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## Black and Belonging at School: A Case for Interpersonal, Instructional, and Institutional Opportunity Structures

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This article is guided by two goals: (a) to consider how race-based perspectives can serve as theoretical tools for investigating Black adolescents' opportunities to belong at school, and (b) to describe cultural and political aspects of schooling that can support a sense of belongingness among Black adolescents. We discuss support for the belonging of Black adolescents in terms of interpersonal, instructional, and institutional opportunity structures. We provide a set of guiding questions for scholars seeking to advance educational psychology research at the intersection of race, belonging, and motivation. We end by describing specific research directions for an inclusive examination of school belonging, along with strategies to accomplish this goal.

In motivation research, contemporary efforts to understand the relevance of schools as social arenas have been driven largely by research on school belonging, which is defined as perceptions of acceptance, respect, inclusion, and support (Goodenow, 1993). Decades of empirical studies on this construct show that students who perceive a sense of school belonging generally fare well both academically (Freeman, Anderman, & Jensen, 2007; Goodenow & Grady, 1993; Griffith, 1997; McMahon, Wernsman, & Rose, 2009) and psychologically (Chipuer, Bramston, & Pretty, 2003; Matthews, Banerjee, & Lauermaun, 2014; Ross, Shochet, & Bellair, 2010; Shochet, Smith, Furlong, & Homel, 2011; Suldo, Shaffer, & Riley, 2008). This expansive body of literature has motivated researchers to examine factors that protect students against in-school experiences that leave their belongingness needs unfulfilled (Juvonen, 2007; Martin & Dowson, 2009).

Prior school-belonging research demonstrates that race and ethnicity are implicated in the way that students perceive and interpret the social dimensions of their school environments. Black Americans are often stigmatized in academic settings, leading them to be aware of, and concerned with, circumstances that could threaten their sense

of school belonging (Walton & Cohen, 2007). Scholars acknowledge that race and identity are critical for understanding patterns of belonging, motivation, and performance because stigmatized social identity groups such as Black Americans are at a heightened risk of receiving disconfirming messages about whether they fit within academic spaces (Cohen & Garcia, 2008; Cook, Purdie-Vaughns, Garcia, & Cohen, 2012; Walton & Cohen, 2011). Given the possible repercussions and consequences of belongingness uncertainty for this racial group, a fundamental question needs to be addressed: What opportunities do Black students have to establish a sense of belonging when school systems have historically prohibited Black people from receiving formal education and are currently complicit in inequitable education?

Based on our ongoing research in predominantly Black schools, we propose that more expansive descriptions, and deeper explorations of the cultural and political aspects of schooling, enhance researchers' capacity to advocate more concretely and effectively for instructional practices and institutional policies that address the challenges facing Black students in today's educational system. In addition, we argue for an ecological interpretation of school belonging within motivation research that considers how populations with a history of racial denigration and mistreatment experience their schooling environment. We begin with a brief summary of key

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frameworks in *competence motivation* research that are useful for understanding traditional approaches to the study of school belonging. Competence motivation is “the appetitive energization and direction of behavior with regard to effectiveness, ability, sufficiency, or success” (Elliot, Dweck, & Yeager, 2017, p. 3). As scholars have previously discussed (Urduan & Turner, 2005), social dimensions of schooling are distinct from, but can influence, competence motivation. The theoretical and empirical research we review suggests that students make strides toward developing their competence in domains in which they experience a sense of belonging. As such, part of creating a motivationally supportive school environment involves providing opportunities for students to fulfill their belongingness needs. Following this overview of belonging and motivation, we conceptualize opportunities for belonging at school in terms of the sociohistorical relationship between Black students and schools in the United States. We conclude with recommendations for conducting and interpreting school-belonging research from an ecological perspective that considers Black students’ cognitive, social, and emotional development as embedded within cultural and political aspects of classrooms, schools, communities, and history.

### THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS OF SCHOOL BELONGING RESEARCH: AN OVERVIEW

The notion of “fit” is central to fostering a sense of belonging among adolescents. According to stage-environment fit theory (Eccles & Midgley, 1989), adolescents have salient psychological needs they seek to fulfill within social contexts such as schools and classrooms (Eccles & Roeser, 2011). The satisfaction of psychological needs like belonging is associated with lower depressive symptomatology (Gallus, Shreffler, Merten, & Cox, 2015) and greater intrinsic and utility value of education (Gillen-O’Neel & Fuligni, 2013). Decrements in well-being and motivation during adolescence are in part explained by an incompatibility between adolescents’ needs and their (lack of) opportunities within social contexts to fulfill these needs (Eccles et al., 1993). The stage-environment fit perspective continues to gain currency in school-belonging research that focuses on students of color (e.g., Hughes, Im, & Allee, 2015; Morales-Chicas & Graham, 2017). For instance, longitudinal research with ethnic minority adolescents finds that both school belonging and behavioral engagement decline across the transition into middle school (Hughes, Im, Kwok, Cham, & West, 2015). This aligns with a stage-environment fit perspective, which contends that adolescents cognitively and physically disengage from social contexts that do not address their needs and that adolescents engage in social contexts in which there is alignment between their

needs and their opportunities to satisfy them (Eccles & Roeser, 2009).

For this article, the term *opportunity structure* refers to aspects of a school or classroom environment that either fulfill or thwart students’ needs to belong. Building on ecological interpretations of school influences (Eccles & Roeser, 1998), we introduce the terms *interpersonal opportunity structure*, *instructional opportunity structure*, and *institutional opportunity structure* to describe how schools can support belongingness needs and competence motivation. Educators who actively facilitate social ties in instructional contexts contribute to an *interpersonal opportunity structure*. Such social ties might reflect connections among peers or connections between students and teachers. When educators engage students in scholastic activities that uphold and reinforce students’ esteemed cultural meaning systems, we call this an *instructional opportunity structure*. This opportunity structure can therefore be thought of as the cultural alignment between that of the activity setting and that of the student. Finally, when educators collaborate with students and take actionable steps toward eliminating structural barriers that devalue minoritized populations in the school and surrounding community, they are creating an *institutional opportunity structure*. Each of these opportunity structures is important because, as suggested by Walton and Brady’s (2017) recent review of experimental research on belonging, such facilitating conditions assuage students’ concerns about whether they will be able to establish social connections (e.g., “Are there people here whom I connect to?”), how much value they should place on participating in an instructional context (e.g., “Is this a setting in which I want to belong?”), and if they will be subjected to treatment that is unfavorable and different from the quality of treatment others receive (e.g., “Do people here value (people like) me?”). (All of these questions and others are found in Tables 15.1 and 15.2 in Walton and Brady, 2017.)

### What Interpersonal Opportunity Structures Teach Us About Associations Between In-School Relationships, Belonging, and Competence Motivation

School belonging is commonly conceptualized as a relational, or interpersonal, experience (e.g., L. H. Anderman, 2003; L. Anderman & Anderman, 1999; Battistich, Solomon, Kim, Watson, & Schaps, 1995; Furrer & Skinner, 2003; Juvonen & Wentzel, 1996; Martin & Dowson, 2009; Mouratidis & Sideridis, 2009; Nie & Lau, 2009; Roeser, Midgley, & Urduan, 1996; Wentzel, 1998, 1999). A number of theoretical perspectives articulate the process by which interpersonal opportunity structures, such as positive peer relationships and student–teacher relationships, contribute to satisfying students’ belongingness needs and subsequent competence motivation. From a self-determination theory perspective (Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier, & Ryan, 1991; Ryan, 1995), providing interpersonal opportunity structures in an

instructional setting helps students internalize important academic values, and subsequently to gain more intrinsic motivational beliefs and behaviors. For example, a setting supportive of belongingness (also referred to as relatedness) can facilitate autonomous efforts to engage in activities that hold shared value between the social target (e.g., the student) and the socializing agent (e.g., a caring teacher; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Wentzel's (2009) perspective on interpersonal relationships suggests that a sense of belonging is the pathway by which social support facilitates "a positive sense of self, the adoption of socially desirable goals and values, and the development of social and academic competencies" (Wentzel, 2009, p. 309).

