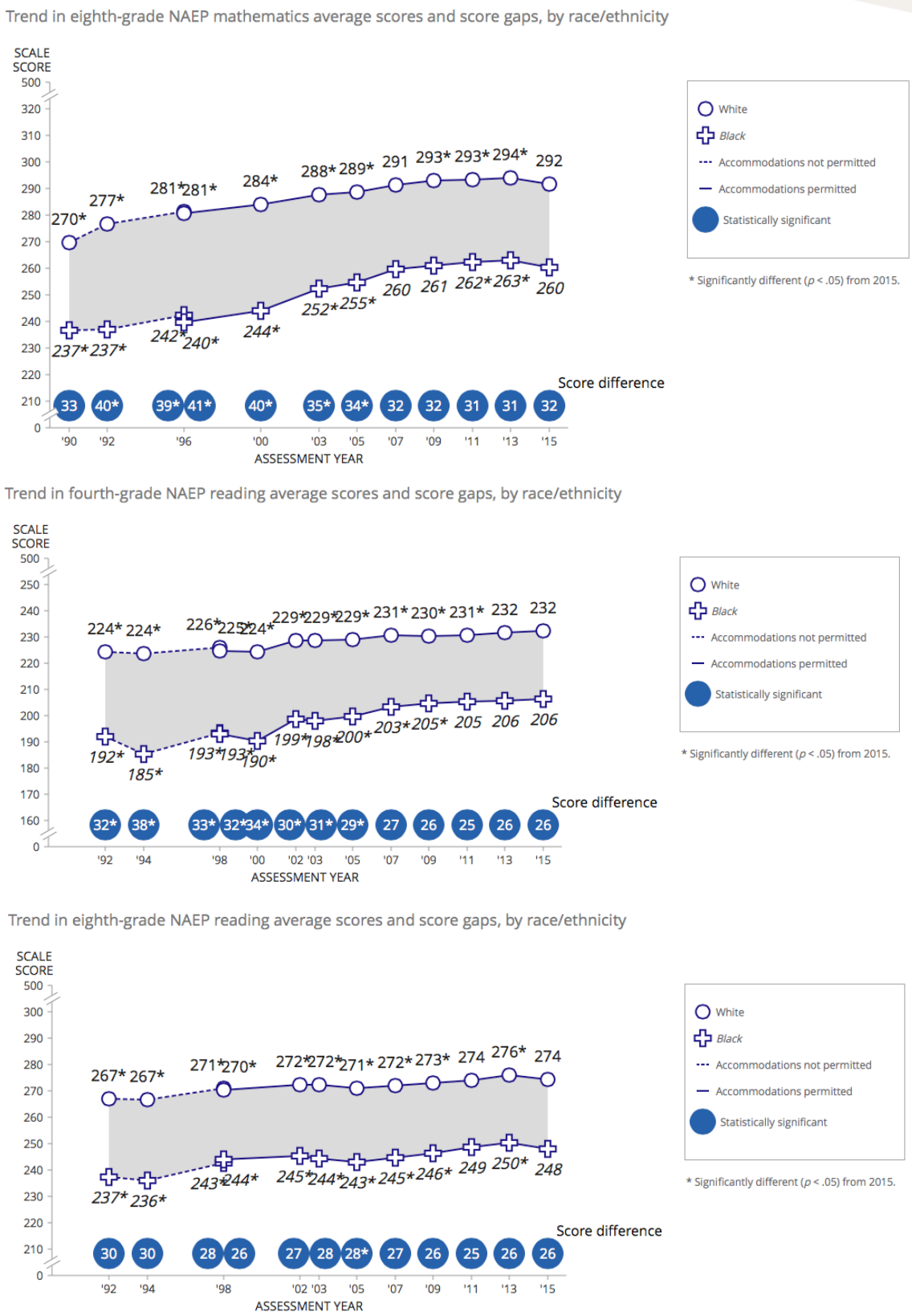
A review of the most recent NAEP National Report Card (2016) reveals the contemporary disparity in standardized test scores between students of color and their White counterparts. For the purpose of this analysis, I focus primarily on the educational disparities between Black students and White peers even though a disparity in standardized test scores and quality of education exists between Latina/Latino students and White students and recent immigrant students and White students as well (Ladson-Billings, 2006; NAEP, 2015). In 2015, the average standardized reading score for fourth graders revealed White students' scores were 26 points higher than the average reading score for Black students (NAEP, 2016). Though this gap has not changed

significantly since 2013, the present gap is smaller than the 32-point gap reported during the first year of standardized reading assessments in 1992 (NAEP, 2016). Standardized mathematics test scores from 2015 reveal a 24-point discrepancy in scale scores between White and Black fourth graders, with Black students receiving significantly lower scores than their White peers (NAEP, 2016). A comparison of standardized math and reading scores from 2015 for eighth grade students features a gap where Black students scored an average of 26 points lower than White peers in reading and 33 points lower in mathematics (NAEP, 2016). The eighth grade math and reading scale scores do not reveal a statistically significant change in the racial disparity between scores when compared to the previous testing year (2013) or to the first years of standardized test scores (1990 and 1992, respectively) (NAEP, 2016).

The graphs included from the NAEP report (2016) below illustrate the average reading and math scores for fourth and eighth grade students from the first years of standardized testing to the most recent test results. The graphs clearly illustrate the pervasive, consistent disparity in standardized math and reading test scores between Black and White students. The so-called "achievement gap", or consistent trend of racial disparity in standardized test scores, can neither be disputed nor ignored.



Figures 4: The differences in standardized NAEP math scores between Black and White students in fourth-grade. From NAEP - 2015 Mathematics & Reading Assessments. (2015). Retrieved December 15, 2016, from http://www.nationsreportcard.gov/reading%5fmath%5f2015/



Figures 5, 6 & 7: The differences in standardized NAEP math and reading scores between Black and White students in grades 4 and 8. From NAEP - 2015 Mathematics & Reading Assessments. (2015). Retrieved December 15, 2016, from http://www.nationsreportcard.gov/reading%5fmath%5f2015/

Disproportionately low graduation rates are another indicator of schools' inability to provide quality, meaningful education for students of color. Recent research reveals that Black males have the lowest four-year high school graduation rates in 35 states and Washington, D.C. out of 48 states polled; Latino males had the lowest graduation rates in the other 13 states. The estimated national graduation rate for Black males from 2012-2013 was only 59% (The Schott Foundation of Public Education, 2015). Within the United States' economy, education level is associated with occupational opportunities, upward mobility, and earning potential. Youth who leave high school without a diploma are positioned to earn significantly lower wages than their peers who graduate high school. Even students of color who graduate high school but do not continue on to higher education experience a significant economic disadvantage to peers who earn a Bachelor's degree. A study from the Pew Research Center indicates that the value of a college degree is higher now that it has been in nearly 50 years and the earnings gap between millennials with Bachelor's degrees and millennials with only high school diplomas has widened (Kurtzleben, 2014). As Kurtzleben (2014) reports, "Among millennials ages 25-32, median annual earnings for full-time working college-degree holders are $17,500 greater than those with high school diplomas only". This earnings gap has been widening steadily since the 1960s. As the earning gap continues to widen, it is increasingly important to close the graduation gap between students of color and White peers as well as to provide quality educational opportunities that prepare students of color for higher education because level of education directly correlates to earning potential. Ultimately, racial disparities in educational outcomes oppress students of color and limit their upward mobility and economic potential after school.

While racial disparities in standardized test scores and graduation rates clearly illustrate an obvious discrepancy in academic outcomes between White students and students of color, it is necessary to conduct a critical analysis that contextualizes the racial disparities in student outcomes within the contexts of classrooms and schools to problematize the opportunities and experiences students of color receive during the school day that affect their standardized scores. Racial disparity in "achievement" or "school performance" is prevalent when comparing drop out rates, students enrolled in Advanced Placement (AP) courses, students enrolled in Gifted and Talented Education (GATE) programs, and admittance and completion of college, graduate, and professional programs (Ladson-Billings, 2006; Taylor, 2006). In the current snapshot of school "achievement" across the country, Black male students are pushed out of school and into the School-to-Prison Pipeline at higher rates than they graduate and reach high levels of academic achievement (The Schott Foundation, 2016).

These educational inequalities between Whites students and students of color occur across socioeconomic statuses and manifest in cities, suburbs, and rural areas across the nation (Taylor, 2006). The current state of educational outcomes for students of color demands that scholars, educators, and policymakers expand their view of the "achievement gap" to include an analysis of underlying factors occurring within the American education system that fuel the disparity in student outcomes.

Deficit Analysis of the "Achievement Gap"

The systemic roots maintaining an educational system of disparate opportunity remain intact as teachers and administrators continue to make educational decisions for and about students of color based on negative implicit biases and cultural deficit theories. Throughout history, educators have utilized variants of cultural deficit theories to explain the racial disparities in student outcomes through placing the blame for the disparities in "achievement" on students of color and their "inherent cognitive dysfunctions" that prevented them from experiencing the same level of academic success as their White counterparts (Ladson-Billings, 2006). In the early 2000s, the staff at Education Trust shared data on the well-known "achievement gap" with educators around the United States and collected data on their responses to the gap. Their data revealed popular explanations for the racial disparities that focused on blaming the students of color and their parents for their low "achievement". Common explanations carried sentiments that the students were too poor, their parents didn't care enough to invest in their child's education, and low student achievement was in part due to the families' lack of respect for education (Haycock, 2001). As Ladson-Billings cites in her research (2009), the two most popular explanations in education for the low achievement of at-risk students positions the source of the problem within the youth themselves or within their families. These negative stereotypes undergird teachers' convictions about the causes of academic struggles among students of color and reflect a deep-seated implicit bias against people of color. Such research reveals widespread deficit schemas among educators that attribute students' academic struggles to believed inherent intellectual, academic, motivational, and cultural dysfunction in students of color and their families (Volk & Long, 2005). It is problematic to justify racial differences in achievement based on stereotyped characteristics of groups of students (inherent abilities, attitudes toward school) and families (socio-economic status, parental attitudes about education) and geneticists have proven that there are no inherent genetic or cognitive differences among races nor a factual biological explanation for an entire race of students' academic struggles (Mattison & Aber, 2007; Taylor, 2006).

