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Interrogating Conceptions of Structural Oppression

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Abstract

Deficit framings of marginalized students, though maintaining widespread social influence, are thoroughly condemned in recent educational scholarship. The goal of this "counter-deficit" scholarship is to challenge racism in schools and improve opportunities for marginalized youth. To meet the lofty ambition of racial equity in education, how scholarship understands racial oppression is a central concern. Sociologists of race have emphasized the duality of racial oppression. Racism is ideological and structural. Ideologically, racism shapes how communities of color are perceived and how they are treated in educational settings. Structurally, racism is embedded in histories and policies that systematically disadvantage racially minoritized people. Both processes matter to educational inequality. However, in this review of counter-deficit literature, we find that racism is primarily understood by way of ideology, and seldom by way of structures. This framing has important implications for how schools can support racially minoritized students to overcome racism in schools and communities.

In the search for the cause of unequal educational outcomes in the United States, some of the most prominent educational scholarship has looked first to marginalized students[1] and their families. The headline finding of the famous Coleman Report (Coleman, et al., 1966) was that out-of-school factors like family support and household income were much stronger predictors of academic achievement than any school-related measures. Though the report did not claim that measures like school funding were irrelevant, Coleman and colleagues downplayed these factors so much that their report fueled a "culture of poverty" ideology (Lewis, 1966) asserting that people were poor because of cultures that discouraged industriousness. Analyzing the cultural processes that produce educational inequality, John Ogbu (1987) theorized that the home cultures of "involuntary minorities" (i.e. Black, Latinx, and Native youth) compel these youth to adopt identities oppositional to education. There exists a robust history of educational scholarship that unfairly assigns blame to marginalized students and their families for educational inequality.

Such analyses have necessarily fallen out of favor. They are now widely understood as deficit-oriented (Valencia, 1997; Hogg & Volman, 2020), locating social problems within individuals. The tenor of education scholarship has shifted as more educational experts adapt "asset-based" frames that elevate the strengths of racially minoritized, working-class students and families to navigate oppressive systems. Culture of poverty and oppositional culture theories have been soundly refuted (Tyson & Lewis, 2021). Much of this work has drawn from the theoretical foundations of Critical Race Theory and other frameworks emphasizing the pervasiveness of systemic racism, and how racist ideologies constrain opportunity for

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1 Throughout this text, we use "marginalized" as a term to denote those who are oppressed by way of systemic racism, class subjugation or both. When referring to those marginalized only by structural racism, but not necessarily class oppression, we will use the terms "racially minoritized" or "of color."

marginalized groups. This asset-based reframing has been profoundly generative, illuminating possibilities for educators and scholars seeking to expand educational opportunity. Asset-oriented scholars have disrupted hegemonic victim-blaming narratives. Research has revealed how racially minoritized youth – traditionally viewed as academically helpless – overcome racist schooling to achieve educational success (e.g. Harper, 2010, 2015a). Other research has highlighted how urban teachers – traditionally described as incompetent – can elevate students' cultural strengths toward academic achievement (e.g. Martin-Beltrán et al., 2018). Some research has even celebrated urban schools – framed as "dropout factories" – for their ability to enhance educational opportunity for marginalized youth (Harper, 2015b). This body of research rejects deficit framings of marginalized students, families, and communities, offering insights to the challenge of educational equity.

The body of work centering asset-based framings and refuting deficit-oriented renderings of students – which we label the "counter-deficit" school of educational research[2] – is pervasive in educational scholarship. A Google Scholar search for articles in 2020 featuring the terms "education," "assets" and "deficits" turns up over 11,200 results. Theories that undergird the counter-deficit school – Funds of Knowledge, Community Cultural Wealth, the Anti-Deficit Achievement framework, Richard Valencia's Dismantling Deficit Thinking – have received thousands of citations. Here, we offer an accounting of the counter-deficit body of educational research, a profoundly influential framing in educational scholarship.

In particular, we assess how the literature views racism and the implications of this framing for expanding educational opportunity. Our inquiry is led by the following questions:

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2 We use the term "counter-deficit" instead of "anti-deficit" in order to differentiate the broader school of thought aimed at combatting deficits from Shaun Harper's (2010) specific anti-deficit framework.

1. How does the counter-deficit literature understand racism and diagnose educational inequality?

2. What are suggestions in this literature for how racism and inequality might best be addressed in schools?

Leveraging the sociology of race and racism, we evaluate how counter-deficit scholarship constructs racism. Ultimately, we argue that while racial oppression is comprised of *racist ideology* and *structural oppressions*, counter-deficit literature predominantly views oppression as occurring by way of ideology, focusing less on the systems, policies, and histories that disadvantage marginalized communities. As such, the means of uplifting the marginalized are grounded in overcoming racism as ideology in schools while structural solutions to educational inequality go largely unmentioned in counter-deficit literature. Given the persistence of racism in U.S. society and the pervasiveness of counter-deficit scholarship, an analysis of how this body of scholarship understands and seeks to counteract racism in schools is essential to anti-racist scholarly efforts.

The Sociology of Racism - Ideology and Structure

Racism is complex, operating upon different, albeit interrelated levels (e.g. Bonilla-Silva, 2021; Byrd, 2011). Although differing definitions of racism exist (Byrd, 2011), social scientists tend to agree that racism is enacted at different levels. For example, sociologists engage in empirical racial analysis at the individual, organizational, and institutional levels (Ray, 2019). Within and across these levels of racial analysis is the distinction between racist ideology and racist structure. Racism, according to Golash-Boza (2016), can be usefully understood as,

…both (1) the ideology that races are populations of people whose physical differences are linked to significant cultural and social differences and that these innate hierarchical

differences can be measured and judged and (2) the micro- and macrolevel practices that

subordinate those races believed to be inferior (p.131).

As such, critical scholars need to study ideology, structure, and their dialectical relationship (see

Fig. 1) in order to understand and challenge racism (Golash-Boza, 2016). We offer this short

description of the complexity of racism to demonstrate that, for the educational researcher,

studying racism is, or should be, nuanced. The project of identifying trends in the study of how

racism is studied, constructed, and defined is important as it shapes what and how scholars study

and fight racism. For example, if scholars construct racism primarily at the ideological level, then

their studies and proposed recommendations will likely center upon the ideological as well. In

what follows, we highlight the distinctions between the interrelated relationship of ideological
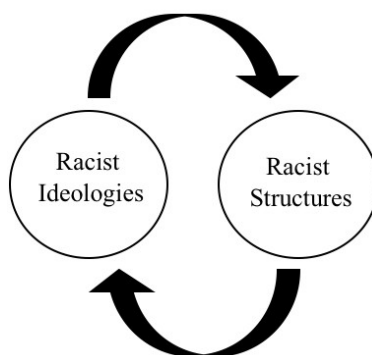
and structural racism.

Fig. 1. Racist ideologies and racist structures (adapted from Golash-Boza, 2016, p. 138)

Racism's Ideological Components

Racial prejudice and stereotypes are the building blocks of racist ideology. Prejudice is

associated with bias, attitudes, and beliefs about racial groups. Ideologies are dynamic, serving

the interest of white supremacy, and change as societal conditions and racial and ethnic

demographics change (Golash-Boza, 2016). As racial ideologies are ever-evolving, studying

racial ideologies remains important.

Prejudice - racist biases, stereotypies and attitudes - occurs at the individual level of personal belief and at the collective level of shared racial attitudes and ideology (Byrd, 2011). Racial prejudice is both affective and cognitive. The "affective component reflects the negative feelings and emotions a person has toward a group, while the cognitive component reflects a… unfounded belief about a group, which is often referred to as a stereotype" (Byrd, 2011, p. 1006). Such racist stereotypes might imply criminality of racially minoritized people or assert that Black and brown families do not value education. Racial prejudice and stereotypes dehumanize non-White groups, justifying the privileged status of White Americans.

These ideologies have important implications for schools. Given the prevalence of racist ideologies, educators are likely to have internalized notions of pathology regarding marginalized students and their families. These ideologies presume that racism has been overcome, and any failures ought to be blamed on incapable students or academically apathetic families (Byrd, 2011). The academic performance of racially minoritized students might be explained as natural – academic achievement as inherently beyond their grasp. Students are assumed to be culturally deprived, and this portrayal encourages cultural subtraction in school settings (Valenzuela, 1999). The approach may encourage framings of some students as uneducable (Emdin, 2016). Their cultural strengths may be minimized in educational contexts (Yosso, 2005). In short, ideology plays a powerful role in shaping the experiences of racially minoritized students in schools.

Racism's Structural Components

Racist structural conditions and practices are material and create inequitable learning experiences for racially minoritized students. Here, we understand structural aspects of racism as

the policies, material resource disparities, laws, and institutional practices that contribute to

social reproduction (Bonilla-Silva, 1997). In schools, structural oppression is prevalent. It

manifests, in part, as resource disparities between racially and socioeconomically segregated

school districts (Kozol, 1991; Rothstein, 2017). Structural oppression includes differences in

political power and cultural capital that ensure White, middle- and upper-class families hoard

access to levers of social mobility (Harris, 1993; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Resource

disparities between schools serving White and non-White students is a way by which Whiteness

maintains value as a form of property to maintain White supremacy (Ladson-Billings & Tate,

1995). Thus, inherent in structural racism is the force of capitalism, the totalizing economic

structure.