Interpersonal relationships with peers also are key to establishing a sense of belonging. Juvonen's (2006) framework of student behavior, school-based relationships, and sense of connectedness extends perspectives on interpersonal antecedents of belonging by explaining that positive student outcomes are in part the result of social identity processes and the groups with which the student affiliates. Juvonen suggested that interpersonal opportunity structures can, but do not always, lead to positive motivational and achievement outcomes. Specifically, she wrote, "Some of the most popular or admired middle school students are not engaged and may in fact overtly display disinterest in school by acting out" (p. 655). Empirical work on Black adolescents provides some support for this assertion. Hamm, Lambert, Agger, and Farmer (2013) compared the structure of peer networks for two groups of Black male individuals in the rural Southeastern region of the United States. The first group did not sustain membership in peer networks that endorsed academic effort and achievement; the second group did sustain such membership, and placed more value on learning at the end of the year. The researchers found that even though those in the second group were part of more academically focused peer networks and were more liked by their peers, they were significantly less likely to be nominated as individuals whom others wanted to be like. Moreover, this second group of students did not perceive a greater sense of belonging than did those in the first group.

An emphasis on interpersonal opportunity structures has yielded many theoretical insights regarding the critical role of social ties in adolescents' competence beliefs and behaviors. At the same time, the notion of belonging at school can be conceptualized more broadly than interpersonal opportunity structures (Green, Emery, Sanders, & Anderman, 2016). Interpersonal opportunity structures are situated within the cultural, historical, and political landscape of a school environment. Therefore, the way Black students respond to interpersonal opportunity structures at school is difficult to fully interpret without also considering the instructional settings and the institutional norms and policies in which interpersonal opportunity structures operate.

## EXTENDING SCHOLARLY DISCOURSE ON OPPORTUNITY STRUCTURES: WHAT RACE-BASED FRAMEWORKS SAY ABOUT OPPORTUNITIES TO BELONG AT SCHOOL

We recognize that our capacity to adequately address issues of school belonging for Black students is limited if we draw only on frameworks in educational psychology. This understanding emanates from our observation that educational psychology research is largely normed around notions of Whiteness. This claim is evidenced by the fact that only a handful of studies in mainstream educational psychology journals explicitly examine race-based constructs (e.g., racial identity) or use race-based theoretical and methodological approaches to investigate widely researched educational psychology constructs (DeCuir-Gunby & Schutz, 2014). Recently, scholars of color have advocated for the examination of educational psychology constructs from a race-reimagined perspective in which mainstream theoretical constructs are examined using frameworks, methods, and interpretations that are more appropriate for addressing issues of race and culture (DeCuir-Gunby & Schutz, 2014). We bring race-based theoretical perspectives to the conceptualization of school belonging by drawing inspiration from culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995), culturally sustaining pedagogy (Paris, 2012), and other asset-based perspectives on the education of minoritized groups. These perspectives are explicit in their call "for schooling to be a site for sustaining the cultural ways of being of communities of color" (Alim & Paris, 2017, p. 4). In the next section, we describe race-based theoretical perspectives that widen the lens educational psychologists can use to investigate opportunity structures for school belonging; we discuss Black culture in terms of (a) the common African diasporic histories shared by Blacks in the United States and (b) the distinct values and perspectives they bring with them from their local communities (Tillman, 2002).

### Why Instructional Opportunities Matter for Black Students' Sense of School Belonging

To convey the pride they derive from being members of the Black community, some Black adolescents wear clothing emblazoned with phrases such as *Black Girl Magic*, *Melania on Fleek*, *Melania Poppin'*, and *Being Black is Lit*. This phraseology is intended to convey the belief that Black people possess many strengths and have made contributions to the advancement of the human condition, or what racial identity researchers call a high *private regard* toward the Black community (Sellers, Rowley, Chavous, Shelton, & Smith, 1997). Identity exploration is critical during adolescence (Erikson, 1968). This includes exploring the meaning and importance of membership in one's racial group (DeCuir-Gunby, 2009). Research reveals that Black students' race-related identity beliefs can either promote or

deter connections to school and achievement (Crocker & Major, 1989; Hope, Chavous, Jagers, & Sellers, 2013; Smalls, White, Chavous, & Sellers, 2007). Given the importance of racial identity in education contexts, it is important to encourage Black students to explore their racial identity and to understand the value of their cultural heritage.