Despite the fact that students of color are not inherently inferior intellectually as a group to their White peers, teachers and administrators view students of color through this deficit perspective to justify widespread academic struggles as reflective of Black students' inherent deficits (Volk & Long, 2005). A racial hierarchy of cognitive and academic ability is socially constructed and stems back to times of slavery when it was used to justify the nation's abuse of Blacks and refusal to grant education to people of color (Gutiérrez, 2008). This deficit schema about the intelligence and school suitability of students of color persisted from generation to generation through the process of socialization in a White supremacist society. Psychologists confirm that although this implicit racial bias often operates apart from educators' conscious awareness, it strongly influences their decision-making and mental rationalizations for manifestations of inequity (Gregory, Skiba & Noguera, 2010). Because teachers are "gatekeepers" to students' educational opportunities, determining which students will benefit from which programs, it is necessary to consider and analyze how deficit schemas cloud educators' ability to make objective, equitable educational decisions for students of color (Ford & Grantham, 2003). Unfortunately, many teachers and administrators believe that their schools and placements are bias-free, merit-based systems based on test scores; however, research shows that even with the same test scores, Black and Latina/Latino students are significantly less likely to be allowed in an advanced class than their White peers with comparable scores (Taylor, 2006). Such research indicates that even when students of color are equally prepared for academic rigor as their peers, teachers are less likely to view them as competent and assign students to the rigorous courses that would best prepare them for academic success. In this way, teachers' deficit perspectives about the abilities of students of color plays a large role in limiting the educational rigor and coursework students of color receive exposure to during their school careers.

A deficit perspective about students of color is so integral and invisible to the minds of many educators, administrators, and policy-makers, that it is even ingrained in the terminology used to describe the racial disparity in student outcomes. Labeling the disparity in standardized test scores and student outcomes as an "achievement gap" supports the racist misconception that students of color inherently don't and can't "achieve" as highly as their White peers. According to Google, an "achievement" is "a thing done successfully, typically by great effort, courage, or skill" and synonyms include "accomplishment", "performance", and "attainment". Webster's Online Dictionary features a similar definition for "achievement", as "a result gained by effort" or "the quality of a student's work". Both of these common definitions of "achievement" place a

strong emphasis on students' ability and effort in earning accomplishments. Therefore, the "achievement gap" insinuates that there is a disparity in the natural abilities and amount of effort that students of color apply to school as opposed to their peers. Every time an administrator, policymaker, politician, teacher, or parent talks about educational disparities as the racial "achievement gap", they reinforce the pervasive, damaging stereotype that students of color can't and don't "perform" as naturally or as highly as their White counterparts and don't work as hard. This mislabeling of student outcomes as simply "achievement" maintains a negative narrative about the character and intellectual and academic abilities of students of color (Gutiérrez, 2008).

Such rhetoric is dangerous as it serves to uphold systemic racism and educational inequities students of color experience in American schools with the "justification" that students of color don't "perform" as well as their White peers, are inherently less intelligent, or value education less. Placing blame for educational struggles on the students removes responsibility from the educators to provide equitable, quality, challenging educational experiences for students of color and camouflages the role of historical and contemporary systemic racism and deficit teacher schema in creating and maintaining educational disparities. For example, White educators who view low academic success rates for Black students as evidence to prove the inherent academic inferiority of students of color don't even consider the roles that teacher, curriculum, instruction, and educational opportunities quality play in student success and avoid reflecting on the historical exclusion of students of color from education (Roberts, 2011). Dominant deficit schemas about students of color deflect scrutiny away from educators, administrators, and school policies and practices; critical review of educators' decisions and school policies and practices reveal widespread biased, unjustified educational and behavioral decisions about students of color (Ford & Grantham, 2003). While deficit schemas serve to devalue the academic abilities and values of students of color in comparison to their White peers, research shows that White male students actually value education the least of all genders and racial groups (Wise, 2012) and affluent White students exhibit the lowest academic integrity compared to all other peers (Blau, 2003). In order to move away from the elevation of White youth as ideal students and oppression of Black youth as inferior students, we must redefine the "achievement gap", examine the pervasive opportunity gap of educational inequities, and remove the sole blame for low academic success from students of color.

Simply focusing attention and analysis on the racialized "achievement gap" and blaming students of color for their "underperformance" dangerously neglects to address the systemic and institutional barriers

perpetuating racial disparities in educational quality and outcomes. Scholars who specialize in equity research have used the term "gap gazing" to describe the too common phenomenon of fixating on the gap as the problem and continuing to place blame on students (Gutiérrez, 2008). Gap gazing is a dangerous fixation as it only offers a static picture of educational disparities and promotes deficit thinking and negative narratives about students of color, further perpetuating the myth that the problem with contemporary education lies in students' inherent intellectual and academic abilities (Gutiérrez, 2008). To an American socialized in a society that devalues the learning potential of students of color, the "achievement gap" data seemingly reinforces the deep-seated, unexamined deficit perspectives about the inferiority of people of color, perpetuating the mindset that "Black students can't perform academically as well as White students" (Roberts, 2011). Gap gazing and focusing exclusively on testing "abilities" and student "performance" allows researchers and educators to normalize the "chronic low-achievement" of students of color without ever acknowledging the historical systemic racism, racial opportunity gaps, and deficit perspectives burdening students of color (Gutiérrez, 2008). Even the effects of No Child Left Behind asserted white superiority through placing pressure on struggling, underperforming schools as if pressuring those students and teachers with high-stakes testing consequences can undo centuries of institutional practices that have denied students of color a quality education for generations (Taylor, 2006). As Ladson-Billings (2006) asserts, an "all-out focus on the "achievement gap" moves us toward short-term solutions" (p. 4), which neglect to address the true issues of equity underlying the gaps that continue to perpetuate systemic disparities in quality educational opportunities and subsequent outcomes for students of color.

Critical Analysis of the Opportunity Gap

Focusing on educational disparities primarily through the "achievement gap" obscures analysis of an underlying disparity in students' educational opportunities. A narrow focus on standardized test performance as a measure of student "outcomes" or "success" neglects to account for the myriad of factors underlying and dictating student output. One way to redefine the "achievement gap" is viewing the disparities in student outcomes through a critical lens and focusing on the educational "opportunity gap", which fuels racial disparities in students' academic outcomes in standardized test scores and graduation rates. The Schott Foundation (2016) asserts that it is shortsighted for the nation's leaders and educators to focus solely on student

"output", which is only "one side of the equation for success"; in order to truly rectify racial disparities in student outcomes, educators must be held accountable for educational "input" to ensure that all students regardless of race or socioeconomic status have "fair and substantive opportunity to learn" (p. 1). A focus on the educational input available to students of color shifts the focus away from a deficit perspective of student "achievement" and places scrutiny on the academic opportunities schools provide or deny students of color. Gutiérrez (2008) asserts, "Discrepancies in scores on standardized achievement tests mirror discrepancies in opportunities and life chances that students from different backgrounds experience in their everyday lives" (p. 360). More specifically, the Schott Foundation (2016) defines the opportunity gap as the "disparity in access to quality schools and the resources needed for academic success, such as early childhood education, highly prepared and effective teachers, college preparatory curricula, and equitable instructional resources" (p. 1). The opportunity gap is a multi-faceted issue of equity that involving a variety of modes of educational input.

One facet of the educational opportunity gap involves educational tracking. Tracking students of color into lower levels of coursework based off of broad "ability levels" has damaging long-term effects on students' academic outcomes and stigmatizes students of color as "inferior learners" (Taylor, 2006). Systemic tracking targets students of color from a young age, confining them in lower level courses and denying them the opportunity to experience the academic rigor and educational enrichment present in Advanced Placement (AP) and honors courses that best prepare students for success in college-level courses (The Schott Foundation, 2015). Students who are locked into remedial tracks of classes have restricted opportunities to experience educational content and rigor and data shows that students of color are disproportionately tracked into special education and lower level courses at higher rates than their White counterparts (Wise, 2012). The lack of students of color represented in higher-level courses is a clear indication of systemic inequity and critical analysis warrants scrutiny of teachers, who make the decisions regarding students' academic placements and open or close doors to various educational opportunities (Ford & Grantham, 2003). Teachers' implicit bias against the intellectual and academic abilities and character of students of color affects the type and quality of educational opportunities they will grant to said students (Gregory, Skiba & Noguera, 2010). Unfortunately, research indicates that implicit biases against students of color not only impact teachers' educational decisions for pedagogy, student placement, and rigor, but also influence teachers' ability and willingness to provide effective education to students of color (Volk & Long, 2005).

Across the nation, data on student enrollment in AP and higher-level courses reveal students of color have less access to rigorous coursework through AP courses and higher-level math and science classes such as physics and calculus than White peers (OCR, 2016). Students who have the opportunity to access AP courses reap advantages in improved SAT scores and increased likelihood of college admission, scholarship receipt, and college completion (The Schott Foundation, 2015). In schools that offer AP courses, Black and Latino students represent 38% of the student body yet only 29% of students enrolled in AP courses (OCR, 2016). However, not all schools provide students with an equitable opportunity to experience AP courses as not all schools host an equal number of AP or advanced courses. Schools that serve low-income communities and families of color have fewer opportunities for AP courses compared to schools that primarily serve White students and families, which ultimately contributes to disparities in educational high school outcomes and future college success (The Schott Foundation, 2015). In regards to higher-level math exposure, research indicates that students of color have a decreased opportunity to access calculus, especially when attending schools with higher Black/Latino enrollment: only 33% of schools with high Black and Latino student enrollment offer calculus while 56% of schools with low Black and Latino enrollment offer calculus (OCR, 2016). Likewise, research indicates a pattern of disparity in the access that students of color have to higher-level science courses such as physics compared to White peers: only 48% of schools with high Black and Latino student enrollment offer physics while 67% of high schools with low Black and Latino enrollment offer physics (OCR, 2014). This lack of access to higher level content and rigorous, enriching coursework is one type of detrimental disparity in educational input facing students of color that contributes to students' educational outcomes such as lower standardized test scores, lower rates of college admittance, and lower graduation rates for students of color (The Schott Foundation, 2015).

Another facet of the Opportunity Gap is the under-representation of students of color in Gifted and Talented Education (GATE) programs. Research shows that students of color are simultaneously under-represented in GATE programs and over-represented in special education (Ladson-Billings, 2006; OCR, 2016; Wilson, 2014; Taylor, 2006). According to the Office of Civil Rights Data Collection for 2013-2014, although Black and Latina/Latino students represented 42% of students in schools with GATE programs, they represented only 28% of the students in the GATE programs (OCR, 2016). In comparison, although White students represented only 49% of school populations with GATE programs, they represented 57% of students in

the GATE programs (OCR, 2016). This disproportionate, under-representation of students of color in the GATE programs creates an opportunity gap in the curricular exposure and enrichment that all students who could benefit from GATE should receive. Research suggests that the under-representation of students of color for referral and enrollment in GATE programs stems from teachers' and administrators' deficit perspectives of students of color (Wilson, 2014). One study found that teachers' negative stereotypes and misconceptions about the academic ability and educational potential of students of color prevented them from identifying the students' strengths compared to their White counterparts (Wilson, 2014). Deficit thinking about students of color is evident when teachers believe that there is an internal deficit or dysfunction that hinders students of color's cognitive or motivational abilities, disqualifying them from consideration for GATE programs (Wilson, 2014). When teachers make referral decisions through a socialized lens of implicit, negative bias and deficit schema about the abilities of students of color, these students are denied the opportunity to experience GATE programming as early on as the referral process. This trend in education reveals that it is the teachers and administrators, who make the educational decisions like referrals for GATE, Special Education, and course enrollment for students of color, who are truly responsible for racial disparities in the quality of students' educational input and subsequent output (Ford & Grantham, 2003).