In addition, systems of racial oppression are entwined in educational policies that, though

on their face are race neutral, reinforce White supremacy. For example, standardized curricula

that are ostensibly designed to enhance academic rigor for all students elevate hegemonic

cultural narratives and crowd out the experiences of marginalized communities. Efforts to

desegregate schools by race were met by stiff resistance from conservative leaders, courts, and

White parents resistant to change in their communities (Orfield & Eaton, 1996). Affirmative

action policies aimed to enhance postsecondary access for racially minoritized groups have been

challenged in courtrooms and at the ballot box, maintaining existing inequalities in educational

achievement by race and ethnicity (Jayakumar & Garces, 2015). Racial oppression is

institutionalized by policies that uphold racial stratifications in the United States. Thus, to

understand racism is to also understand how it operates through social, economic, and political

institutions. Ideology plays a role in systemic change, but no amount of mindset change can undo

the deep historical and legal processes that maintain White supremacy (Bonilla-Silva, 2021). In

schools and beyond, racial oppression has a structural component in need of structural solutions.

In her ethnography of racism at a public school, Sabina Vaught (2011) leans on a long lineage of critical race scholars to explain that racism is "not the errant psychological workings of individual members of society." Rather, there exists a "powerful system of racism in schooling" with implications for racial hierarchies and resource distribution (p. 3). Capturing the ideological and structural components of racism is a difficult scholarly endeavor. For example, Jonathan Kozol's *Savage Inequalities*, widely cited in Critical Race and sociological scholarship, struggled to adequately balance counter-deficit framings and structural analyses (Farmer-Hinton et al., 2013). However, ideology alone cannot fully account for racist structures. Analyzing this duality of racism, the ideological and the structural and how they inform each other, is critical for better understanding racism.

Counter-Deficit Frameworks and Racial Oppression

Sociologists of race emphasize the multifaceted nature of racism. On the one hand, White supremacy is ideological, manifesting by way of biases and stereotypes which impact the experiences of people of color in schools. On the other hand, White supremacy is structural– woven into the fabric of institutions– the laws, social systems, and histories that shape unequal access to educational opportunity. Given the multi-layered structure of racism, the particular vision of racial oppression that counter-deficit frameworks adopt has important implications for movements toward liberation for marginalized communities.

To interrogate the conception of racial oppression of counter-deficit research, we begin by mapping its theoretical foundations. How did we identify theories that should be thought of as "counter-deficit"? Certainly, many theories and approaches might focus on students' strengths, view students' cultures from a place of possibility, or understand students as whole, dynamic

people. What distinguishes these counter-deficit frameworks, however, is that their explicit theoretical foundations are tied to challenging, disproving, or debunking deficit, pathological renderings of marginalized groups. That is, the *raison d'être* of the counter-deficit school of thought is identifying and challenging deficit-thinking. The theories we highlight are among the most widely used and cited in current counter-deficit analyses. As noted above, we arrived at four theories that have inspired much of the recent work in the counter-deficit school - Richard Valencia's Dismantling Deficit Thinking, Funds of Knowledge, Community Cultural Wealth, and the Anti-Deficit Achievement framework. What we highlight here is necessarily brief in that we only intend to identify the particular framings of structural oppression elevated in each framework.

Valencia's Dismantling Deficit Thinking

Valencia's (1997) work on deficit-thinking lays the groundwork for much counter-deficit work across the theoretical frameworks. His work is often cited in counter-deficit literature to name deficit thinking. In the literature we outline for this review, fewer examples emerged using Valencia's work as a standalone or primary theoretical framework (Garcia-Olp et al., 2017; Kennedy & Soutullo, 2018; McConn, 2019). Much work, while not using Valencia's work as a standalone theory, used his framing or definition of deficit-thinking (e.g., Ford, 2014; Sperling et al., 2017).

Valencia charts the evolution of deficit ideology along both ideological and structural axes. One might assume that Valencia's (1997) work is exclusively about ideology based on the book's title, *The Evolution of Deficit Thinking*. Yet, Valencia is careful to demonstrate the interconnected nature of ideology and deficit thinking with the material reality of oppressive structures. Valencia (1997), for example, explains that through deficit thinking, "…systemic

factors (for example, school segregation; inequalities in school financing; curriculum differentiation) are held blameless in explaining why some students fail in school" (p. xi). Beyond a description of the proliferation of deficit, pathological narratives about marginalized communities, the authors demonstrate how ideologies shape educational policies and practices. For example, they demonstrate how deficit beliefs about Mexican American people in the early 20th century led to different, unequal curricula and overall educational opportunities. Yet, consider the conclusion of Valencia's (1997) text, which highlights four future directions for those interested in the evolution of deficit thinking and education: 1) demographic trends, 2) the decline of school desegregation, 3) the intersection of politics, the economy, and education, and 4) the continuing growth of anti-deficit thinking (p. 242). Valencia's work demonstrates that to understand and study deficit thinking, one necessarily examines the ideological, but also the material impacts of deficit thinking and the structural realities of the marginalized.

Funds of Knowledge

Funds of Knowledge emerged as a counter-deficit approach to teaching and learning that views marginalized families as rich in cultural resources for educational success. Moll and colleagues (1992) developed the concept to emphasize that working-class families endow their children with specific experiences and skills that can be leveraged in classrooms. When teachers conduct home visits with an anthropological eye for familial strength, they can employ their learnings to better support their Latinx students (Gonzalez, et al., 1995). Skills of carpentry, entrepreneurship, household management, farming, among others, are all viewed as part of a robust ecology for academic development in working-class households. The elevation of these familial assets has provided educators with an expanded foundation for classroom learning (Hogg & Volman, 2020).

Rios-Aguilar and colleagues (2011), in their theoretical review of funds of knowledge in educational research, identified the following limitation: "The emphasis on the recognition of funds of knowledge has generally not addressed power relations in educational institutions (including classrooms, schools, and colleges/universities)" (p.166). Rios-Aguilar and colleagues (2011) argue that funds of knowledge could benefit from a capital perspective, that is, the more traditional Bourdieusian concepts of cultural and social capital can usefully supplement a funds of knowledge approach to provide a more precise structural analysis (Bourdieu, 1986). In reviewing funds of knowledge scholarship, Rios-Aguilar and colleagues (2011) noted that scholars employing Funds of Knowledge "have not explicitly or thoughtfully addressed issues of power, social class, ideology, and racism. Most of these articles have examined micro-level interactions without paying attention to patterns in larger structures" (p.171). Funds of Knowledge, they argue, lacks a targeted analysis of larger systems of oppression.

Community Cultural Wealth

More recently, Yosso (2005) defined six distinct ways communities commonly viewed through a deficit lens are actually awash in resources. These forms of capital – aspirational, linguistic, familial, social, navigational, and resistant – are assets that can be leveraged to educational success. Yosso contends that these strengths are often ignored in educational research, and pervasive applications of Bourdieusian constructs in educational research have pathologized marginalized communities. This framework has been useful in recasting marginalized families as robust sources of capital to be leveraged for educational success.

Similar to the criticisms leveled at Funds of Knowledge, Community Cultural Wealth primarily operates through the lens of ideology and takes a limited view of racism embedded in institutional policy. Hinton (2015), in a larger critique of the use of capital as a theoretical

construct, argued, "Researchers citing community cultural wealth frequently pay attention to power relations, but as an independent conceptual category, not included within their definitions of capital" (p.304). Seeing systemic power disparities as external to the processes of community cultural wealth may limit its strength as a liberatory theoretical framework. Though Yosso has widely been interpreted as a rejection of Bourdieu, Tichavakunda (2019) contends that Bourdieu's integration of structural oppression is an important theoretical tool for research educational inequity. Yosso's conception of oppression, largely neglects the systems and policies that subjugate youth long before they enter the classroom. Yosso largely focuses on racism as ideology, and economic capital is absent from her framework. Instead of wholly rejecting Bourdieu, scholars like Prudence Carter (2003, 2006) have asserted that understanding cultural capital by way of dominant and non-dominant forms of cultural capital, seeing cultural strength and oppressive visions of culture interacting in tandem to produce diverse educational outcomes. Valencia's call for asset-based researchers to interrogate both structural and ideological processes goes mostly unheeded by the Community Cultural Wealth framework.