Racial identity has been described as a sense of belonging to one's ethnic group (for a review, see DeCuir-Gunby, 2009). The opportunity to nurture this cultural aspect of the self contributes to what curriculum and instruction researchers describe as experiencing "belonging in continuity with their ancestral heritage" (J. E. King & Swartz, 2015, p. 18). This cultural perspective of belonging posits that curriculum and instruction can provide students with opportunities to establish and maintain deep connections to individuals from their same racial-ethnic background. The Afrocentric praxis of *Teaching for Freedom* (J. E. King & Swartz, 2015) uses academic content and pedagogical techniques to emphasize belonging at school by exposing Black students to the cultural legacies and traditions of the African diaspora. This culturally relevant pedagogy functions as an instructional opportunity for belonging that reaffirms Black students in their racial identity (private regard). Black students in culturally affirming classrooms have opportunities to explore their racial identity in a context that legitimizes their culture, thereby allowing them to see commonalities and take pride in their connection to people who look like them.

Scholars have called for the explicit acknowledgment of culture within motivation research (DeCuir-Gunby & Schutz, 2014; R. B. King & McInerney, 2014; Zusho & Clayton, 2011), and there are important reasons to do so. Both curriculum and instruction rest on a cultural platform (J. E. King & Swartz, 2015) that includes academic content, classroom structure, and school norms—all of which serve to socialize students into ways of thinking and doing based on value systems that mirror those of the larger society in which schools are embedded (Asante, 1991). The cultural platform of schooling in the United States is largely monocultural and Eurocratic (J. E. King, 2006). From a critical race theory perspective (DeCuir & Dixon, 2004), failure to acknowledge such cultural platforms in schools is a color-blind approach that perpetuates social inequities. In other words, there is no such thing as a race-neutral curriculum. Curricula are cultural. A curriculum that does not acknowledge the cultural values of its learners signals that the perspectives, philosophies, and histories of Eurocentric racial-ethnic groups are more important than those of other groups. It is therefore important to critically consider the ways in which curriculum and instruction affect students' experiences, and subsequent self-perceptions, of who is, and is not, a member of a "dominant cultural or national identity group" (Borrero, Yeh, Cruz, & Sudah, 2012, p. 3) and thus who does and who does not belong in school.

A recent national conversation regarding school textbooks illustrates some of the issues at play when curriculum and instruction do not support the development of Black students' heritage knowledge. In 2015, the *Washington Post* published an image of a page from a McGraw-Hill World History textbook that contained the following statement: "The Atlantic Slave Trade between the 1500s and 1800s brought millions of workers from Africa to the Southern United States to work on agricultural plantations" (Wang, 2015). A Black male student at a high school in Texas took a picture of the text and sent it to his mother with an attached sarcastic remark that read, "We was real hard workers, wasn't we?" His mother then created a video and posted on social media in objection to the narrative being portrayed about her ethnic group's heritage (the video went viral and can be seen via a *Washington Post* article by Wang, 2015). McGraw-Hill Education CEO David Leven discussed the matter on National Public Radio and described the text in question as an "editorial error" (Isensee, 2015). Nevertheless, the mischaracterization of African enslaved people as "workers" is an example of how curricular materials in U.S. schools can make Black students feel *Othered*, as if they do not belong and as if an accurate portrayal of their history does not matter. These perceptions are supported in an analysis of recent U.S. history textbooks in Texas by A. L. Brown and Brown (2010), which identified distorted portrayals of racial violence against Black Americans. Most notable were the renderings of racial violence as single acts by lone individuals, which understates the sociocultural systems of injustice and oppression that gave rise to, and were reinforced by, these acts (A. L. Brown & Brown, 2010).