Another major disparity contributing to the Opportunity Gap between students of color and their White counterparts is the opportunity to access effective, experienced teachers. Research indicates that this disparity in access to quality teachers and instruction is most detrimental to students of color because the opportunity to experience high quality education through effective teachers, content, and rigor has the greatest influence on students' educational outcomes (Marzano, 2005). National data reveals White students, especially students who are members of predominantly White student bodies, have access to superior educational programs, services, and educators compared to peers of color (Boykin & Noguera, 2011). An effective teacher can make or break students' academic output and the effects of a single school year with an ineffective teacher can be seen in student's academic skills up to four years later (Taylor, 2006). And yet, students of color, whose average standardized test scores would indicate the greatest need for exposure to quality instruction, are least likely to receive instruction from quality teachers – schools with high proportions of students of color have higher proportions of teachers who lack qualifications, experience, and advanced training compared to schools with

predominantly White student bodies (Taylor, 2006; Haycock, Jerald, & Huang, 2001; Wright, Horn, & Sanders, 1997; McLaren, 1994).

Interconnectedness of Discipline Gap and "Achievement Gap"

Teachers and administrators also contribute to the Opportunity Gap and negatively affect educational outcomes for students of color through the racial Discipline Gap. Students of color who are disproportionately disciplined through exclusionary discipline policies experience higher rates of removal from their academic classes and exclusion from valuable instructional time due to discipline at significantly higher rates than their White peers (The Schott Foundation, 2015). A student who is suspended through ISS or OSS could be excluded from instructional time for any duration from a single class period to up to ten or more consecutive school days depending on teachers' and administrators' decisions. The Schott Foundation (2015) bluntly states, "You cannot teach students who are not in school." According to Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera (2010), "One of the most consistent findings of modern education research is the strong positive relationship between time engaged in academic learning and student achievement." They proceed in their analysis of effects of discipline on students' success to assert research indicates that frequent suspensions significantly increase the risk of students' academic underperformance (Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2011). As previously noted, suspensions not only limit students' instructional time and negatively effect student performance, but often school discipline decreases students' social bonds to school as well as their sense of belonging within an educational community, which increases students' risk of dropping out (The Schott Foundation, 2015). Students of color, particularly Black males, are subject to a disproportionate rate of exclusionary discipline and therefore experience a higher risk for subsequent academic struggles than their White peers (Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2011). In a reverse relationship, research reveals students who struggle with literacy and often receive low grades are prone to increased aggression and disruption later in school as students become frustrated and disaffected with the schooling process (Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2011). As is such, remediating the Discipline Gap should be considered an important priority to enhancing the educational opportunities and outcomes for students of color and engaging students in quality education should be an important priority when considering racial disparities in school discipline rates.

The research synthesized throughout this section illustrates time and time again that teachers and schools who operate under deficit schemas fail to provide students of color with equitable, quality educational

experiences and subsequently use deficit schemas about students of color to "normalize" racial disparities in educational outcomes as reflective of students' inherent academic inferiorities as opposed to results of systemic racism in education (Roberts, 2011). Policy-makers, educators, and administrators cannot expect to see increases in student outcomes without addressing the systemic effects of teachers' deficit schema on students' educational opportunities. Further critical analysis of the racial disparities in educational outcomes warrants a historical contextualization of education and recognition of the systemic oppression of people of color. The subsequent section explores Gloria Ladson-Billings' (2006) critical analysis of Education Debt, or the road to the contemporary Opportunity Gap, which provides an analysis of the historical context behind the contemporary, longstanding racial disparities in education.

Education Debt

As Taylor (2006) asserts, "Little is discussed among current gap-closing strategists and the federal policymakers about the historic reasons that Whites and people of color have had separate and unequal educations… this inhibits the formulation of effective policies and practices" (p. 75) as the foundation of the phenomenon is never fully exposed, analyzed, or addressed. Truly understanding the roots of the contemporary opportunity gap and subsequent disparities in students' educational outcomes requires a critical analysis of the systems and ideology upholding the education system and spawning generations upon generations of teachers and administrators who continue to perpetuate inequalities in educational opportunity. Gloria Ladson-Billings (2006) describes the opportunity gaps as America's education debt : the multi-generational, historical systemic racism that has chronically denied education to people of color while simultaneously justifying the denial of education with inaccurate, racist, deficit perspective theories about people of color. The explanations used throughout history to justify the denial of Black rights and education echo still today in the deficit perspective explanations of the racialized opportunity gap and "achievement gap". Ladson-Billings' (2006) analysis of the American education debt scrutinizes the historical, economic, sociopolitical, and moral trends of oppression throughout history to understand the contemporary disparities in education. Such an analysis of education is unpopular to the White public; scholars acknowledge that strong resistance against historical examination of racial inequities is common but serves as further proof of popular deficit perspective analyses, as opposed to historical or social analyses, which reveal the systemic structures that favor members of the dominant social

group while oppressing members of the minoritized group (Taylor, 2006). However, Ladson-Billings' (2006) analysis of the Education Debt illuminates the necessity and truth of such a critical analysis.

Ladson-Billings (2006) asserts that an analysis of the historical, economic, sociopolitical, and moral decisions and policies that have shaped American society reveals an education debt, or sum of chronic disparities in opportunity, which logically affects the academic outcomes for students of color. Ladson-Billings (2006) acknowledges systemic racism's role in creating and maintaining disparate educational opportunities for students of color compared to White peers and her interpretation of the historical educational opportunity gaps also requires teachers, administrators, and policymakers to take responsibility for the role that the institution of education and socialized educators have played in maintaining an unjust system. For the purpose of this thesis, I will specifically analyze the Education Debt as it relates to African Americans but need to acknowledge that the Education Debt also exists for Latino/Latina students and American Indian students.

The first component of the Education Debt is historical debt (Ladson-Billings, 2006). In order to critically analyze the contemporary "achievement gap" crisis, scholars must acknowledge the historical systems of education and educational opportunity gaps that span back to the time of slavery. Ladson-Billings (2006) summarizes historical Education Debt as follows:

> *In the case of African Americans, education was initially forbidden during the period of enslavement. After emancipation we saw the development of freedmen's schools whose purpose was the maintenance of a servant class. During the long period of legal apartheid, African Americans attended schools where they received cast-off textbooks and materials from White schools. In the South, the need for farm labor meant that the typical school year for rural Black students was about 4 months long. Indeed, Black students in the South did not experience universal secondary schooling until 1968 (p. 5).*

The contemporary opportunity gap in education has existed since the founding of education in the United States. Early schools initially denied education to students of color. Even after the federal government legally established students' of color right to education, opportunity gaps persisted in resources, funding, quality of teachers and schools, and quality of content and rigor. Not only were students of color historically denied education, but also the White government, policy-makers, educators, and community members justified this injustice with cultural deficit theories based off a fictional "racial hierarchy of intelligence" (Gutiérrez, 2008, p.

359). We see historical opportunity gaps and the denial of quality education to students of color mirrored in the contemporary education system and opportunity gaps that continue to receive justification through variants of fictional intellectual and academic deficit theories (Roberts, 2011).

The second component of Ladson-Billings' (2006) Education Debt involves economic debt in the form of school funding. She points out that the contemporary funding disparities between schools serving predominantly White students and schools serving students of color have existed for decades. The amount of money spent on schools for students of color versus White students tells an honest story about the disparity in value that society places on the educational value of students of color versus their White counterparts (Ladson-Billings, 2006). Significantly more funding allotted to schools with predominantly White student bodies signifies a greater societal value of those students' education and quality of schooling compared to the lesser funding and resources allotted to schools composed mostly of students of color. In 30 out of 50 states around the country, districts with a high proportion of minoritized students receive less money per student than districts that are predominantly White (Education Trust, 2005). In addition to the disparity in spending per student based off of race, the wealth gap that exists between families of color and White families further limits the educational resources allotted to students of color because wealth is a source of political and social power that can unlock access to more affluent areas and schools with greater resources (Ladson-Billings, 2006). Some scholars believe that closing the resource and wealth gaps and disparities between White communities and communities that are predominantly people of color is a major key to positively addressing the disparities present in the "achievement gap" as well as the discipline gap (Gregory, Skiba & Noguera, 2010). And in turn, better educational opportunities and outcomes for students of color will equip students for stronger economic prospects as high school degrees and college degrees increase one's earning opportunities (Kurtzleben, 2014).

The next component of Ladson-Billings' (2006) analysis of Education Debt involves sociopolitical debt. Sociopolitical debt refers to the extent to which communities of color have been excluded from civic processes such as voting throughout history as well as the compounding political and societal effects of a sociopolitical system used to stifle the voices of minoritized communities. Historically, people of color were excluded from education and democratic practices such as voting. It wasn't until 1965 with the passage of the Voting Rights Act that the government took serious legal action in protecting African American's crucial civil right to vote. Without voting power, families of color had little voice or political influence on the policies and

legislation that shape our nation and continue to perpetuate opportunity gaps in education (Ladson-Billings, 2006). Another result of sociopolitical education debt is the fact that families of color are often excluded from decision-making processes that would allow them to voice concerns and advocate for their children's right to quality education within their communities (Ladson-Billings, 2006). Ladson-Billings (2006) asserts, "Their advocacy for improvement in schooling has often been muted and marginalized" (p. 7). This historical, systemic pattern of silencing and devaluing the voices of advocacy from communities of color inhibits progress toward equity in education for students of color and serves to maintain a social and racial hierarchy of power in which students of color are assigned the least educational, social, and economic value.