Anti-Deficit Achievement Framework

Harper (2010) offered a pathbreaking reframing of research focusing on Black male student failure through the Anti-Deficit Achievement Framework. In this framework, Harper (2010) reframes what he labels as deficit-oriented research questions to anti-deficit research questions, using an "instead-of" approach (p. 68). For example, he offers, instead of asking "Why do so few Black male students enroll in college?" an anti-deficit-oriented scholar might ask, "How were college aspirations cultivated among Black male undergraduates who are currently enrolled?" (Harper, 2010, p.68). This framework encourages researchers to examine how racially minoritized students overcome challenges to succeed in school. The Anti-Deficit

Achievement Framework has opened important analytical avenues for understanding how racially minoritized young people achieve academic success.

The Anti-Deficit Achievement Framework moves the lens from systems to individuals. Rather than elevate unjust policies and histories of systemic racism, the framework looks to the behaviors of students and families. Racism as embedded in social structures, while acknowledged, is blurred for a better view of individual tenacity and resourcefulness. The problem of racism, again, is one of ideology and the solution is a change in the mindsets of researchers and educators. The anti-deficit achievement framework, like other theories oriented towards student assets, takes a vision of racism and racial uplift that is centered on altering the ideologies that frame our visions of racially minoritized students.

Racial Oppression and the Theoretical Grounding of Counter-Deficit Research

In our review of counter-deficit scholarship, the theories we have outlined here were among the most prominent in informing research. They are appropriate as guideposts for this review because these theoretical frameworks are presented explicitly as anti-deficit, and they have important implications for teaching and learning schools. Though other theoretical frameworks might be interpreted as anti-deficit (e.g. culturally relevant pedagogy and racialized organizations), as noted above, we argue that they are not as exclusively grounded in challenging deficit ideology. This vision of racism articulated by counter-deficit lenses has taken research in new directions. Valencia's foundational work on deficits elevates the dual challenge of racism as ideology and structure. The educational theorizing that has grown from this counter-deficit soil, however, has come unbound from structural analyses. By focusing on funds, wealth, and achievement, the assets of marginalized communities are elevated over the structures that marginalize them.

However, racism is about more than ideology, or the perceptions of individual educators or researchers about students and families. It is also systemic, flowing through the arteries of the institutional organs animating U.S. society. While Valencia wove systemic and institutional inequality throughout his counter-deficit framework, those who have furthered this theoretical conversation have mostly cast aside structural lenses in favor of individual ones. Students and their families are seen overcoming systemic barriers, but the systemic barriers they endure are underexamined. While sociologists of racism have fashioned a lens on the manifold nature of racism, articulating its ideological and institutional components, counter-deficit theories have gradually moved towards a sole emphasis on racism's ideological component.

How a framework explains oppression has implications for how it expects marginalized communities to resist oppression. For those who see racial oppression as primarily ideological, the most important anti-racist strategy is to change hearts and minds. If teachers, researchers, and schools can be convinced to view marginalized students and their communities in a positive light and to leverage their communal assets for success, these students can gain skills for social mobility. Racism will thus be undone through educational achievement of oppressed groups. Through a more systemic lens, however, overcoming racism requires structural change. Changing mindsets is insufficient. Resistance to racism is imminently political, and students and families must prepare to organize movements for systemic change. How is racial oppression understood in empirical work guided by counter-deficit frameworks ? Given the reach and influence of the counter-deficit lens in educational research, the answer to this question has important implications for its capacity to address racism as it manifests in schools and society.

Methods

Given the importance of the aforementioned theoretical frameworks in counter-deficit

research, our literature review addresses only articles that explicitly leverage these frameworks.

Using EBSCOhost, we searched for articles that included terms "asset" or "deficit" in the abstracts and mentioned one of the above frameworks at any point in the article. EBSCOhost allowed us to search for "asset" or "deficit" specifically in abstracts and to search for the theoretical frameworks if they appeared at any point in the article. Our decision to limit our search to articles that included "asset" or "deficit" in the abstract was guided by the assumption that such articles would engage with the concepts at length throughout the text. We omitted articles that did not meaningfully engage with assets or deficits with respect to pathological explanations for student success and failure (for example, one of the studies, Gwernan-Jones [2016] mentioned "deficit" in the abstract in the context of "Attention-Deficit disorder"). We restricted our search to work published in peer-reviewed journals and were published between 2010 and 2020 to elevate recent and peer-reviewed applications of the counter-deficit lens. We focused on work in the United States to narrow the analysis around processes of race and oppression as they unfold uniquely in the U.S. Also, articles were also omitted if they were not about education (e.g. Isbell, et al., 2013).

Using this method, we found a total of 113 articles. While the majority of the articles (approximately 80%) leveraged community cultural wealth or funds of knowledge to analyze assets or deficits, approximately one-fifth of the articles used Harper's Anti-Deficit Achievement or Valencia's germinal works on deficit thinking. Though there was a wide range of journals represented, from high- to low-impact and across a number of sub-fields in education, there were many journals that appeared multiple times in the results. *Journal of Latinos in Education* appeared eight times; *Equity and Excellence in Education* appeared five times; and *Urban Education, The School Community Journal, The Journal of Negro Education,* and *The*

Association of Mexican American Educators Journal each appeared three times. Fourteen journals, including the *Harvard Educational Review*, *High School Journa*l, and the *Journal of African American Males* appeared twice. See Supplementary Table 1 for a summary of all reviewed articles.

Next, we analyzed the selected literature, looking specifically to the ways racism was presented as ideology or social structure. We first divided the literature into four groups by its theoretical lineage – Valencia's anti-deficit theory, Funds of Knowledge, Community Cultural Wealth, and Harper's Anti-deficit Achievement Framework. In reviewing the literature, both authors read ten articles together for each of the theoretical frameworks. After coding these ten documents, identifying how the pieces understood racial oppression and how best to address it, we met to discuss emergent categories and themes and checked for consistency of coding practices. Categories included theoretical engagement, definitions of deficits, examples of deficit-oriented ideology, structural racism, ideological solutions to oppression, and structural solutions to oppression. For example, in analyzing Aragon (2018), we coded at multiple points in the article examples of framings of racial oppression that sought to alter educators' ideologies about their Latina students. We categorized this as theoretical engagement with Community Cultural Wealth, examples of deficit ideology, and ideological solutions to injustice. After the initial coding of ten documents, we split up the remainder of the articles to categorize separately. We engaged in peer debriefing throughout and shared our findings with each other and discussed emergent themes for each framework. Reading each article in its entirety we looked explicitly for the ways in which the articles conceived of oppression and the study's implications for addressing racial injustice. This review thus endeavors to interrogate asset-oriented research for how counter-deficit scholars are theorizing racial oppression in education.

Our review, however, has notable limitations. We were restricted in what articles we could include in our review because the database we used was not all encompassing and did not provide access to journals that other institutions might have had access to. Additionally, our process of categorizing the articles' primary lens of oppression – whether on structural or ideological racism – was not unambiguous. Though we believe our interpretation of each of the articles to be correct, and each categorization was determined after careful analysis and deliberation, some readers may disagree about the extent to which each article addresses ideological and/or structural foundations of racism. In addition, we only report here on the framing of oppression as it appears in the reviewed articles. If the counter-deficit authors considered other framings of oppression that did not appear in the article, we cannot account for those here. Also, our findings only speak to counter-deficit theoretical frameworks we delineate above, though we believe these to be among the most important frameworks in current counter-deficit research. Despite the limitations, our review with more than 100 articles between 2010 and 2020, we suggest, provides a representative portrayal of the trends within the theoretically informed counter-deficit school of thought.

Positionality

The first author identifies as a multiracial, south Asian man from a middle-class background. He taught in schools serving working-class students of color for ten years. His experience as a teacher in urban contexts, as a person of color, and as a father of two multiracial (South Asian, White, Black, and Latino) boys of color have informed his views on race and racial oppression by way of both ideological and structural forces. His research investigated sociological underpinnings of educational inequalities primarily between high school and college. The second author is a Black man. He is a product of urban public schools and later

taught middle and high school courses in the same district. Although his K-12 background was in a majority Black context, his higher education experience was in predominantly White contexts. Informed by his experiences, he examines how Black students navigate otherwise oppressive contexts. His work wrestles with tensions between structures and agency.

Findings

In analyzing the literature for this review, we found that most prominently, racist oppression was viewed through the lens of ideology whereby educators perpetrated stereotypes about racially minoritized students. Less often, oppression was described as systemic, whereby inequality stemmed from histories and policies that produced inequitable access to resources and opportunities by race and ethnicity, and only on occasion did counter-deficit scholarship consider how social systems might be altered towards lasting, structural change.

As mentioned, oppression is both structural and ideological (Bonilla-Silva, 1997). Educational scholars who write against deficit ideologies likely understand the manifold nature of racial oppression. To be sure, work in this review, at times, alluded to the interconnected nature of ideology and structure. Yet, most often, one or the other - structure or ideology - would take center stage in their framings and subsequent analysis of power. In what follows, we outline the literature along two axes. The first regards the way that the literature understands racial oppression – either primarily by ideological or structural mechanisms. Much counter-deficit work emphasizes how schools underserve students of color and these explanations provide important grounding for analyses of educational inequality. The second axis regards potential solutions to this inequality, which again might be pursued along ideological or structural lines.