From a Teaching for Freedom lens (J. E. King & Swartz, 2015), these historical inaccuracies speak to larger ideological biases that are harmful for at least two reasons: (a) They perpetuate cultural incompetence within society, and (b) they provide an incomplete and distorted view of being Black that "obstructs Black students' opportunities to identify with their heritage" (J. E. King, 2006, p. 343). We argue that these historical inaccuracies also obstruct Black students' instructional opportunities for school belonging. The Teaching for Freedom framework can serve as a theoretical tool for interpreting instructional opportunity structures for school belonging. Several Afrocentric concepts and worldview elements are present in this framework. One such concept is *collective responsibility*, which in this context represents that individual successes (and setbacks) of African descendants are inextricably linked to their collective memberships in families, communities, and society at large (Karenga, 1998). Another Afrocentric concept explored in the framework is the *anteriority of classical African civilizations*, which is the view that Ancient Kemet (Egypt) represents Black excellence in the sense that it is a source of many intellectual traditions including geometry, philosophy, arts, and sciences (James, 1954). In addition,

this framework emphasizes the *reclamation of cultural heritage*, which is an understanding that Black heritage has been distorted or hidden and that making a conscious effort to recover it reflects an act of self-discovery (J. E. King & Swartz, 2015).

When Black students retain information about African diasporic ways of being, knowing, and thinking, this knowledge is referred to as *heritage knowledge*; when other ethnic groups (e.g., Whites, Latinx, Native Americans) retain information about African diasporic ways of being, knowing, and thinking, this is referred to as *cultural knowledge* (J. E. King & Swartz, 2015). Exposure to cultural concepts from a variety of ethnic groups is a pathway for increased self-understanding; promoting one ethnic group's heritage knowledge does not mean that other groups' heritages must be derogated, devalued, or ignored. Research on school racial climate and racial socialization reinforces this point (Brittian & Gray, 2014; Byrd & Chavous, 2011; Griffin, Cooper, Metzger, Golden, & White, 2017). The concept of heritage knowledge is akin to Byrd's (2015) description of *cultural socialization*, which she explained as a process affording opportunities for students to learn about their own ethnic group and culture within the school context, and thus to develop positive group identities. Moreover, the racial climate literature characterizes cultural knowledge as the *promotion of cultural competence*, or the extent to which students have opportunities to learn about cultures and ethnic groups other than their own (Byrd, 2017).

### Why Institutional Opportunities Matter for Black Students' Sense of School Belonging

Contemporary research on Black educational opportunities stemming from the work of critical race theorists (Bell, 1976) suggests that present-day U.S. school policies and practices promote systemic racism that is more difficult to trace yet is just as damaging as interpersonal forms of discrimination (O'Connor, 2016). Throughout the history of public schooling in the United States, Black students (among other marginalized groups) have been purposefully and legally excluded from public schools (e.g., *Board of Education of Oklahoma City Public Schools v. Dowell*, 1991; *Bush v. Orleans Parish School Board*, 1962 [New Orleans School Desegregation Crisis]). Now, more than six decades after the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* case ushered in the era of school integration, hostile school environments still exist that marginalize Black students through racial discrimination, classism, stereotypes, and implicit bias (Benner & Graham, 2013; Rosenbloom & Way, 2004; Sanders, 1997; Steele, 1997; Wong, Eccles, & Sameroff, 2003). Alongside interpersonal racism, institutional racism (e.g., insufficient funding, inadequate school resources, police shootings, the school-to-prison pipeline, school resegregation) repackages the message of the segregation era that Black students do not belong in U.S. public schools

(Fine, Burns, Payne, & Torre, 2004; Orfield & Eaton, 1996; Street, 2005). Institutional racism creates a misalignment between the schooling environment and opportunities for Black students to fulfill belongingness needs within formal academic spaces.

DuBoisian scholars argue that a first-rate education for Black students involves learning about who they are, the history of their ancestors, and what they are capable of (Alridge, 2007; Boykin, 1994; O'Connor, 2016; also see Du Bois, 1935). Many contemporary school policies are antithetical to the Du Boisian goal. For example, several school systems across the United States have implemented dress codes that ban hairstyles most commonly associated with Black Americans (Mettler, 2017; Roberts, Torres, & Brown, 2016). These school policies target Black students and explicitly convey that the natural state of their hair (e.g., locs and Afro styles) and nonchemically manipulated cultural hairstyles (e.g., braid extensions, twists, cornrows) are inappropriate for the learning environment. As hair is part of the physical self, such policies signal to Black students that they must manipulate the natural state of their physical self just to belong in the classroom. To further illustrate this premise, recently two African American girls in Massachusetts whose hair was styled in braid extensions were pulled from class, given hours of detention, and told they were not allowed to participate in extracurricular athletics and prom because of their hairstyle (Mettler, 2017). We draw attention to this critical issue because such Othering experiences have psychological consequences not only for the Black students who have been directly victimized by discriminatory institutional policies but also for those who learn of such events through exposure to these students' stories. Such institutional policies can have many other far-reaching effects: The conditional acceptance of the Black physical self in school environments is likely to shape the way Black students interpret and respond to commonly assessed Likert-type school-belonging items such as "It is hard for people like me to be accepted here" (Goodenow, 1993).