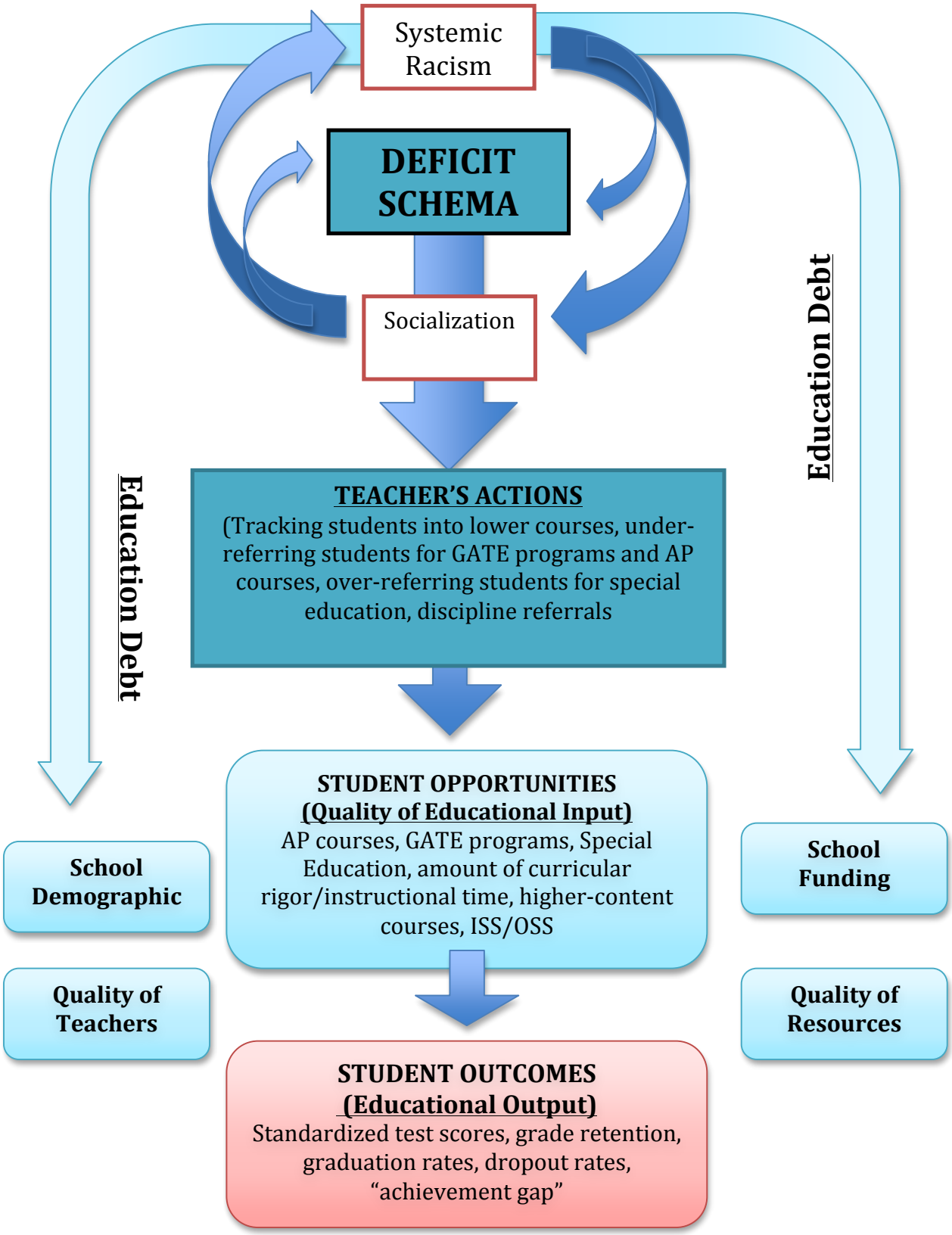
The final component of Ladson-Billings' (2006) analysis of Education Debt is moral debt. The moral debt intrinsic to the Education Debt reflects the disparity between what is right and just and what society perpetuates in regards to education; moral debt involves the decency humans owe to each other when giving, or failing to give, honor and respect where such is due (Ladson-Billings, 2006). In the context of education, Ladson-Billings (2006) asserts that educators, administrators, and policy-makers must consider the national moral debt to students of color – what does society owe to students and families who have historically received unjust exclusion from social benefits and educational opportunities? When evaluating the moral debt the United States owes to people of color, Ladson-Billings (2006) reminds us that one must consider that it was the labor and efforts of people of color who sustained the early American economy with products from plantations and it was the contribution of 200,000 Black men who enlisted in the Union Army during the Civil War who bolstered the Union Army enough to win the war and secure a government "by the people for the people". People of color have made valuable contributions to the American nation in all arenas of influence from art to politics, all while enduring oppressive economic, sociopolitical, and educational systems. Ladson-Billings (2006) reasons that Americans have a moral debt and obligation of honor to consider the historical debt compounded through generations of oppression of people of color when considering the Education Debt that American society and systemic racism create and perpetuate. It is only through comprehensive, critical analysis of all the facets of the Education Debt, the generations upon generations of opportunity gaps and systemic oppression of people of color, that one can begin to understand the context and longevity of the contemporary opportunity gap and begin to stride toward reform for quality education and equitable opportunities for students of color.

The contemporary landscape of American education is not so different than that of the past. Critical analysis of the literature surrounding the high profile "achievement gap" reveals that racial disparities in educational opportunities help create and perpetuate national racial disparities in students' educational success. The American public education system provides students of color with less access to experienced and effective teachers, less school funding, and fewer AP and advanced content courses and GATE programs (Boykin & Noguera, 2011; Haycock, Jerald & Huang, 2001; McLaren, 1994; OCR, 2016; Taylor, 2006; Wise, 2012; Wright, Horn, & Sanders, 1997). As the gatekeepers of educational opportunities, White American teachers across the nation limit students' of color equitable access to educational opportunities through tracking students of color into lower academic course trajectories and away from advanced content courses, under-referring qualified students for GATE programs, over-referring students for Special Education programs, and subjecting youth of color to disproportionate rates of exclusionary discipline (Gregory, Skiba & Noguera, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2006; OCR, 2016; The Schott Foundation, 2015; Taylor, 2006; Wilson, 2014). Deeper analysis of the root problems contributing to the contemporary educational Opportunity Gap reveals generations upon generations of systemic oppression of people of color and educational disparities that compose a national Education Debt to people of color. White citizens justify systemic racism and the legal, historical, economic, and sociopolitical institutional barriers devised to limit the educational opportunities of people of color through negative, pervasive, fictional deficit theories (Solorzano & Yosso, 2011). These deficit theories about people of color have persisted throughout history through the process of socialization in which White citizens learn to devalue people of color as "inherently" cognitively and culturally inferior to Whites and thus deserving of restrictions in their opportunities and subsequent negative outcomes reflected in society (Roberts, 2011).

I designed Schematic Model 4.0 to illustrate my conceptual framework and critical analysis of the relationship between systemic racism, socialization and teacher schema as well as the impact of teachers' schema on actions and educational decisions, students' educational opportunities, and subsequent educational outcomes. Systemic racism also influences factors such as school demographics, disparities in school funding, and disparities in the quality of teachers and amount and type of resources, which also affect students' educational outcomes. Comprehensively, this schematic model and conceptual framework presents a contextualized critical analysis of the contemporary racial disparities in students' educational outcomes and refutes the deficit schema analysis of the "achievement gap". The schematic model also represents the

centrality of teachers' deficit schemas in maintaining and perpetuating the opportunity gap. Conceptually, to truly impact this cycle that negatively affects student outcomes, one could address teachers' schema as a means through which to positively impact the educational system. Social psychologists confirm that implicit racial bias subconsciously influences educators' decisions about students of color; as teachers' referrals and educational and disciplinary decisions are often the first step for determining students' opportunities and outcomes, teachers' schemas can set students up for educational success or failure (Gregory, Skiba & Noguera, 2010; Wilson, 2014).

In the next section of this thesis, I review existing literature to determine effective methods for addressing and deconstructing the implicit bias and deficit perspective schemas prevalent for teachers, especially White teachers. I propose the need for the development of critical consciousness in preservice teachers as a systemic approach to combatting the cognitive barriers influencing teachers' discriminatory instructional, referral, and disciplinary decisions pertaining to students of color. The development of critical consciousness in teachers involves a personal commitment to justice and educational excellence that cannot be forced, but is critical to providing equity in students' educational opportunities and subsequent educational outcomes. I also review literature that focuses on the impact of critical consciousness on teachers' pedagogy and analyze Ladson-Billings' (2009) proposal of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy as a means through which to connect White teachers and students of color for meaningful, quality educational experiences and outcomes (Ladson-Billings, 2006). Working to remediate the opportunity gap, discipline gap, and subsequent racial disparities in students' outcomes must be considered a national priority. The ability of public schools and American educators and administrators to provide quality education to all American students affects the future of our nation. In a country where academic accomplishment dictates a large portion of economic success, it is critical that we learn how to effectively steward the intellectual skills and talents of students of color who compose almost half of our American students (Wilson, 2014).



- Schematic Model 4.0

Chapter 3: The Transformative Power of Critical Consciousness and Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

Much of the literature reviewed in this thesis highlights the necessity of addressing teachers' deficit schemas in order to provide quality, equitable educational experiences and opportunities to students of color and begin to remediate the racial discipline gap and "achievement gap". In the final section of this thesis, I review existing literature to determine effective methods for addressing and deconstructing the implicit bias and deficit perspective schemas prevalent in White teachers. I propose the need for the development of critical consciousness in preservice teachers as a systemic approach to combatting the cognitive barriers influencing teachers' discriminatory instructional, referral, and disciplinary decisions pertaining to students of color. The development of critical consciousness in teachers involves a personal commitment to justice, equity, and educational excellence for all students that cannot be forced, but is critical to providing equity in students' educational opportunities and subsequent educational outcomes. I then review literature that focuses on the impact of critical consciousness on teachers' pedagogy and analyze Ladson-Billings' (1994) conceptualization of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy as a means through which to connect White teachers and students of color for meaningful, quality educational experiences and outcomes.

Addressing Teacher Schema for Students' Success

Research indicates that far too many White teachers hold deep ideological biases against African American students, which results in low expectations for students' success and decreases teachers' willingness and ability to provide quality educational opportunities to students of color (Ladson-Billings, 1994). Teachers' deficit perspectives about students of color produce unavoidable negative consequences for students' long-term academic success and perpetuate institutional racism and systemic oppression, which disadvantage people of color in American society (Sleeter, 2011). Ladson-Billings (1994) notes in her research that many teachers who "decry racism" and "believe in equal opportunity" are the very people who support systemic racism through education as they do not understand how their negative schema about students of color interferes with their ability to provide effective education (p. 23). There is no "neutral ground" however in education; teachers who don't actively develop critical consciousness and make educational decisions which reflect asset-based schemas about students of color reinforce deficit schemas, restrict students' potential, and support systemic racism through their ideology and actions (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012). In this way, teachers who do not effectively analyze and address their conscious and subconscious deficit schemas about students of color actively and

passively perpetuate systemic racism. In order to effectively examine their personal role in maintaining systemic racism, teachers must first develop a critical consciousness that allows them to analyze the complex sociopolitical and historical construction of race and acknowledge their own positionality and role in supporting, maintaining, or combatting systemic racism (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012).

Even considering that the contemporary model of American education and prominent deficit teacher schemas perpetuate racial disparities in student outcomes can feel like a risky and aversive mental maneuver for educators. As Mooney & Cole (2000) assert, "Taking an introspective look at our relationship to school today is itself an act of defiance. We are taught not to look inward for direction when it comes to school. We are supposed to follow the lead of the institution and accept many of its unquestioned values" such as individualism, meritocracy, and "equal opportunity" (p. 74). However, the current state of American students' success warrants a serious, introspective response from educators. Research indicates teachers' multicultural incompetence can negatively impact students' outcomes just as much as teachers' incompetence in subject content can limit student success (Ford & Grantham, 2003). As is such, teacher preparation programs should consider preservice teachers' development of critical consciousness and cultural competence as crucial to educators' training as content mastery and emphasize course work that exposes students to critical analysis of their positionality and systems of oppression within society and the context of American education.