Causes of Racial Inequity in Education

Few, if any, scholars of race and education would deny the profound impact of racism on

the schooling experiences of racially minoritized youth. Here, we address the ways counter-deficit literature views racial oppression as ideology and/or racial oppression as structural. Mapping the literature illuminates where counter-deficit research is and how it might be advanced.

Racial Oppression as Ideology

Primarily, counter-deficit scholarship views racism by way of ideology. In categorizing the studies in the sample, we found that 94 of the 113 articles reviewed here suggested primarily ideological rather than structural foundations of oppression in schools. This research rejects pathological framings of marginalized youth and seeks to reframe widespread oppressive ideologies about marginalized students. Indeed, stereotypes and deficit-thinking abound in popular media, policy making, and in some research. The counter-deficit school of thought takes aim at scholars operating upon deficit-based logics or more generally at stereotypes pervasive in society about certain groups. In the summer of 2020, for example, a journal published a racist article clearly informed by deficit-thinking (Flaherty, 2020). Scholars, rightfully, mobilized and challenged the article's contents so much so that the editor retracted the article. This case is worth highlighting because the author is a voice in welfare reform yet, in this work, linked Black and Latinx families' cultures to the cause of poverty. Such deficit-thinking is harmful and stands in the way of equitable policymaking and teaching. The counter-deficit lens exists to refute these racist ideologies about marginalized students that often penetrate academic scholarship.

Much literature has specifically taken aim at the scholarship of Ruby Payne, another prominent, deficit-oriented voice in education. Six articles in particular from our review (Gorski, 2012; Keefer, 2017; Kinney, 2015; Koyama & Desjardin, 2019; Manzo, 2016; Roegman, 2018) mention her directly. Payne is a leading speaker of poverty and K-12 education with books and

toolkits for middle-class teachers to understand their poor and working-class students and family counterparts (see Gorski, 2012). Her work is based on racist and classist stereotypes of poor people of color (Roegman, 2018) and has even been shown to reinforce teachers' stereotype-laden, deficit-informed views of families and students who are in poverty (Dee Smiley & Helfenbein, 2011). Manzo (2016) cited Payne as an example of research that misinterprets immigrant parents' parenting practices, thereby suggesting that such parents have a "lack of concern for their children's education" (p. 54). In another example, Koyama and Desjardin (2019) demonstrated how a college preparatory program informed by Ruby Payne's work led to race-evasive understandings of Latinx students' views of their identity as well as counselors' negative views of students' families. Payne's work is an example of prejudice in that it is grounded in negative beliefs and stereotypes about Latinx students. Despite widespread critique from scholars, Payne continues to have wide influence in school districts across the nation (Roegman, 2018). The prevalence and persistence of deficit-oriented work like Payne's suggests that challenging racist ideology in educational contexts continues to be important work.

Other counter-deficit work, while not focused on countering a specific body of scholarship (like Payne), is geared towards countering negative images or stereotypes of a given population. For example, Cooper's (2016) work, in part, sought to challenge the "dumb jock" stereotype about Black students in college (Edwards, 1984). Two counter-deficit scholars couch their research in anecdotes or first-hand experiences of being on the receiving end of someone else's deficit-based thinking (Barrera, 2014; Matos, 2015). Through a qualitative longitudinal study of 18 Chinese undergraduates, Heng (2018) challenged flat the common narrative of Chinese students that "inadvertently perpetuates a stereotype that the students are incompetent and deficient" (p.22). Licona (2013) leverages the Funds of Knowledge framework to identify

ways that Mexican and Mexican-American households apply scientific principles in their day-to-day lives, refuting perceptions that these families are not scientific. Ilett (2010, 2019) sought to challenge deficit ideologies about first-generation students' ability to access university libraries. Scholars also, necessarily, refuted deficit-oriented narratives of Latinx people advanced by President Trump (Martin-Beltrán et al., 2018). There exist numerous examples of scholars aiming to complicate static understandings of a population in the counter-deficit literature. In challenging deficit understandings of different marginalized populations, scholars are challenging the ideological–beliefs and attitudes (Golash-Boza, 2016).

Charges of a deficit orientation are not only directed towards prominent ideological framings of racially minoritized groups, but also towards practitioners who apply pathological explanations for the academic underperformance of racially minoritized youth. Teachers are often purveyors of deficit discourses, and even educators from marginalized backgrounds can adopt deficit understandings of their students of color (Keefer, 2017). Consider, for example, the following examples of findings and claims made by counter-deficit researchers about educators. Educators have low expectations for their marginalized students (Liou, et al., 2017). They commit symbolic violence and microaggressions (Baker, T., 2019; Monzó, 2013). They implement punitive practices that are harsh and often inequitable (Kennedy & Soutullo, 2018). They develop teaching strategies that assume language deficits (Molle, 2013). They neglect student cultural assets in indigenous communities (Bialostok, 2019). They adopt deficit frames and fail to leverage cultural strengths when teaching math (Colegrove & Krause, 2017; Garcia-Olp, 2017), English Language Arts (Cho et al., 2019), and social studies (Keefer, 2017). They exclude Black and Latinx students from gifted education because of deficit assumptions (Ford, 2014). They develop college-readiness programs that assume familial incompetence with respect

to college-going decisions (Koyama & Desjardin, 2019). They microaggress parents (Jimenez-Castellanos & Gonzalez, 2012) and view them with a deficit lens (Miller, 2010). They live outside of the communities they teach (Jester & Fickel, 2013). Community college program leadership fail to see the strength of Latinx students and instead attempt to "fix" them (Winterer et al., 2020) and doctoral student pipelines to academia are riddled with deficit assumptions about their academic ability (Blockett, et al., 2016). Even teacher educators allegedly committed to social justice fetishize their students of color and highlight the deficits of their communities (Smith Kondo, 2019). In the counter-deficit lens, educators are primary culprits in the deficit framing and subsequent underachievement of their students.

There is a subtle irony in the counter-deficit school of thinking that hovers over much of this literature: work that is ostensibly anti-deficit frequently finds educators to be deficient. Though not all teachers are deficit-oriented (Baggett, 2018), many teachers are guilty of transgressions like these. Educators regularly espouse and enact deficit ideologies in their instruction. However, narratives of the inadequacy of educators ignores structural constraints of schools, particularly those in under-resourced contexts. Monzó (2013), for example, describes as "symbolic violence" a counselor's denial of a Latina mother's request to remove her child from a class where he did not get along with the teacher. In making this assessment Monzó overlooks the structural challenges urban counselors. Classes are difficult to balance, and overwhelmed counselors often undergo pressures from overwhelmed teachers in urban contexts (Camacho et al.; Owens et al., 2009). Similarly, a separate article criticizing teachers for choosing to live outside of the marginalized communities they serve (Jester & Fickel, 2013) overlooks the very real systemic oppressions -- the public and the private disinvestment -- that have characterized urban communities of color for decades (Rothstein, 2017; Wilson, 2011). If counter-deficit work

seeks to undo the propensity of educational research to "blame the victim," is the urban teacher –

often underpaid and unsupported – a victim whose victimhood has gone ignored?

As such, we next look to some counter-deficit scholarship that sees educational inequity

not solely by way of deficit ideologies and attitudes of teachers, but through the structural

constraints of schools. This branch of counter-deficit scholarship emphasizes how the

educational system fails to support its teachers. Thus, a new counter-deficit lens is applied to

educators working in under-resourced schools and the institutional oppressions they face in

serving their students.

Racial Oppression as Structural

Structural racism, an integral component of oppression that shapes schooling outcomes,

is understated in the counter-deficit literature. Asserting that students have assets may do little to

change their material realities. Those assets may be obscured by deep and pervasive structural

oppressions. Also, even though teachers of racially minoritized students may be inadequate,

failing to harness their students' strengths toward academic success, this inadequacy may be

connected to the structural marginalization of their schools and their profession. Much of the

above work substituting deficit-oriented ideologies for ideologies grounded in assets largely

glosses over these structural oppressions. Social structures that pattern opportunity by race, class,

and ethnicity have a profound impact on students and teachers. As mentioned, racism operates at

both the ideological and structural levels (Golash-Boza, 2016). Only 19 of 113 articles

emphasized structural processes as an essential component of racial oppression in education.

While scholarship highlighting these systemic challenges is less robust, some work in the

counter-deficit vein directly addresses structural marginalization in schools serving racially

minoritized youth.

We found three articles that elevated the assets of teachers while detailing the structures that constrain their capacity to be effective. Acevedo (2020), for example, researches the development of asset orientations among teachers serving marginalized youth, and notes the limiting structural conditions teachers have to navigate that might prevent their development as asset-oriented educators. Barriers include high turnover among administration and faculty, scant resources, inadequate training and time constraints for teachers in urban contexts. Fujimoto and colleagues (2013) tied educators' deficit mindsets to the structural oppressions their communities were forced to navigate. Sanders, Parsons, Mwavita, and Thomas (2015), find that teachers who express deficit ideologies often feel disrespected by deficit framings of their own professional capacity. As one teacher in their study noted, telling teachers "you suck, you suck, you suck," (p. 233) without acknowledging the deep structural constraints they face in their work may be an ineffective means of affecting change in schools.