Kumashiro (2000) argued that educational spaces must be antioppressive and must welcome students who are Othered for their race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and/or ability status. This Othering includes harmful treatment and discrimination as well as biases and assumptions held by educators, which then influence student experiences in the school. Two examples of Othering via institutional opportunity structures are zero-tolerance and punitive disciplinary policies, both of which have shown little evidence of improving school discipline yet disproportionately target and remove Black and Latinx students from the classroom (American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008; Losen & Skiba, 2010). To reduce oppression in schools, Kumashiro (2000) has advocated for schools to be spaces where members of historically marginalized groups are both affirmed in their identity and safe in their

bodies. By adopting an antioppressive approach, including eliminating and prohibiting institutional standards that devalue cultural heritage (under the guise of regulating respectability), schools can help Black students affirm their Blackness and can provide institutional opportunities for belonging.

### Examples of Instructional and Institutional Opportunity Structures for School Belonging

As a next step toward an integrated understanding of school belonging that considers the sociocultural history of Black students, we discuss *cultural distinctiveness* and *citizenship* as examples of instructional and institutional opportunity structures. Rooted in research on cultural integrity (Tierney, 1999), *opportunity for cultural distinctiveness* represents instructional experiences that validate students of color by holding the norms, standards, and mores of their cultural group in high esteem. Rooted in research on citizenship attitudes (Bogard & Sherrod, 2008), *opportunity for citizenship* reflects an academic institution's cultivation of students as social justice advocates who promote the common good of the school community.

### Cultural Distinctiveness: An Instructional Opportunity Structure

Color-blind approaches to race-related issues are damaging because they allow society to neglect issues of prejudice and discrimination (Gotanda, 1991; Peller, 2011). In contrast, when school environments are structured in ways that honor Black Americans' distinct realities and challenges and that provide learning opportunities for Black students to connect academic content to these realities (J. E. King, 2006), then these students develop a heightened sense of legitimacy and belonging at school (J. E. King & Swartz, 2015), which may also help them to recognize that "this [academic task] is for me" (Brophy, 1999, p. 79).

Research suggests that Black students can develop a positive sense of belonging when the cultural values promoted in schools are compatible with the cultural values that they bring with them to school (Boykin & Ellison, 1995; Dotterer, McHale, & Crouter, 2009; Rouland, Matthews, Meyer, Byrd, & Rowley, 2014). For example, research on a predominantly Black sample of urban adolescents reveals that home-school dissonance is associated with greater academic cheating via amotivation (Brown-Wright et al., 2013).

Black students may perceive that schools support their cultural distinctiveness when educators (a) "counteract alienating ideological knowledge that obstructs the right to be literate in one's own heritage" (J. E. King, 2006, p. 338) and (b) celebrate forms of self-expression, rather than allowing (and/or practicing)

derogation on the basis of students' clothing, speech patterns, and behaviors (Gay, 2000; Hilliard, 2001; Howard, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 1995). These supports are critical, considering that the need for distinctiveness is a basic human motive that exists cross-culturally (Becker et al., 2012; Brewer & Roccas, 2001). Furthermore, when a social group accepts an individual while allowing that individual to express a sense of distinctiveness, the individual can develop a greater sense of psychological membership toward that group (Brewer, 1991). Relative to other high school adolescents, those who are able to "stand out while fitting in" (SOFI) express greater identification with being members of their classrooms and, in turn, perceive academic content as more interesting, important, and useful (Gray, 2017). SOFI is also indirectly associated (via school belonging) with positive achievement emotions, such as more pride and enjoyment as well as less boredom, anxiety, hopelessness, and shame (Gray, 2017).