Ford & Grantham (2003) highlight the fact that effective multicultural education preparation among school staff can have a positive impact on racialized disparities in students' academic outcomes; they call for "substantive and comprehensive program preparation" that reeducates teachers "so that deficit-oriented philosophies no longer impede diverse students' access to programs and services" (Ford & Grantham, 2003, p. 221). As noted in my conceptual framework, the quality and quantity of educational opportunities teachers choose to provide for students strongly influences students' subsequent success and outcomes. The development of new, equitable schemas about students of color is only possible through teachers' development of critical consciousness, a mental state of critical self- analysis, historical analysis, and social analysis. As Sleeter (2011) explains, the heart of critical consciousness is "understanding systemic inequity – that is, the political, economic, and racial structures that disproportionately limit the opportunities of children of color (p. 15). Through the development of critical consciousness, teachers will begin to examine their own ideology and the relationships between systemic racism, socialization, and their power as educators to perpetuate or challenge

cycles of oppression in education. This critical consciousness will positively affect how educators interact with students of color and positively influence the quality and quantity of educational opportunities they provide to support students' academic success.

Defining Critical Consciousness

Ira Shor's (1992) summary of Freire's (1973) conceptualization of critical consciousness illuminates critical consciousness as a challenging journey of cognitive development through which individuals often experience both growth and resistance. Freire's (1973) conceptualization of critical consciousness involves three stages. Freire (1973) refers to the first stage of development as "intransitive consciousness" (Freire, 1973). Individuals within this stage of consciousness believe that humans are powerless to change their social conditions and view issues of injustice through nonhistorical, prescientific lenses (Shor, 1992). Individuals within an intransitive stage of consciousness hold a disempowering view of society, believing, "Life is as it has to be. The system is permanent and invulnerable…. You cannot act in society to change it" (Shor, 1992, p. 126). This stage of schema is one of defeat, acceptance, and conformity as individuals with an intransitive consciousness accept systemic inequities as fixed and unchangeable. A teacher within the intransitive stage of consciousness may subscribe to the dominant deficit schema about people of color and uphold systemic inequities through limiting the quality and quantity of educational opportunities provided to students of color. White teachers with an intransitive consciousness do not critically consider the historical or social contexts and constructions of systems of oppression nor do they acknowledge the role they play, as individuals in positions of power, in upholding systems of oppression. Because teachers in this stage of consciousness never examine their own cultural backgrounds, they have no way to challenge their conscious and unconscious negative assumptions about students of color that influence how they educate students of color (Ladson-Billings, 1994).

Freire (1973) describes the second stage of consciousness as "semi-transitive consciousness". During this cognitive stage, individuals believe in their human ability to learn and change things in society (Shor, 1992). Individuals within the semi-transitive stage of consciousness experience partial empowerment as they accept their individual ability to elicit personal and social change. However, individuals in the semi-transitive stage of consciousness fail to analyze the interconnectedness of society and systems of oppression and seek to isolate and change one aspect of society at a time; this "one dimensional, short-term thinking" is often reflected in educators today; it leads to teachers "acting on an isolated problem, ignoring root causes and long-term

solutions, and often creating other problems because the social system underlying a problem is not addressed" (Shor, 1992, p. 127). For example, educators and policy-makers try to address the "achievement gap" through stricter testing standards and school and teacher accountability for test scores fail to contextualize the disparity in student outcomes within its historical and sociopolitical roots of systemic racism and deficit-perspectives and therefore miss the opportunity to address root causes of racial educational disparities in schools and provide effective long-term solutions. This short-sightedness or inability to situate manifestations of oppression within their systemic context is symptomatic of a semi-transitive consciousness and serves as a barrier to effective systemic change within schools across the United States (Shor, 1992).

Freire's (1973) final stage of consciousness is critical consciousness, or "critical transitivity". In the stage of critical consciousness, individuals recognize society as a "human creation, which we can know and transform" and make "broad connections between individual experiences and social issues, between single problems and the larger social system" (Shor, 1992, p. 127-128). Individuals who have cultivated a mindset of critical consciousness recognize the historical and social contexts of societal injustices, the ways in which various parts of society are interconnected, and the role that power plays in maintaining elite groups which "wield dominant power and wealth" within a society (Shor, 1992, p. 128). As Shor (1992) asserts, it is necessary for individuals to recognize that not all people have the same power within politics, society, and economics and this awareness and analysis of power is a necessary prerequisite for disrupting any cycle of oppression. Importantly, educators who have reached the stage of critical consciousness can analyze racial disparities in student outcomes as reflective of historical and contemporary manifestations of racism and socialization.

In addition to Freire's (1973) conceptualization of critical consciousness, Shor (1992) reinforces four key components of critical consciousness: power awareness, a habit of critical literacy, permanent desocialization, and self-organized transitive education. The concept of permanent desocialization is of particular relevance to the development of critical schema in White educators as teachers can only buck the dominant deficit perspectives about students of color through "understanding and challenging artificial, political limits on human development; questioning power and inequality in status quo; and examining socialized values in consciousness and in society which hold back democratic change in individuals and in the larger culture" that teachers can buck the dominant deficit perspective about students of color (Shor, 1992, p. 129 – 130). This

"desocialization" does not imply that individuals are unaffected by socialization, but rather that they critically comb through their schemas to identify and challenge problematic beliefs and stereotypes influencing their ideology and actions toward people of color. Without engaging in a process of critical analysis and desocialization, individuals, like White teachers, in positions of power continue to perpetuate systems of oppression through passive and active acceptance of historically and socially constructed deficit conceptions about students of color.

In his later work, Freire (2000) expands his articulation of critical consciousness. Freire defines critical consciousness as conscientização, the ability to perceive "social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality" (Freire, 2000, p. 35). As bell hooks (1994) asserts, it is this "conscientization", or critical awareness and engagement with issues of justice, which is crucial to providing quality education to students of color in American schools. Critical consciousness changes not only the way teachers and administrators view students of color, but also how educators interact with students of color. One key concept from Freire's (2000) conceptualization of critical consciousness is known as "praxis", or the crucial interplay between reflection on the world and action to transform it. Through praxis, Freire (2000) highlights that true critical consciousness is not merely cerebral awareness void of influence. True critical consciousness necessitates an expression of praxis that "cannot be purely intellectual, but must involve action; nor can it be limited to mere activism, but must include serious reflection" (Freire, 2000, p. 65). In her works, bell hooks (1994) also acknowledges the importance of Freire's (2000) principle of praxis as it requires individuals to verify in action and reflection what they know to be true in their critical consciousness. Within the context of education, teachers who have developed a critical consciousness should be reflective practitioners, analyzing and reflecting on their schemas and the ways their schema influences their actions and interactions with students of color. Reciprocally, critically conscious teachers should choose to engage in educational practices and behavioral decisions that reflect their critical schema. It is through this process of reflection and action and subsequent reflection on one's actions that critically conscious teachers ensure that their instructional and behavioral decisions facilitate equity within their classrooms.

Multicultural Education and the Development of Critical Consciousness in Preservice Teachers

Ideally, educators should enter the field as reflective, critically conscious practitioners ready to effectively engage all students, including students of color, in a quality, meaningful education. In order for

White teachers to enter the field of education prepared to effectively educate students of color, they would need to have developed some level of critical consciousness prior to or during their preservice teacher training program. Some universities use Multicultural Education Courses to introduce preservice teachers to critical habits of mind crucial to equitable education (Gonsalves, 2008). These Multicultural Education Courses (MCE) strive to help preservice teachers understand that thinking critically extends beyond acquiring new information to "determining the social, historical, and political meaning given to those facts" which uphold systemic racism and limit the educational opportunities afforded to students of color (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012, p. 2). Multicultural education courses provide preservice teachers with educational experiences that challenge them to engage in "critical self-examination that explores their attitudes and perceptions concerning cultural diversity, and examine the influence of these attitudes and perceptions on minority students' achievement and educational opportunities" (Ford & Grantham, 2003, p. 221).

As Gonsalves (2008) asserts, "a MCE (or Anti-Racist) course is a crucial juncture in the process of transforming predetermined beliefs and values" (p. 16) and Multicultural Education courses provide a space for preservice teachers to encounter and overcome resistance to information about systemic racism that contradicts their socialization within the dominant society. Multicultural Education courses for preservice teachers highlight historical and contemporary aspects of oppression and power and challenge future educators to develop mindsets that will allow them to teach and empower students of color through quality, critical education (Gonsalves, 2008). One hope behind MCE courses is that preservice teachers will begin to develop critical consciousness and experience a change in their beliefs about people of color that will positively influence their teaching behaviors and ability to effectively teach students of color (Gonsalves, 2008). Freire (2000) warns that universities that omit MCE courses from their teacher education programs engage in a disguised form of censorship that ultimately limits preservice teachers' opportunities to better understand systems of oppression, maintaining the dominant deficit perspective about students of color that negatively impacts students' academic outcomes and educational experiences.

Though Multicultural Education Courses can play a critical role in training teachers to effectively prepare students of color for academic success, MCE courses are often viewed as controversial and receive pushback from participants and universities (Freire, 2000; Gonsalves, 2008; Mcfalls & Cobb-Roberts, 2001). The content presented in MCE courses can feel threatening to White preservice teachers, as "it exposes the tacit

or implicit contradictions in our society, directly challenging the beliefs of many precredential teachers" linking the "history of oppressed minorities and the current state of schooling in America" (Gonsalves, 2008, p. 9). Students in MCE courses are often presented with material that challenges what they hold as personal and social identities as they are asked to critically consider and discuss issues that may oppose their personal frames of reference and socialized schemas (Mcfalls & Cobb-Roberts, 2001). This exposure to information and material that challenges one's learned beliefs often creates cognitive tension, or dissonance, and discomfort for students within MCE courses. When cognitive dissonance arises, individuals have a strong interest in protecting their pre-existing schema to maintain cognitive consistency instead of revising or changing their beliefs (Festinger, 1957; Mcfalls & Cobb-Roberts, 2001). As cognitive dissonance theory asserts, people are motivated to diminish the psychological tension they experience when they interact with information that is incompatible with prior knowledge and challenges the beliefs they hold as "reality" (Mcfalls & Cobb-Roberts, 2011). Piaget (1952) suggests, however, that experiencing and decreasing this cognitive dissonance are key components, driving forces even, behind all learning (Mcfalls & Cobb-Roberts, 2011). These psychological principles provide a conceptual basis for the various types of resistance preservice teachers experience during MCE; cognitive resistance to new or challenging information that confronts one's learned "truths" serves as a barrier to developing critical consciousness and debunking dominant deficit perspective schemas about students of color. It is only through persevering through a series of developmental cognitive stages and resolving various types of mental and moral resistance that preservice teachers can develop critical consciousness crucial to protecting the educational entitlement of American students of color (Gonsalves, 2008).