Following a similar vein of research, we found four other articles wherein scholars adopt a counter-deficit stance towards pre-service teachers (Borrero & Yeh, 2016; Navarro et al., 2019; Settlage, 2011; Siefert et al., 2018). Settlage (2011) adopts a similar argument in their study of preservice teachers identifying as middle-class white women. The author provides a counternarrative of participants' efforts to be culturally responsive teachers in an effort to challenge the dominant narrative that white preservice teachers are completely unresponsive to students from marginalized backgrounds' needs.

Also, we found five counter-deficit articles that highlighted students' assets while also emphasizing the structural impediments that can cause their assets to be devalued in schools and beyond. Scholars of the college transition, for example, have noted the complex ways in which non-dominant capital can be simultaneously an asset to academic success as well as an academic

barrier due to structural inequities faced by non-dominant cultural groups (Shapiro, 2019; Shapiro & MacDonald, 2017). Whyte and Karabon (2016) emphasize how the power dynamics circumscribing funds of knowledge home visits can limit the effectiveness of the practice. Monzó (2016) evaluates the ways in which racial capitalism creates status hierarchies and elevates deficit discourses about marginalized groups, and thus encourages Latinx students to perceive their own families as inadequate. Similarly, Smith and Hope (2020) found that capitalism encourages Black students to describe their underperforming peers in deficit terms. This discourse fosters internalized oppression among marginalized students, impacting their academic achievement. Systemic racism and capitalist structures impede efforts to elevate the assets of marginalized communities (Bonilla-Silva, 2021; Byrd, 2011; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

Thus, there exists a budding branch of counter-deficit research that seeks not just to celebrate student assets, but to understand the structural barriers that blunt the development and application of those assets for marginalized groups. Also, seeing teachers as rich in assets serves as an important counterweight to scholarship that ignores the real systemic challenges educators face. Unfortunately, however, we find counter-deficit work that meaningfully engages structural oppression to be rare. The framing in counter-deficit scholarship that emphasizes racism as ideological but not structural has important implications for how racial equity in education can most effectively be achieved. We move next to an analysis of the strategies implied by counter-deficit researchers as essential to overcoming oppression and achieving racial equality.

Differing Strategies for Racial Equity in Education

Many counter-deficit scholars studying educational inequality seek solutions. Different framings of educational inequality, however, imply different solutions. Counter-deficit researchers who emphasize deficit ideologies as the primary drivers of educational inequality

imply that the solution to educational inequality is undoing these ideologies. As such, educators

who successfully resist framings of students and their families as deficient are described as key

to improving educational outcomes for marginalized youth. Researchers who view racism by

way of structure, meanwhile, are likely to emphasize systemic change in addition to changes in

teacher attitudes. Through this lens, a change in teacher disposition may be inadequate to

overcome histories and policies of inequity in educational contexts. The latter framing may be a

useful direction for the future of counter-deficit literature to more effectively account for

structures and histories of oppression in marginalized communities. We review the literature

regarding each of these solutions below.

Challenging Ideology and Accepting Structures

Overwhelmingly, the counter-deficit literature emphasized challenging ideology as the

sole or primary means of enhancing educational equality. These studies argue that if educators

can see students for their strengths as opposed to their assumed weaknesses, they can improve

educational outcomes. As such, their focus is ideology–beliefs and attitudes (Byrd, 2011).

Challenging Ideology. Because racist beliefs, or ideology, reinforce structural racism

(Golash-Boza, 2016), identifying deficit mindsets is part of resisting racism. As such, much work

has elevated the urgency of investigating how racist ideologies of educators might be changed.

Pérez and Taylor (2016), for example, argue that cultivating achievement requires that educators

"recognize the unique forms of capital Latino male college students possess and utilize to

achieve academic success" (p. 14). Lawton-Sticklor (2018) seeks to "challenge dominant

discourses" that take a deficit view of students persisting through an urban alternative school. For

some teachers, such a change in ideology is possible. Grenville and Parker (2013), for example,

narrate Grenville's transition from a deficit-orientation to a more asset-based approach to serving her students. Llopart and Esteban-Guitart (2018) review the literature on Funds of Knowledge to describe how the framework can encourage more teachers to adopt asset-oriented approaches. As noted above, much research argues that deficit discourses are common among teachers, and how to change these educator discourses to produce greater educational equity is a central focus of much counter-deficit literature.

Counter-deficit scholarship also challenges researchers to adopt more asset-based frames. This work looks to high achievers from marginalized communities to offer blueprints for how more students like them might achieve academic success. If researchers can shift their scholarly gaze from failure to success, they can begin to expand that success to more students. With a focus on science achievement, Harper (2010) argues, "An anti-deficit inquiry invites minority STEM achievers to name the persons, resources, experiences, and opportunities to which they attribute their achievements instead of continually having them identify all the barriers to persistence and success" (p. 69). The reframing of research on racially minoritized STEM students rejects a deficit-oriented approach and explicitly calls on researchers to elevate individual success over barriers that might stem from structural oppressions.

This approach to research – elevating high-achievers to change deficit ideologies about marginalized youth – has seen widespread application. Scholars center Black students who develop intrinsic motivations in elementary school math (McGee & Pearman, 2014) or build academic support networks in high school (Allen, 2015). Students persist through challenges and overcome the inadequacies of urban schools (Lawton-Sticklor, 2018). Numerous counter-deficit researchers have illuminated marginalized students who leverage cultural strengths to achieve in college (Cooper, 2016; Cooper et al., 2016; Cooper, 2018; Duncheon, 2018; Goings, 2016;

Heng, 2018; Kim & Hargrove, 2013; Means et al., 2019; Pérez, 2017). Many marginalized

students aspire to study abroad in their time at university (Perkins, 2020). Urias and colleagues

(2016) focus specifically on men of color who transfer successfully from community colleges to

four-year institutions. Multiple researchers narrate the tenacity and commitment of refugee

students who have overcome severe hardships to do well in school (He, et al., 2017; Reinking,

2019; Shapiro & MacDonald 2017). Latinx students have also been shown to leverage assets like

biliteracy and familial support towards academic success (Aragon, 2018; de la Luz Reyes, 2012;

Gonzales, 2012; Pérez & Taylor, 2016). Allen and Boyce (2013) discuss Black students and their

families who have found success "reproducing middle-class values," suggesting that

understanding how students adopt these values is a key to expanding academic success. Means,

Hudson, and Tish (2019) and Cooper and Davis (2015) emphasize that students from racially

minoritized backgrounds hold high aspirations for higher education. Though one article rejected

this framing, asserting that researchers broaden their conception of success to include

marginalized students who reject academic metrics of success (Bush & Bush, 2017), many

scholars suggest shining a spotlight on high achievers overcoming oppression is essential for

changing deficit thinking about students. Such work is written with aims of expanding

educational opportunity by challenging prejudicial beliefs (Byrd, 2011; Golash-Boza, 2016).

  Some scholars have suggested precisely how asset-based frameworks might be worked

into the classroom setting to improve educational outcomes. Counter-deficit research emphasizes

that teachers who employ asset-based pedagogies can alter outcomes for marginalized youth. For

example, teachers of immigrant students might elevate the migration stories of students and their

family members (Jimenez, 2020). They might develop culturally responsive "food-based

literacy" (Durá, Salas, Medina-Jerez, & Hill, 2015). They might incorporate home-based literacy

practices, including *testimonios* to support English Language Learner students (DeNicolo et al., 2015; Orosco, 2010; Rolander, 2018). They can incorporate new media about student home lives to teach writing (Schwartz, 2015). They might leverage cultural exhibits at local institutions (Hartlep & Xiong, 2018), play using home languages (Baker M., 2019), and apply culturally responsive approaches in science (Ares, 2011; Mangiante, 2018). College biology courses might reduce the emphasis on exams to elevate the performance of marginalized students (Cotner & Ballen, 2017). Math educators might broaden their definitions of "numeracy" to invite more marginalized students to academic success (2018). Perhaps deficit ideologies can be changed through a more asset-oriented language of educational reform (Pacheco, 2010) or through identity-focused discourses (Collins et al., 2017). Though they may be challenging (Smith, 2016) and may require focused professional development (Pérez et al., 2017), these culturally responsive approaches might bring students' assets into the classroom thus improve educational outcomes for among marginalized youth (Cramer, Gonzalez, Pellegrini-Lafont, 2014).