Consistent with notions of supporting ancestral and communal forms of ethnic belonging, teachers can support students' cultural distinctiveness through curricular experiences. The extent to which students of color have opportunities for cultural distinctiveness likely depends in part on their teachers' content knowledge and cultural competence (Ladson-Billings, 1995) and on the extent to which students perceive their teachers value the intellectual contributions that each student makes to the classroom (J. E. King & Swartz, 2015). From a multicultural education lens, strong support for cultural distinctiveness would also include instructional experiences that expose students to various cultural traditions and that help students understand the "why" behind the actions of historical Black figures (J. E. King & Swartz, 2015), as well as exposure to alternative worldviews and values that empower Black students to question mainstream philosophies (Banks & Banks, 2010; Ford, 2011, 2016).

Opportunity for cultural distinctiveness also has implications for the development of competence motivation. Reeve (2009) asserted that "pressuring students to think, feel, or behave in a specific way" is detrimental to students' motivation, engagement, development, learning, performance, and psychological well-being (p. 160). Black students are often given subtle, and sometimes even overt, cues that they should downplay the very aspects of their culture that make them who they are (Lee & Slaughter-Defoe, 1995). For example, forms of literacy and culture that are embraced among many Black American youth (e.g., speech patterns, fashion, hairstyles, gestures) may not be valued and welcomed in structurally White spaces, such as formal schooling environments (Emdin, 2010; Kirkland & Jackson, 2009). From this perspective, pedagogical practices that fail to leverage students' cultural backgrounds and perspectives can detract from instructional opportunities for belonging.

### Citizenship: An Institutional Opportunity Structure

Schools are more than places where students learn information and develop skills; schools function to socialize individuals into society (Boykin, 2001). Citizenship can be considered in terms of membership in a country or among the many communities found within it. Bogard and Sherrod (2008) described citizenship as a “social contract” wherein individuals are granted rights as a condition of membership and wherein they must fulfill certain responsibilities (e.g., voting, lawfulness). For Black adolescents in the United States, historical and contemporary sociopolitical norms and policies threaten their very citizenship, due in large part to their restricted access to political power and social capital. In the United States, rights granted through the citizenship contract (e.g., freedom of speech) are nebulous at best for Black adolescents, who frequently receive disproportionate levels of punishment for exercising those rights (Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002). Children and adolescents learn about citizenship rights and responsibilities through socialization agents that include family, peers, neighborhoods, media, and schools (Bogard & Sherrod, 2008; Torney-Purta & Amadeo, 2011).

Some scholars posit that schools still function as mirrors of society at large and replicate the sociopolitical inequities therein (Fine et al., 2004). As Carter G. Woodson (1933) proposed in his classic text *The Mis-Education of the Negro*, U.S. schools by design fail to cultivate the agency, strength, and skills of Black Americans, which may therefore be left underdeveloped. There are two primary ways to socialize Black adolescents into society in the United States: One encourages Black adolescents not only to assimilate to the current sociocultural climate but also to adapt to certain policies and practices even though they are clearly racist; the other teaches Black adolescents and their peers that, although racist systems exist and although these systems perpetuate racist interactions among individuals, students can work toward counteracting the effects and can be instilled with values of social justice and change toward attaining equal rights and responsibilities for all citizens. Woodson argued that schools are institutions that function to transform Black Americans into individuals who have assimilated to a culture of Whiteness—a process that is one of the most effective vehicles for justifying the perpetual mistreatment of descendants of the African diaspora. He wrote, “There would be no lynching if it did not start in the schoolroom. Why not exploit, enslave, or exterminate a class that everybody is taught to disregard as inferior?” (p. 2).

Woodson (1933) was writing about the experiences of Black students in the 1930s. Yet his perspective on Black education remains critical for theorizing about opportunities to belong in the present day, as it portrays the socialization role that schools have historically played in the lives of Black students in the United States. For example, Winters’s (2016) melancholic perspective of social progress

underscores this point and describes the salience of Black pain and suffering as disturbing and unsettling. This very salience can prompt some people to purposely disrupt structures that stifle social progress for historically marginalized groups. Winters’s perspective can also be applied to scholarship in education by using the premise that ahistorical educational research on Black students is limited in its capacity to generate substantive discourse on the topics of educational and social progress. Because the historical nature of oppression and disenfranchisement facing Black students would not be properly identified without historical context, the conclusions drawn by such research may perpetuate color-blind research recommendations that do little to address structural inequities in schools and society.