More specifically, Gonsalves (2008) asserts, "A preservice teacher must pass through the four levels of consciousness and resistance before developing a critical perspective" (p. 16). Within each level of consciousness, teachers will experience resistance to new information that challenges their learned beliefs, often resulting in an ethical and moral dilemma that forces the individual to resolve conflicting values and perspectives about equity, privilege and education (Gonsalves, 2008). Gonsalves (2008) labels the first stage of consciousness as the "unconscious" stage. Individuals within the unconscious stage are unable to inspect power relations within society, which reinforces the dominant deficit perspective that the social and racial hierarchy present in society reflects a natural order as opposed to a socially constructed phenomenon (Gonsalves, 2008). At this unconscious point of conscious development, individuals are immersed in the dominant culture and

subscribe to the ideology that sustains the dominant order, upholding ideals such as meritocracy, individualism, and justice through law (Gonsalves, 2008).

Individuals within Gonsalves's (2008) second stage of consciousness experience life in a "dysconscious" manner. Individuals within the dysconscious stage of consciousness "shun critical thinking and avoid reflection" to protect an "uncritical habit of mind" (Gonsalves, 2008, p. 18). It is during this second stage of consciousness where individuals strive to maintain a superficial "unawareness" of systemic injustices through semi-conscious mental defenses, such as "hysterical blindness", to thwart any information which may expose discrepancies between ones schema and moral beliefs about justice, equality, and freedom (Gonsalves, 2008). In Gonsalves's (2008) work, "hysterical blindness refers to the symbolic form of denial at the level of social-cognitive functioning" which reflects "a deeper denial that simultaneously represses public and individual awareness about the inequities in our educational systems (Gonsalves, 2008, p. 11). In order for hysterical blindness to racial inequalities to function on a daily basis on personal and societal levels, institutions of dominant White culture must perpetuate the falsity of "racial equality" throughout American society (Gonsalves, 2008). Within the context of education, hysterical blindness among teachers and administrators allows teachers to deny systemic racial inequities, supporting the dominant cultural deficit schema and obscuring the critical reality that educational inequality which maintains the social order in which White students maintain statuses of privilege over students of color (Gonsalves, 2008).

The third stage of Gonsalves's (2008) model for consciousness is the "preconscious stage", which represents the stage of mental maturity in which individuals begin to realize cognitive conflict regarding their internalized beliefs and morals. When students experience Multicultural Education courses during cognitive stages of dysconsicousness and preconsciousness, they may begin to develop more critical habits of mind as they experience the tension of moral dilemmas and critical analysis of systemic oppression; their awareness of cognitive dissonance between their socialized beliefs and critical theory can spur students toward resistance and hopefully resolution and deepening critical consciousness (Gonsalves, 2008). Students who wrestle with their cognitive dissonances during MCE courses can progress to a state of critical consciousness through critical analysis and reflection upon systemic oppression, power, and their ideology and socialization.

Individuals within the consciousness stage of development recognize social inequalities and can analyze and criticize social constructions and modes of oppression within the dominant culture (Gonsalves,

2008). In Gonsalves's model (2008), individuals who enter the consciousness stage often take one of three paths: moratorium, regression, or change. It is very common for preservice teachers to enter a stage of moratorium after their MCE course, meaning they cognitively cannot progress beyond their current level of awareness due to the amount of mentally and emotionally challenging information they encountered throughout the semester and still need to process (Gonsalves, 2008). Other preservice teachers may experience regression after progressing to the stage of consciousness when the level of awareness they experienced during the MCE course exceeds their level of mental or emotional tolerance. Though counter-productive to critical consciousness, individuals who reach a state of consciousness may regress to prior forms of cognitive defense and resistance after their MCE course ends (Gonsalves, 2008). Lastly, and most optimally, preservice teachers who progress to a state of critical consciousness during a MCE course may progress further into a state of change as their experience with MCE cultivated critical analysis and subsequent changes to their attitudes, beliefs, values, and opinions that shape their schema and impact teaching practices (Gonsalves, 2008).

Though it would be ideal for preservice teachers to develop a level of critical consciousness through partaking in an MCE course, research indicates that one MCE course is too often insufficient for helping preservice teachers develop critical consciousness; it is unlikely that an individual will enter a MCE course in a state of dysconscious resistance and exit the course with a semblance of critical consciousness in just one semester (Gonsalves, 2008). Throughout the course, preservice teachers are exposed to information that, if accepted, could serve to isolate them mentally and emotionally from peers, family, and their community (Mcfalls & Cobb-Roberts, 2001). With such high stakes and the fact that the development of critical consciousness is a very personal mentally and emotionally –draining process, it is no wonder that one multicultural education course is insufficient for truly addressing, unpacking, analyzing, and problematizing ones learned ideology and socialization (Gonsalves, 2008). Additionally, preservice teachers who do develop a level of critical consciousness during a MCE course are unlikely to maintain their state of consciousness after the semester is over as it takes students time to digest and critically evaluate the challenging information they learned over the course of the semester and many may regress due to cognitive dissonance without guidance in continued critical analysis (Gonsalves, 2008).

Additionally, cultivating critical consciousness should be a key component of educators' professional and personal development as national and state-level teaching standards require teachers to demonstrate

competency in creating inclusive classroom environments and working successfully with students from diverse cultural backgrounds to allow students to reach their maximum educational potential (NCATE, 2008). While Multicultural Education courses and diverse field experience placements can help facilitate preservice teachers' development of critical consciousness, these trainings and experiences cannot ensure that teachers will cultivate critical consciousness. Preservice teachers' development of critical consciousness and cultural competence are directly related to more than just the quality of field experiences and MCE courses in teacher preparation programs; educators' learned perceptions, attitudes, and dispositions also play an influential role in their development of critical consciousness as that is a very personal journey which involves a great deal of mental, emotional, and moral "self-work" (Dee, 2012). Because thinking critically is part of a developmental process in which individuals are asked to question their learned beliefs about how society functions and examine their position in society pertaining to power, privilege, and equity, many individuals experience strong cognitive resistance to MCE courses. As Gonsalves (2008) asserts, "A great deal of emotional energy is invested in keeping troubling issues out of sight and out of mind" (p. 16). It is not reasonable to expect that a preservice teacher will progress from a dysconscious state of resistance into critical consciousness in the duration of one college course (Gonsalves, 2008). On the contrary, Alcorn (2001) explains that students' exposure to critical analyses of society, institutions, and power through a MCE course may have little to no impact on their teaching methods, pedagogy, or interactions with students of color. She states, "A teacher can 'learn about' many things, and yet this learning may have no effect on their practices other than strengthening their modes of defense against such knowledge" (Alcorn, 2001, p. 177). Dee (2012) asserts that it is the ethical responsibility of university professors teaching MCE courses to reject any students' work that indicates students have fallen short of developing a critical understanding of how to meet the needs of diverse learners in the 21st century classroom. Though the development of critical consciousness can be challenging to measure and isn't upheld as a prerequisite for entering the teaching field, it is still an extremely important factor which influences teachers' ability to effectively educate students of color.

Positive Impact of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy on Student Outcomes

Without an active critical consciousness, White educators are unlikely to engage with students of color in ways that support successful, quality learning (Ladson-Billings, 1995). As a review of existing literature throughout this thesis asserts, teachers' beliefs and dispositions about students play major roles in the academic

achievement of students from diverse backgrounds, for better or for worse (Dee, 2012). Teachers who develop critical consciousness can debunk the prominent deficit-perspectives about students and families of color, see through negative racial stereotypes, and perceive students as individual learners instead of stereotyped cameos of students destined for low academic outcomes. As a result of teachers' change in schema from a deficit perspective to a critical analysis of students and the institution of education, teachers can make equitable educational and behavioral decisions about students of color to diminish the racialized opportunity gap limiting the success of students of color across the nation. Teachers who develop critical consciousness can challenge the deficit schema about students of color, recognize the historical, social, and political constructs of race and identify the ways in which the system of education can serve to oppress students of color while providing White students with privilege (Ford & Grantham, 2003). Teachers who view students of color, race, and the institution of education through a critical consciousness are able to embrace students' diversity and lived experiences as resources and strengths as opposed to deficits and obstacles (Fox, 2016). Critical consciousness makes it possible for teachers to shift away from a damaging deficit schema about students of color to an asset-based schema in which teachers recognize a wider range of attributes as advantages in the classroom (Fox, 2016). A critical analysis of race and belief in the inherent worth and abilities of each student allows teachers to design and implement powerful, relevant pedagogy that empowers students of color to be influential learners.

Ladson-Billings (1995) illustrates the power of educators' critical consciousness in her work on culturally relevant pedagogy. To illustrate the positive influence of teachers' critical, culturally competent schemas on the success of students of color, I review Gloria Ladson-Billings' (1995) conceptualization of culturally relevant pedagogy which champions the inherent knowledge, potential, and worth students of color possess and influences teachers' instructional and behavioral decisions in ways that position students for success. Through much research and observation, Ladson-Billings (1995) asserts that culturally relevant pedagogy is important "for its centrality in the academic success of African American and other students who have not been well-served by our nation's public schools" (p. 159). The three main criteria or outcomes of culturally-relevant teaching are for students to experience academic success, develop and/or maintain a level of cultural competence, and develop critical consciousness to analyze and challenge existing oppressive systems and social constructions (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Teachers who have developed critical consciousness and embrace the following three tenets of culturally relevant pedagogy can engage students of color in quality

educational experiences and environments which can foster positive student outcomes associated with culturally-relevant education.

The first tenet of culturally relevant pedagogy involves cultivating positive conceptions of self and others within the classroom. As Daniel (1990) found, "Educators who are able to talk about issues of race and racism with their students often find that their relationships with students of color improve, and perhaps as a result, so does the students' academic performance" (p. 28). Students of color who are validated and heard within the classroom and who feel accepted and recognized by their teachers experience positive associations between self and education. A positive conception of self is important both to students and parents. In her research, Ladson-Billings (1994) found that many parents of color wanted their children to "be able to hold their own in the classroom without forgetting their own in the community" (p. 30). Within the conception of culturally relevant pedagogy, it is important for the teachers and students to embrace their culture and embody a strong sense of self in an educational context for the most meaningful learning experiences.