Many teachers can (and do) incorporate student assets into curricula and instruction. Some helpful research has begun to consider how asset orientations might be developed. Teacher preparation might be central to this work (Jester & Fickel, 2013). Some research we reviewed here has begun to illuminate the types of preparation and support for educators that can allow them to adopt counter-deficit stances and as such better serve their students. For example, Cho and colleagues (2015) consider "poverty modules" in professional development to encourage teachers to develop more asset-oriented approaches to teaching students from low-income households. Alarcon (2016) and Kelley (2020) describe pedagogies for pre-service teachers that can upend deficit ideologies. Parkinson and Daojensen (2013) found that games could provide for pre-service teachers a lens into the problems of deficit approaches. Five articles considered

the challenges of interventions like teacher preparation, professional development, and home visits as means of developing asset orientations among educators (Bialastok, 2019; Dudley-Marling, 2010; Luet, et al., 2018; McConn, 2019; Whyte & Karabon, 2016). Recruiting educators of color may facilitate the inclusion of more asset-based frameworks in teacher preparation (Navarro, et al., 2019), especially when they are asked to reflect on their own past experiences with deficit-oriented teachers (Ek, et al., 2014). Student affairs professionals can develop asset orientations with the appropriate guidance (Pérez et al., 2017). Importantly, some scholars have reminded us that educators serving marginalized students have assets that can be leveraged when considering how to support them in improving their craft (Borrerro & Yeh, 2016; Cooper, 2018; Cooper & Cooper, 2015; Cooper & Hawkins, 2016; Harper, 2015; Hernandez, 2017; Settlage, 2011). Despite entailing a "lengthy process," teacher educators can alter deficit discourses among educators of marginalized youth by envisioning educators as capable of change (Sanders, et al., 2015).

Many scholars focus on making change by altering educators' deficit mindsets not just about their marginalized students, but about marginalized parents and families (Aragon, 2018; Colegrove & Krause, 2017; Cooper & Riehl, 2010; Jimenez-Castellanos & Gonzalez, 2012; Jones, 2013; Gonzales, 2012; Kelley, 2020; Manzo, 2016; Monzó, 2013; Miller, 2010; Quan, 2017; Stacy, Gutierrez, & McMillian, 2019). They seek to encourage scholars to see assets of students' communities (Hartlep & Xiong, 2018). These reframings intend to improve connections between schools, families and neighborhoods.

Six articles emphasized some real challenges in encouraging educators to adopt asset-oriented practices. Roegman (2018) notes the unique appeal of deficit frameworks, even among well-meaning administrators. Luet, Morettini, and Vernon-Dotson (2018) attempted an

intervention with teachers to elevate their knowledge of community assets. After visits with

community stakeholders to consider the community practices that could be leveraged towards

academic success, however, teachers maintained their deficit orientations about their students

and their communities. Efforts to encourage teachers to adopt student assets into pedagogies

failed to interrupt traditional curriculum (Bialastok, 2019; Kelley, 2020). Even the most effective

teachers can be constrained by deficit frameworks about their students (Hertzog, 2011). The

research thus suggests that the benefits of asset-oriented teaching are elusive since many

educators of marginalized youth struggle to adopt these practices and maintain deficit ideologies.

      Accepting Structures. Even in the most successful cases, however, where educators

effectively leveraged asset-oriented ideology in classroom settings, those assets were directed at

success within existing social structures rather than at dismantling and rebuilding them. For

example, DeNicolo et al. (2015) assert that by "Teaching Through Testimonio," students can

leverage cultural assets to understand how these strengths might be applied to future academic

and professional success. One student's testimonio emphasized that bilingual capacity "helps you

like get a job easier or like be a student. Because in some places they don't let certain people go

to school" (p. 235). This framing of success around jobs and educational access neglects political

engagement as requisite for social change in marginalized communities. Similarly, Natividad

(2015) celebrates culturally responsive college advertisements that used Latinx culture -- Spanish

language and lucha libre fighters -- to encourage Latinx students to pursue college and careers in

business, medicine, or education. Other researchers have urged teachers to build cultural

solidarity to improve math performance (Miles, et al., 2019). Ultimately, leveraging students' or

families' cultural wealth and funds of knowledge towards success on reading tests (Baker, 2019),

towards college readiness (Jayakumar, et al. 2013), towards engagement and 21ˢᵗ century skills like digital literacy (Beane-Folkes & Ellison, 2018) or to leave the public education system for charter schools (Deeb-Sossa & Manzo, 2020) will not undo systems of injustice. When cultural assets are leveraged for individual uplift, the broader goal of social justice for marginalized communities can become obscured.

The approach presumes that by changing the mindsets of educators, rigid educational stratifications will come crumbling down. Gindlesparger (2010), for example, argues for "reciprocity" in community outreach, namely, practices that equalize power dynamics between educators and the communities they serve. They suggest storytelling between community workers and community members as "an easy and cost-free way to practice reciprocity" (p. 97) and thus to meaningfully address educational inequalities. This framing suggests that reshaping power dynamics – etched in histories of neighborhood oppression and disinvestment – is "easy and cost-free." Clonan-Roy and colleagues argue that youth development professionals might better prepare girls of color for society if they simply understand that the girls are not broken, but society is, and girls must learn to be resilient. While these authors nod to structural oppression, they emphasize readjustments in mindset as the central strategy for overcoming inequality. This emphasis on individual adaptation to structural oppression is a recurring theme in counter-deficit scholarship.

The approach may go so far as to explicitly discount the structural problem of economic inequality. Not only are the poor celebrated, but their poverty is celebrated as well. Students, their families, their schools, and their neighborhoods are all seemingly endowed with an abundance of assets. For Harper (2015), urban schools are beacons of academic success and optimism. Poverty can be enjoyable and character-building (Cutri, Manning, & Chun, 2011).

Homes in under-resourced neighborhoods have "beautiful gardens" (Sugarman, 2011), and

schools there have "curb appeal" (Crawford, 2018). Poverty, itself might be viewed as an asset.

Along these lines, Ridgeway (2019) writes,

> Growing up in living in poverty was not a devastating experience: I was a happy child
>
> surrounded by family and friends. I always had a playmate. In addition, I had science in
>
> my life, and an appreciation for nature (p. 164).

Poverty provides those who experience it with funds of knowledge like a strong work ethic

oriented around survival, a sense of self-regulation, and critical awareness (Cutri, et al., 2011).

Poverty, from this line of thinking, ought to be appreciated, and those who lament the material

conditions of the poor are expressing deficit attitudes (Cho, et al., 2015; Keefer, 2017). While

celebrating adaptations to poverty as cultural strengths in marginalized communities is

important, much of this work does so in a way that discounts the problem of poverty itself.

However, as Bonilla-Silva (1997) argues, while ideological oppression is certainly harmful and

necessitates redress, oppression is also structural. Calling on scholars and educators to see

poverty for its benefits seeks to solve poverty as an ideological problem (i.e. celebrate the poor)

rather than solving it as a systemic one (i.e. end poverty).

When asset orientations are abstracted from the social structures in which they are

indelibly embedded, there remain unresolved questions about whether counter-deficit research

can change the educational outcomes of marginalized youth. Whether students' assets are valued

in a particular classroom does not shape the extent to which those assets are valued in the social

world beyond it. Cultural capital, as conceived by Pierre Bourdieu, gains cache by way of its

potential for conversion into economic capital (Bourdieu, 1986). Ultimately, social structures

imbue capital with value. What schools, teachers, or even counter-deficit researchers value is the

product of "cultural arbitraries" (Oughton, 2010), shaped by forces beyond schools or

researchers. For example, state education standards are a policy that can imbue dominant cultural

language and behaviors with official sanction, disadvantaging marginalized groups (Wiley &

Rolstad, 2014). Though carpentry, child care, and bilingualism (Kinney, 2015) may be important

assets in home contexts, whether this "cultural wealth" or "funds of knowledge" can be

transformed into economic capital is determined by dominant social forces. For example, young,

working-class men in secondary contexts may develop robust competencies for industrial labor

(Willis, 1977) and Black and Latinx students may develop strong racialized cultural capital

(Carter, 2003), but those skills and cultural strengths may lack utility in postsecondary academic

and professional settings. Relatedly, Hogg and Volman (2020), in their review of literature on

Funds of Knowledge, and Funds of Identity more broadly, observed that while most studies

identified different Funds of Knowledge, few studies "investigated actual educational outcomes

in terms of academic, social, or emotional development" (p.886). Without a socially derived

value, teachers who develop students' cultural wealth in school settings may be merely providing

them with a kind of "monopoly money," valuable in the context of home interactions, but of little

use to social advancement. Without also working towards altering the power dynamics and social

structures that devalue the strengths of marginalized communities (e.g., underpaying childcare

workers, exploiting manual laborers, and maintaining English-language political dominance),

such approaches might fall short of expanding economic and political opportunity.