The second tenet of culturally relevant pedagogy involves positive social relations between the teacher and students, parents, and the community. Teachers are best able to provide relevant, meaningful instruction to students who they know on educational and personal levels. Sleeter (2011) found that teachers who experienced academic success with their students of color took time to form close relationships with the students and then based their instruction about what they learned about the students from relationships rather than basing their pedagogy and curriculum off of stereotyped, essentialized "ethnic identities" that mainstream society superimposed upon students of color (p. 14). Ladson-Billings (1995) asserts that a key component of effective culturally relevant teaching involves teachers "consciously working to develop commonalities with all the students", pushing past the unconscious tendency for teachers to favor students perceived to be most similar to himself or herself or the "ideal student" (p. 72). Teachers engaging in culturally relevant pedagogy work to develop positive relationships with teachers, families, and communities, and also create a learning environment in which students are expected to form positive relationships with one another. Culturally relevant teachers encourage a "community of learners" and teach students to work collaboratively and take responsibility for one another's' learning, refuting dominant ideology of competitive individualism (Ladson-Billings, 1994, p. 74).

The third and final tenet of culturally relevant pedagogy stresses critical conceptions of knowledge. Dominant ideology and deficit-perspective schemas about students of color discount the intrinsic educational

capital and knowledge students of color bring to school; in contrast, critical consciousness allows teachers to challenge "normative assumptions of what constitutes knowledge" and recognize the intrinsic knowledge and wisdom of experience within each student (Fox, 2016). In Ladson-Billings' (1994) conceptualization of culturally relevant pedagogy, "Knowledge is continuously recreated, recycled, and shared by the teachers and the students" (p. 163). Culturally relevant teachers maintain transformative and equitable relations with their students and encourage students to take on the role of teachers within the classrooms (Ladson-Billings, 1995). As Ladson-Billings (1994) explains, "Culturally relevant teaching involves the students in the knowledge-construction process, so that they can ask significant questions about the nature of the curriculum. The ultimate goal is to ensure that they have a sense of ownership of their knowledge – a sense that is empowering and liberating" (p. 84).

The critical conception of knowledge characteristic to culturally relevant pedagogy reveals a stark ideological contrast between culturally relevant teaching and the dominant, traditional "banking" concept of education prevalent throughout American schools. The banking system of education positions teachers as the "all knowing" being in the classroom and treats students as "blank slates" or "empty vessels" whose purpose is to receive, file, and store informational and educational deposits bestowed upon them through teacher-directed instruction (Freire, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994). Freire (2000) asserts that the popular method of banking education serves to oppress students' critical consciousness, minimizing their creative and critical thinking skills and maintaining the interests of oppressors, "who care neither to have the world revealed nor to see it transformed" (p. 73). In contrast to assimilationist banking education methods, culturally relevant teaching functions more like problem-posing education which serves to foster critical consciousness within students so that they may perceive systemic forms of oppression and challenge conventional scripts within curriculum through critical analysis (Ladson-Billings, 1994). As Ladson-Billings (1994) describes, "A hallmark of a culturally relevant notion of knowledge is that it is something that each student brings to the classroom. Students are not seen as empty vessels to be filled by all-knowing teachers" (p. 95). Culturally relevant teachers acknowledge, value, and incorporate students' knowledge and lived experiences within the scope of instruction (Ladson-Billings, 1994). bell hooks (1994) positions the belief in the power of students to teach as one of the foundational concepts behind education as a practice of freedom, overturning the banking system's belief that teachers have nothing to learn from students. While banking pedagogy and deficit schemas about the inherent

knowledge within students of color serves to restrain students' academic progress and success, culturally relevant pedagogy crowns students as teachers with valuable input to contribute to class discussions and learning experiences, lending to students' educational ownership and academic success.

Teachers who engage in critical consciousness and the tenets of culturally relevant pedagogy position their students to develop cultural competence and critical and sociopolitical consciousness, and experience academic success. Academic success is arguably the educational outcome of culturally relevant pedagogy that would be most readily welcomed by educators, administrators, and policy makers. Ladson-Billings (1995) echoes popular belief when she asserts, "All students need literacy, numeracy, technological, social, and political skills in order to be active participants in a democracy" (p. 475) and function independently and successfully within society after completing schooling. As is such, culturally relevant teachers desire academic success for all their students, including students of color, and maintain the fundamental belief that students of color can and must succeed in school (Ladson-Billings, 1995). This belief in the ability within all students places responsibility for student success on educators and asserts that all students can and will learn when given quality educational experiences and opportunities. This ideology contradicts the deficit schema perspective used to justify racial disparities in student outcomes, which perpetuates the stereotype that students of color are inherently less capable learners than their White peers. Throughout her research, Ladson-Billings (2009) found that effective teachers of African American students "demanded, reinforced, and produced academic excellence in their students" (p. 160). High expectations for student learning, belief in students as capable learners, persistence on the part of the teacher, and helping students "choose academic excellence" are important hallmarks of culturally relevant teaching which help contribute to students' academic success and positive educational outcomes (Ladson-Billings, 2009).

A second outcome of culturally relevant pedagogy is the development and/or maintenance of students' cultural competence. In addition to requiring academic excellence, culturally relevant pedagogy protects students' right to maintaining cultural integrity throughout the educational process (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Research indicates that students who feel positive about their own culture without alienation from their cultural values in educational settings are less likely to struggle in school (Ladson-Billings, 1994). One of the primary goals of culturally relevant teaching is to support students in the development of positive cultural identities which allow students to simultaneously choose and experience academic success and excellence while

maintaining a close identity and cultural frame of reference throughout their academic careers (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Sleeter, 2001). Once teachers shed deficit schemas about students of color through the development of critical consciousness, they are able to value and recognize the intrinsic wealth of students' cultures and empower learners to identify and access cultural and academic resources within their cultures and communities (Fox, 2016). This development of cultural competence coexists with academic excellence in classrooms shaped through culturally relevant pedagogy.

The development of sociopolitical consciousness within students is the final important outcome targeted through culturally relevant pedagogy. In contrast to much of formal education, which serves to socialize children into the dominant culture and correct behavior that does not conform to "social norms", culturally relevant pedagogy provides a space for students to question the system of education and problematize structures that uphold systemic inequities, racism, and oppression affecting their daily lives (Gonsalves, 2008; Ladson-Billings, 1994). In this way, culturally relevant pedagogy serves as a "subversive pedagogy" and allows students and teachers to exercise education as a practice of freedom (bell hooks, 1994; Ladson-Billings, 1994). Culturally relevant teachers set expectations for students to practice critical analysis, challenging students to think about the world and others critically while developing multiple perspectives about information within its historical and social contexts (Ladson-Billings, 1995). As Ladson-Billings (1995) explains, "Beyond those individual characteristics of academic achievement and cultural competence, students must develop a broader sociopolitical consciousness that allows them to critique the cultural norms, values, morals, and institutions that produce and maintain social inequities" (p. 162). Ultimately, culturally relevant pedagogy helps students of color develop sociopolitical consciousness and cultural competence while equipping students for academic excellence, thus preparing future teachers, lawyers, doctors, politicians, entrepreneurs, and leaders to think critically about their socialization and learned practices and schemas to challenge systemic racism and structures upholding the socially constructed hierarchy of power and oppression.

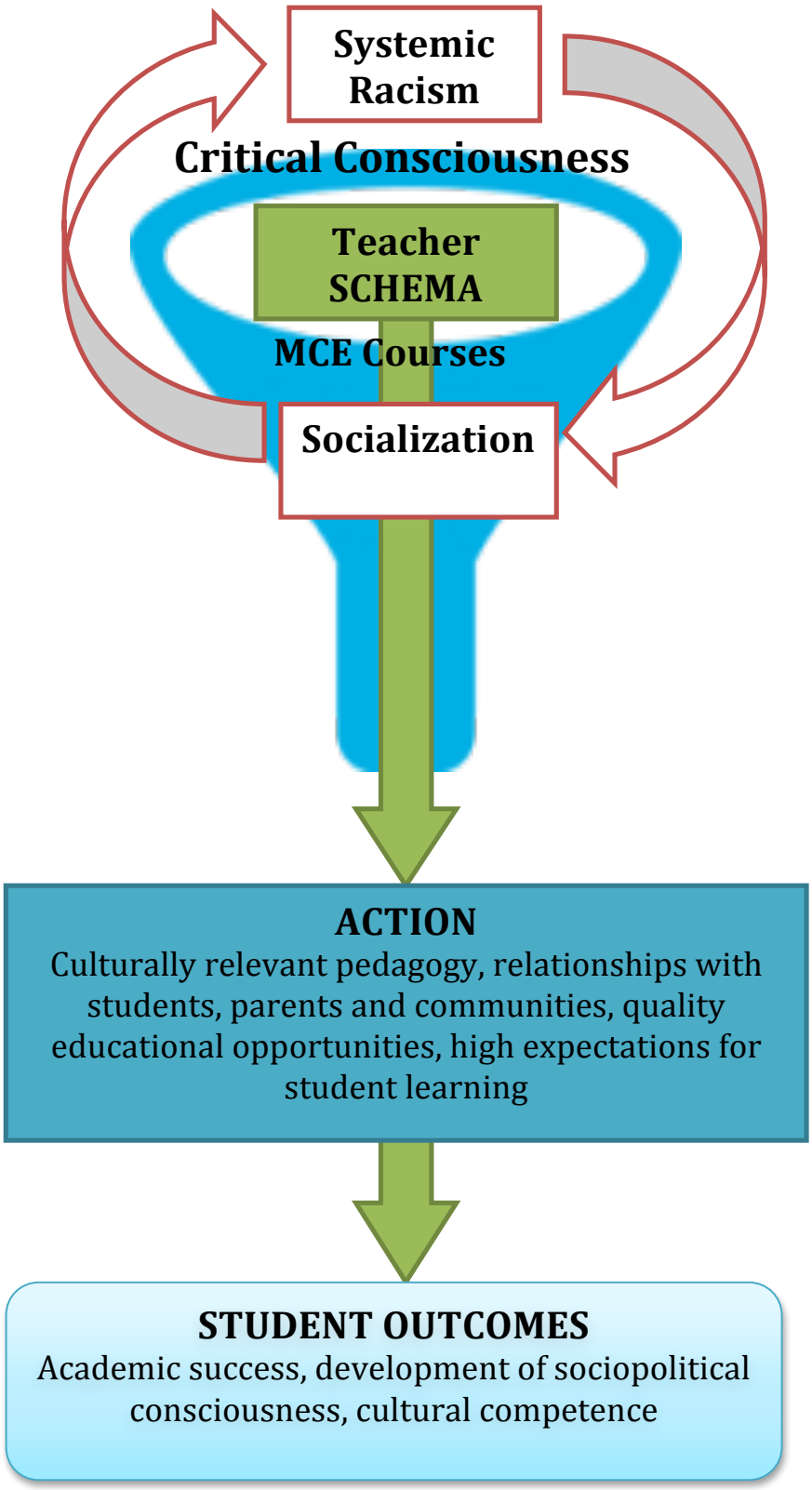
Schematic Model 5.0 illustrates and summarizes my conceptualization of the impact of teacher schema, in this case critical consciousness, on teachers' educational, behavioral, and pedagogical decisions and subsequent student opportunities and outcomes. The model reveals that while no White individual is immune from the ideological influence of systemic racism through the process of socialization within a White supremacist society, a critical consciousness serves to filter out the dominant deficit schema about people of

color to enable teachers to make educational decisions for students of color out of an asset-perspective. Some White preservice teachers experience the development of critical consciousness through a Multicultural Education course during their teacher preparation program. I designed Schematic Model 5.0 to illustrate the interconnectedness of the role MCE courses can play in interrupting individuals' unconscious socialization into deficit perspectives. This development of critical consciousness serves as a filter of sorts, allowing educators to critically analyze and sort through their beliefs about others and the equity of society. Through a lens of critical consciousness, teachers can see through the socially constructed guise of prominent deficit perspective schema about people of color. Teachers who develop critical consciousness adapt to a new, culturally relevant schema, which enables them to see students of color equitably and favorably as learners and citizens with important potential. Critical consciousness allows teachers to develop positive, asset-based schemas about students of color, which in turn influence the quality and quantity of educational opportunities teachers provide to students and how teachers handle discipline. Teachers who have developed critical consciousness are more likely to avoid punitive punishments for subjective infractions as they build relationships with students that enable them to refute negative stereotypes and consider the educational consequences of Zero Tolerance policies instead of jumping to conclusions about what students of color "deserve" behaviorally.

Educators who have developed a critical consciousness will exhibit instructional methods and curricular decisions that reflect a critical analysis of society and position students as teachers within the classroom (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Critically conscious educators may engage in culturally relevant pedagogy or another form of liberatory pedagogy that prioritizes building positive relationships with and among students and families, embraces knowledge as a continually recycled and reconstructed resource, and helps students develop positive and critical sense of self within the classroom. As a result, culturally relevant teachers empower students of color to embrace their culture as an asset in their education and experience cultural competence, develop critical consciousness, and experience academic excellence. In Ladson-Billings' (1994) research, she found critically conscious educators engaging in culturally relevant pedagogy provided quality, equitable educational opportunities and experiences to students of color that resulted in students' academic success, as well as their development of critical consciousness and cultural competence. Educators engaging in critical consciousness and employing instructional and behavioral decisions through practices such as culturally relevant pedagogy can play an instrumental role in closing contemporary disparities in racial opportunity gaps

and subsequent "achievement" and discipline gaps through fostering positive relations and academic success for students of color (Ladson-Billings, 1994).

Below, Schematic Model 5.0 represents the complex interconnectedness of systemic racism and the process of socialization as explored during my conceptual framework. Additionally, it depicts the influence of MCE courses and the development of critical consciousness as a filter on White teachers' schema about students of color. This critical schema positively impacts teachers' educational and behavioral decisions for students of color, providing increased equity in quality and quantity of educational opportunities. Subsequently, students of color experience positive educational outcomes such as academic success and develop sociopolitical consciousness and cultural competence within diverse 21st century classrooms.



- Schematic Model 5.0

Discussion

The development of critical consciousness is a deeply personal and often an emotionally and mentally draining journey. It is not specifically mandated or even regulated as a requirement for White teachers though it is vital to the academic opportunities and subsequent success of students of color. Critical consciousness is not a silver bullet to fix the education system; educators' ability to critically analyze and perceive systemic racism within its political, social, and historical contexts and recognize their positionality and role in upholding or opposing racism will not erase racism or its systemic, generational effects. However, to move forward in educating 21st century learners, teachers will need to be able to empower students to become critical thinkers who will shape the future for the better.

Students of color constitute half of students in American schools. It is a crime to continue to dismiss the educational potential and rights of students of color. Universities and teacher preparation programs play a large role in shaping the next generation of educators who will in turn shape the next generations of learners. Preservice teacher programs should seriously consider how best to train teachers to meet the diverse learning needs of the 21st century classroom; a series of Multicultural Education courses and diverse field experience opportunities could help provide future educators with the experiences and information necessary for cultivating critical consciousness and rethinking education as a practice of freedom and vehicle for justice and equity. Universities' failure to provide MCE courses that critically analyze oppressive schemas and problematic racialized behavioral and instructional decisions support the systemic inequities and allows injustices to continue to go unquestioned while educators continue to enter the field ill-equipped to educate the next generation of diverse learners.

The existing literature does reveal that a widespread deficit perspective among White educators has a negative impact on students' educational outcomes; deficit schemas about students of color negatively influence teachers' educational and behavioral decisions, which often disadvantage students of color. Because of the impact of ideology on teachers' pedagogy and educational decisions, the racial "achievement gap" and discipline gap remain strongly intact as White educators continue to act out of deficit schemas and limit students' educational opportunities and subsequent outcomes. These national crises call for justice and equity in the classroom. I believe individual teachers can influence trends in education, as it is the educators who make daily decisions that impact students' success. As long as teachers continue to operate under deficit

schemas, they will continue to justify racial disparities and dismiss systemic racism as fictional or a tale of the past, thus perpetuating contemporary inequities. It is only through the development of critical consciousness that teachers can break the cycle of their socialization and positively impact the educational experiences and outcomes of students of color. Ladson-Billings' (1994; 2009) model of culturally relevant pedagogy is one conceptualization of educational practices that prepares students for critical consciousness while facilitating positive academic outcomes for students of color. It is not documented as the final word on pedagogical practices that help students of color experience academic success. I do not assert that culturally relevant pedagogy can "fix" or "rectify" systemic racism or totally eliminate oppressive practices within realms of education, economics, and politics. While we can't change the whole educational system or macro levels of systemic oppression overnight, educators who begin to embrace critical analyses and experience ideological changes can implement positive pedagogical and behavioral shifts that will empower instead of oppress students of color in the classroom. Micro levels of resistance through critical analysis and rejection of systemic racism and deficit schemas can create positive educational outcomes for students of color one teacher and classroom of students at a time.

Conclusion

The American public education system is still deemed by many as the best mode for delivering much of the supports and training necessary for breaking the "intergenerational cycle of poverty" through positioning youth to secure high school diplomas, which allow for postsecondary training or higher education (The Schott Foundation of Public Education, 2015). However, contemporary American schools are ineffective in providing equitable educational opportunities for students of color when disproportionalities such as the "achievement gap" and discipline gap exist so rampantly across the United States' education systems. Current, commonly used methods of teaching are ineffective in combatting such clear implications of systemic inequity. Sleeter's (2011) research reveals, "Although racial achievement gaps in the US have been a focus of attention, solutions have emphasized offering all students the same curriculum, taught in the same way, regardless of the fact that they are based on the language, worldview, and experiences of White English-speakers" (p. 8). Pedagogy and instruction that treat and teach all students "the same" fails to address the diverse cultural and educational backgrounds of 21st century learners. Effective pedagogy should address students' unique cultural differences,

differentiated skill levels, and diverse experiential knowledge to effectively connect students to learning and empower students of color to experience academic excellence (Ladson-Billings, 2009).

The contemporary racialized "achievement gap" and discipline gap reflect racial disparities in quality of education across the United States. A critical analysis of the "achievement gap" and discipline gap reveals a prominent deficit schema about students of color which influences teachers' instructional and behavioral decisions for students of color. A deficit schema is also used to justify racial disparities in student outcomes. A critical historical analysis reveals the social and political constructs of race and the cumulative effects of systemic racism on both White teacher schema and educational practices and policies that influence students' educational opportunities and outcomes. Until educators address their deficit schemas through a critical consciousness, they will continue to perpetuate systemic racism and justify racialized disparities in quality of education across the United States. Educators who are able to cultivate a critical consciousness can effectively educate students of color, empowering learners to develop cultural competence, sociopolitical consciousness and experience academic excellence (Ladson-Billings, 1994).

It can be "professionally and sometimes legally risky" for educators to implement "culturally responsive practices that conflict with the mandated "sameness" masquerading as equality for all" that upholds the current educational system (Sleeter, 2011, p. 19). However, when teachers and students alike learn to become active participants in the construction and analysis of knowledge, they can engage in education as a practice of freedom and embark on critical analyses that could influence future generations' ideology about race in the United States for years to come (hooks, 1994). Teaching is an inherently political endeavor. Teachers can either uphold dominant policies and practices, which maintain White institutional power and privilege and oppress students of color, or they can employ critical pedagogy that strives toward equity and justice (Sleeter, 2011). Teachers who choose "not to" engage in a critical analysis of their educational practices or beliefs about students of color fuel racial disparities in students' outcomes, uphold systemic racism, and use their position of power to disadvantage students of color whether they consciously recognize it or not (hooks, 1994). As Sensoy & DiAngelo (2012) assert, "There is no neutral ground; to choose not to act against injustice is to choose to allow it" (p. xxii). While many White Americans hold deficit perspectives about people of color and view racial disparities in all aspects of life as proof of a natural racial hierarchy, critical analysis refutes the popular belief that America is a beacon of freedom and equality for all (Roberts, 2005). It is only through the

development of critical consciousness that White educators will be able to see the oppressive impact of deficit schema on the quality of education provided to students of color and act in ways that progress toward a more just society (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012).

Teachers who inhibit students from experiencing quality, rigorous, challenging educational opportunities and who push students of color out of school through Zero Tolerance policies rob students of the opportunity to reach their full personal, educational, and professional potential; when schools fail to provide an environment in which students of color can experience academic success and growth, families, communities, and ultimately our nation are robbed of their leadership and contributions (The Schott Foundation, 2015). According to Sensoy and DiAngelo (2012), "Schools in the United States are more diverse today than they have been since the early 1900s, when a multitude of immigrants entered the United States; within the next one to two decades, current trends indicate students of color will equal or exceed the percentage of White students within American public schools" (p. xii). As is such, educators need to develop critical consciousness to reflect critically on their positionality and conceptions of knowledge and bridge the demographic divide between educators and students to effectively serve students in diverse 21st century classrooms (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012). It's past time for White American educators to challenge their hidden giants of socialization and address deeply rooted deficit schemas that inhibit teachers' abilities to effectively educate students of color.

Just as education could be used as the "balance wheel of social machinery", (Mann, 1848), it can also be used as a system through which to maintain the current racial hierarchy of power maintained in the United States. Inequitable educational experiences deny students of color the opportunities and enrichment given to their White peers that would facilitate their journey to reaching their utmost potential. While many Whites educators and administrators believe that education serves as an equalizer for those who "work hard" that would allow equal footing upon graduation to people of color if they would just "seize the opportunities" laid out for them, critical analysis reveals that this ideology only serves to obscure the truth. Our education system as it stands is not "the great equalizer" for people of color because the vast racial inequalities within and between schools continue to fuel racialized disparities in quality and quantity of educational opportunities provided to students of color that influence their academic success and subsequent educational and professional opportunities for the future. In order to address the macro level of systemic racism limiting students of color in schools, efforts can focus on the micro levels of racism through training teachers and staff to engage in critical

consciousness and culturally relevant teaching to equip the next generation of students with academic success, cultural competence, and sociopolitical consciousness to shape the future of this nation.

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