Thus, considering the assets of students and their families without also considering how

to alter the social structures in which they are situated may fail to interrupt inequality. Certainly,

honoring and celebrating non-dominant cultures is important for advancing educational

opportunities for racially minoritized groups. Ideological constructions that convey non-

dominant cultures in deficit terms harm marginalized people, and combating racist ideology and

prejudice challenges the elevation of hegemonic cultures as superior. However, the hegemonic

ideological position of these cultural constructions is secured by their connection to material

resources. Undermining ideology without also addressing material realities within systems of

power positions our battle for equity on an uphill slope. To focus primarily on ideology, on

prejudice, on racist beliefs, Bonilla-Silva (2021) argues, "keep[s] attention away from the

structure and collective practices that maintain racial domination" (p.3). As such, when schools

focus energy on emphasizing cultural assets of their marginalized students, they may neglect to

criticize the social conditions that marginalize them. Recognizing these challenges, some

scholars have begun to take asset-oriented research in new directions, fashioning a three-

dimensional lens on the strengths of students, the strengths of educators, and on altering the

oppressive systems in which schools operate.

Challenging Ideology and Challenging Structure

In Valencia's (1997) original conception of deficit thinking, social structure played a

central role. Deficit thinking needed to be challenged, but social systems would also have to

change. In our review of the literature, structural change was much less often articulated as a

central strategy in efforts for educational equality. Given profound structural barriers to equal

opportunity, this may be an important oversight in this area of research that limits its potential.

Some counter-deficit researchers have usefully begun to imagine a role for structural

change by way of asset-oriented educational practices. They investigate how community assets

can be leveraged not solely for academic success, but also for structural change. For example,

Liou, (2016) discusses how teachers can bridge academic rigor and community change when

designing learning experiences for marginalized students. López (2016) discusses a teacher's

work with immigrant students that encouraged them to tell migration stories and to consider

potential action for social justice. Martin-Beltrán, and colleagues (2018) emphasize that

immigrant students can write letters to the president. While these actions in and of themselves

will not bring about social change, students are learning skills of political advocacy, which they

can leverage to make change in the future.

Also, teachers might better understand poverty and work to undo its impacts with

families (Cho, et al., 2015). Shapiro (2019) viewed refugee students as potential agents of social

change, challenging unjust social structures as well as oppressive cultural expectations in their

households (e.g. parental requirements that daughters marry early). Deeb-Sossa and Manzo

(2018) describe an example of how assets in marginalized communities helped to change social

structures that contributed to their marginalization. Through political advocacy among Latinx

parents, by force of their collective community wealth, parents successfully ousted a schoolboard

leader who had ignored their concerns. Other scholars also suggested how parents can be

leveraged as an asset-rich community and organized towards educational equity (Quinn & Carl,

2013). Some scholars have emphasized the challenges of developing critical resistance among

students, noting stubborn deficit orientations among students themselves (Monzó, 2016; Smith &

Hope, 2020). This scholarship elevates the importance of teachers who do not just leverage

students' assets to teach academic skill but apply those assets towards structural change.

Six articles demonstrated how merging asset-oriented work with critical pedagogies

might provide a fruitful avenue for working towards systemic change. Rodriguez (2013)

discusses how pedagogies grounded in a funds of knowledge framework might be tied to

questions of "power and agency of teachers and students" (p. 88). Casapulla and Hess (2017)

describe an asset-driven educational project for students in Appalachia that is "place-focused"

and "democratically oriented." Alarcon (2016) considered the potential for asset-oriented critical

pedagogy in teacher education. Privileged students might also be included in these conversations,

leveraging their own funds of knowledge to build critical consciousness and awaken them to

social injustice through Freireian approaches to college teaching (Kurtyka, 2010). Critical

consciousness may itself be an important asset within marginalized communities (Diemer, et al.,

2016) that can be leveraged toward social change. Subero and Esteban-Guitart (2015) describe

social justice programs that incorporate funds of knowledge. Considering the intersections of

critical consciousness and counter-deficit framings of marginalized youth might encourage

productive resistance to racist ideologies and structures.

As this work implies, if assets are not strategically directed towards political advocacy in

schools, sustainable social change may be sacrificed to the ideals of individual advancement. As

opposed to using student assets to direct them apolitically towards academic success or STEM

careers (Martin et al. 2017; Ridgeway, 2019) these visions prepare students and families towards

democratic engagement that could provide a lasting, widespread expansion of educational

success. Indeed, as some counter-deficit scholarship has emphasized, the educational challenges

students endure are primarily due to longstanding, structural resource disparities within

marginalized communities (Rodriguez, et al., 2016). Though scant, we highlight these arguments

about the potential for structural change through the counter-deficit paradigm as an important

direction for future research that elevates student assets and widen avenues of opportunity.

Advancing the Counter-Deficit Movement

Counter-deficit scholarship primarily locates racism at the ideological level–identifying

prejudice, beliefs, and stereotypes as racism. These scholars show that deficit thinking pervades

educational research and schools because marginalized students and their families are seen as

broken. This problematic framing of students and families of color has been appropriately

rebutted by counter-deficit scholarship. This ideological shift in understanding educational

inequality has been essential to improving education, reframing how many educators see their

students and their communities and encouraging them to leverage their students' cultural and

communal strengths to achieve academic success.

A collection of theoretical frameworks has accumulated to undergird this important

reformulation of marginalized students and their communities. Preeminent counter-deficit

theories – Funds of Knowledge, Community Cultural Wealth, and the Anti-Deficit Achievement

Framework – all refute the pathological visions of young people of color, their families, and their

neighborhoods. Expanding the lens of counter-deficit research, however, will necessitate

interrogating the theoretical frameworks that have grounded this work. These theories tend to

view racism primarily in ideological terms, largely skirting the more in-depth, potentially

transformative, discussions of structure articulated in Valencia's (1997) initial framework.

Overwhelmingly, research aimed at undoing deficits has understood racism as ideological.

Bonilla-Silva (1997) suggests sociology largely relies upon an ideological – as opposed

to a structural – understanding of racism. We have demonstrated a similar trend in the counter-

deficit school. Bonilla-Silva (2015), in describing the limitations of the ideological approach,

makes the point that, "If the core of the phenomenon coded as "racism" is prejudice, then

education and time should have cured this disease a long time ago" (p. 74). Of course, such is not

the case. Racism is also structural. As such, structural analyses are necessary.

This review has illuminated two problems that emerge from a body of literature whose

theoretical construction of racism is only partially formed. First, blame for educational inequities

largely falls on individuals as opposed to systems. Second, the research implies that equality

might best be achieved by individual mobility rather than structural change. The narrow vision of race, racism, and student success constrains the capacity of the scholarly literature to holistically understand educational inequity and the possibilities for social change through education. We thus offer four potential directions for counter-deficit researchers to move the work forward.

Avoiding Individualist Conceptions of Academic Success

The data here suggest that much counter-deficit research elevates the individual over the structural. These analyses hover closely to ideas like "grit" (Duckworth, et al., 2007) that have long been critiqued by educational sociologists for their obliviousness to structural impediments to success (e.g. Gorski, 2016). Poon and colleagues (2016) describe a similar phenomenon with the preoccupation of research on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in higher education and countering the Model Minority Myth. They illustrate the, "... paradox of efforts in counterhegemonic frames that unintentionally reinforce oppressive structures" (Poon et al., 2016, p.475). In our review of counter-deficit research we similarly saw a lack of problematization and, thereby, a tacit acceptance of racist structures in prioritizing the individual.

Individual attitudes may be less relevant than histories and structures of oppression. Individualist lenses are far too narrow to capture the complexity of schooling. Certainly, individual teachers who hold high expectations and see the strengths of their students can inspire much academic success, and some students may adeptly navigate schooling systems and achieve academic success. Explaining success by way of individual students, their teachers, or their families, however, may imply a pathological vision for understanding students who do not succeed. If successful students are successful because they have assets, the question might be asked, what should we make of students who fail?

While examples of marginalized students who "beat the odds" to achieve success can

inspire us to reconsider problematic ideologies about marginalized students as inadequate, the existence of odds that require beating deserves further interrogation. Individualist conceptions of academic success largely neglect to consider the structural constraints on achievement. The focus remains on overcoming bad odds rather than on making bad odds better for marginalized students. While we believe few scholars of counter-deficit work would disagree that structural racism needs to be undone, the narrow focus on ideological racism in counter-deficit educational scholarship rests on an individualist lens of racism. Such a lens is in need of expansion.

Elevating Structural Constraints of Educators

One important structure impacting student success involves the structural inequities endured by urban educators. As former urban educators ourselves, we understand these challenges intimately. Some counter-deficit researchers, as evidenced in our review, are eager to point out that the reason that some students fail is not because students lack assets, but rather, because their educators fail to acknowledge and leverage the assets they do have. In this reframing, deficit lenses are redirected from students to their teachers. However, assigning the responsibility for student engagement to educators neglects the unequal systems in which schools must operate. By framing racism solely by way of ideology in schools, social justice is a matter of teacher and researcher perception – make teachers/researchers less racist and then solve educational inequality. This lens fails to capture the multifaceted nature of racism and oppression. Like students, teachers in marginalized communities are negotiating racist systems that engulf both them and their pupils. Crowded classrooms, resource shortages, and often-inadequate training present challenging obstacles for many educators.

Certainly, some teachers hold racist ideologies, and research that counteracts these ideologies is essential. Bonilla-Silva (2021), however, likens the scholarly preoccupation with

the individual "racist" to conversations about "bad apples" (p. 516). Identifying bad apples is akin to identifying deficit ideology held by teachers . Yet without also examining the tree, itself, or structures, critical scholars are doomed to identifying and analyzing bad apples and their ideologies *ad infinitum*. A similar trend exists in counter-deficit research surrounding teachers. Changing ideologies alone will not reshape the social structures that lay the foundation for racial oppression.

By framing teachers for their potential to unlearn deficit orientations, some counter-deficit scholarship begins to tackle oppression from its structural foundations. These scholars acknowledge that teacher ideologies are a barrier to student success, but rather than solely lament problematic ideologies, they also seek to alter the systems (e.g., resource allocation, teacher education, and professional development) that produce deficit lenses. Educators can change. In attempting to delineate the potential for that change, this research is an important first step in broadening counter-deficit lenses to understand oppression by its structural as well as ideological components.

As such, researchers might also consider the importance of looking not just at teachers' mindsets, but at administrators, superintendents, and school boards -- those whose deficit mindsets might shape school policies and systems. Research might interrogate to what extent racial ideologies of these more powerful social actors in education for how their deficit ideologies impact social systems. Of course, even these social actors and the policies they implement might be constrained by systems beyond their reach. An urban district school board member's decisions, for example, are inevitably shaped by the years of oppression and disinvestment in the community they serve. In order to understand deficit frameworks in

educational settings, scholars need to examine both the ideological and structural aspects of

racism (Golash-Boza, 2016).

Leveraging Assets for Social Change

Understanding how educators can elevate student assets and counter deficit frameworks

is essential, but a real project of liberation necessitates social transformation. Certainly,

educational access is important. A college degree significantly increases one's lifetime earnings

(Barrow & Malamud, 2015) and the gains may be particularly pronounced for students on social

and academic margins (Zimmerman, 2014). Highlighting student assets might be a useful

strategy for improving the educational outcomes for racially minoritized youth, and the

importance of this endeavor ought not to be understated. However, the educational attainment of

racially minoritized youth will not alone fix structural racism. This prominent tendency of many

educators and scholars to treat education as a cure-all for social ills is what McMillan Cottom

(2017) labels "the education gospel," an almost religious framing of educational attainment for

its capacity to undo social injustice. She emphasizes that even the most successful Black students

who graduate from college face obstacles in the job market that elude their White peers. These

data challenge the schools-as-saviors ideology: helping more students achieve academic success

– perhaps by adopting counter-deficit frameworks – will fail to undo centuries of cruelty and

neglect in marginalized communities.

The emphasis on social mobility rather than structural change has a long history in

educational thinking and practice. As Tyack and Cuban wrote in 1976, "[s]chools could and

should sort out and prepare students differently for their various destinies in life as adults. This

[leads] to the use of intelligence tests and tracking as a form of social engineering" (1995, p. 51).

To Bowles and Gintis (2011) schools primarily serve as a sorting mechanism to ensure the

reproduction of economic class. Labaree (2018) has lamented the emphasis on social mobility and economic efficiency goals of education at the expense of more democratic aims. The individualistic social mobility goal has long superseded civic, community-oriented objectives in educational discourse. In the literature reviewed here, individual social mobility seems to occupy a similarly vaunted position in counter-deficit research.

However, a small branch of counter-deficit scholarship has considered how assets might be leveraged towards social change. Teachers who elevate student assets can also guide them towards activism (Caspulla & Hess, 2017; Kurtyka, 2010: Liou, 2016; López, 2016; Martin-Beltrán, 2018; Shapiro, 2019). Parents might also be supported to achieve justice for their communities (Deeb-Sossa & Manzo, 2018). This research looks to those asset-oriented educators who attempt to reach beyond the "education gospel," looking to achieve social change by way of altering the political and social structures that marginalize their students.

Expanding Counter-Deficit Theoretical Frameworks

Incorporating a wider vision of racial oppression to include social structures may necessitate a broadening of theoretical constructs that have thus far guided counter-deficit scholarship. Though the foundational work of Richard Valencia emphasized structural oppression as an essential component of deficit orientations about marginalized people, the research leaning on Funds of Knowledge, Community Cultural Wealth, and the Anti-Deficit Achievement Framework has largely neglected the structural components of racial oppression.

Indeed, some scholars have emphasized the structural limitations of these theories. Tichavakunda (2019) suggests that Community Cultural Wealth has too eagerly cast aside Bourdieusian frameworks and their interrogation of social structure. Rios-Aguilar and colleagues (2011) apply a similar critique Funds of Knowledge, suggesting that analyses of power are

understated in the framework. While few scholars have considered the structural shortcomings of the more recently conceived Anti-Deficit Achievement Framework, the approach is similarly light on considerations of structural oppression, focusing instead on racial oppression by way of ideology. The theoretical vision of counter-deficit research has emphasized ideological conceptions of racism at the expense of its important systemic components. Perhaps this scholarly impulse is symptomatic of a prioritization of the ideological in the social sciences and popular culture more broadly (Bonilla-Silva, 1997). Given the dominance of the counter-deficit school in educational research, however, leveraging such frameworks have also become *doxa*, or common sense, for critical education scholarship.

Given this challenge, we recommend theoretical expansion in the counter-deficit school of thinking. Four theories stand out as particularly useful to expanding counter-deficit scholarship to include an analysis of structural oppression: Critical Race Theory holistically applied, Bourdieu's theory of social reproduction, racialized organizations, and critical pedagogy. Though much counter-deficit scholarship asserts a grounding in Critical Race Theory, Critical Race Theory offers a far more expansive analysis of structural oppression than this literature generally allows. Including considerations of concepts like Whiteness as property (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995) might prove fruitful in expanding the potential of counter-deficit work. In addition, though some theoretical work that has informed counter-deficit scholarship is explicit in its rejection of Bourdieu, Bourdieu's (1977, 1986) theories of social reproduction may be useful. Incorporating concepts like symbolic violence and habitus can elevate the intersection of structure and culture to deepen counter-deficit analyses. Further, we see potential in the theory of racialized organizations (Ray, 2019). Through the theory of racialized organizations, education scholars might examine the mechanisms and structures by which organizations and

institutions such as schools constrain the agency of racially minoritized people and justify

inequitable resource distribution. Lastly, critical pedagogy (Kincheloe, 2008) has long

considered the ways that classrooms are embedded in systems of oppression. This short list of

theoretical frameworks that elevate social structures is certainly not exhaustive, and other

theoretical frameworks that elevate social structures might also provide useful supplements to

counter-deficit theories.

Conclusion

The sociology of race and racism teaches us that ideology and structure are wound

together in reproducing racism (Golash-Boza, 2016). Scholars of race (e.g. Bonilla-Silva, 2021)

and Critical Race Theorists (e.g. Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995) emphasize this duality of racial

oppression. Yet, similar to commentary on the research on race in sociology (e.g., Bonilla-Silva,

1997), we find an overemphasis on the ideological aspects of racism without a like emphasis on

the structural aspects in counter-deficit research. Though scholars have rightfully identified an

urgency with which we must reject deficit thinking, this urgency has led to narrow theorizing of

educational inequality. Much of the research has eagerly castigated deficit-oriented educators and

elevated academically successful students of color. Deficit theories – focusing on ideology and

individual-level analysis – are rejected on the same terms. However, this rejection implicitly

accepts the premises of deficit theorizing – that systemic oppression is peripheral to academic

opportunity. Theoretical frameworks that undergird this scholarship have encouraged a similarly

narrow focus on ideology. In counter-deficit work, we recommend expanding the theoretical and

methodological lens to see beyond ideology as expressed by individuals as the sole driver of

educational inequality, including a parallel analysis of the systemic oppressions that might be

shaping these processes. While this is certainly a challenge, some scholarship reviewed here has

successfully researched across the ideology-structure divide (e.g. Casapulla and Hess, 2017; Deeb-Sossa and Manzo, 2018; Monzó, 2016; Shapiro, 2019).

These findings suggest important implications for research and educators who seek to improve the educational experiences of marginalized youth. Seeing racial oppression primarily – or often solely – by way of ideology limits how we might consider enhancing educational equity. Focusing on assets of students and their families implies that the solutions to educational problems reside in the ability of schools to identify and enhance those assets. Educators can succeed if they just change their minds about their students. Researchers can conduct better research by using happier adjectives. While constructing new, counter-deficit ideologies about marginalized youth has offered an important reframing for educational research, the limiting vision of racism identified here suggests efforts might be expanded to consider structural oppressions and better support marginalized youth. Teachers might consider not solely leveraging assets to improve instruction, but also leveraging assets to prepare students for democratic engagement in structural change. Some researchers have begun to explore how educators might do this, but this research needs expansion. Our point here is not that elevating assets and rejecting deficit ideologies is unimportant. Such work is needed. Yet, given the popularity of the counter-deficit approach, we suggest that greater attention to structure is necessary in the fight for racial justice in education.

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