Research suggests that institutional opportunity structures related to citizenship and civic engagement to address injustices within the education system and society at large have a positive impact on belongingness and on competency beliefs and behaviors. For instance, urban Black and Latinx high school students who took part in a youth participatory action research project demonstrated increased academic interest and self-efficacy (Mirra, Morrell, Cain, Scorza, & Ford, 2013). Students conducted research to develop expertise about the conditions of their schools and, in a search for institutional change, presented their research to local politicians. Afterward, students reported increased confidence in their ability to succeed academically as well as a greater sense of agency to create positive change in their schools and community. Consistent with a *Teaching for Freedom* lens (J. E. King & Swartz, 2015), this opportunity for civic learning and participation also can be viewed as an emancipatory practice by which students are able to establish a sense of belonging to their heritage, as well as a sense of empowerment and, as participation centered on students’ histories and knowledge, a sense that they matter.

Youth participatory action research and other civic interventions provide Black students with school-sanctioned opportunities to exercise their citizenship responsibilities and advocate for the needs of their communities. These institutional opportunity structures for belonging are linked with positive student outcomes. For instance, in a study of alienation among high school students, researchers found that opportunities for civic engagement helped students who felt low levels of alienation develop a sense of agency in the classroom and in the community as advocates for higher quality schools (Taines, 2012). The activism training emphasized the value of students’ voices in impacting positive change, which translated for some students into greater feelings of self-efficacy. Students who had higher levels of alienation at the beginning of the program had mixed results, although some did report reduced feelings of alienation.

When schools scaffold curricular and extracurricular opportunities for students to engage with their sociopolitical environment, Black students have the opportunity to see



themselves as valuable members of society, which includes being valued members of the school. These messages about citizenship accomplish several goals, including the following: (a) Schools acknowledge the racially oppressive conditions that Black adolescents face in school and society at large, (b) schools teach students ways to understand some of the root structural causes of racial oppression, and (c) schools teach students how to mobilize with their peers to change those conditions. The relationship between institutional opportunity structures and belonging may also be reciprocal, as an uptake in opportunities to engage in civic practices can be influenced by a sense of belonging (Guillaume, Jagers, & Rivas-Drake, 2015).

### STRATEGIES FOR ASSESSING INSTRUCTIONAL AND INSTITUTIONAL OPPORTUNITY STRUCTURES FOR SCHOOL BELONGING

We now describe specific research directions for a culturally and politically inclusive examination of school belonging that includes instructional and institutional opportunity structures, along with strategies to accomplish this goal (see Table 1). These strategies are informed by culturally sensitive approaches to research on Black Americans (Tillman, 2002), cross-cultural research in motivation (R. B. King & McInerney, 2014), research on race reimagined approaches to educational psychology (DeCuir-Gunby & Schutz, 2014), and recognition that the race-based opportunity structures experienced by Black students today may differ from those that future generations will experience (O'Connor, Lewis, & Mueller, 2007).

#### Strategy 1: Recognize Existing School Policies and Environmental Factors That Could Constrain Suggested School Belonging Reform Efforts

We envision a school-belonging literature base in which scholars address the lack of well-developed contextual constructs and explicitly acknowledge personal biases and acultural assumptions that otherwise masquerade as neutral or objective. We recommend that when researchers design studies, they spend time in schools to understand specific schoolwide and district-wide policies and practices that speak to how cultural and political aspects of schooling affect Black adolescents. Public schools are expected to serve students amidst political pressure, restricted budgets, and local community realities. School administrators often must make difficult decisions on policies and overall school climate that affect all students. Assessing how students of color are positioned in relation to school policies can lead to richer interpretations of institutional opportunity structures that contribute to Black adolescents' perceptions of where at school they expect their belongingness needs to be

fulfilled. Investigative teams that take time to understand and document these policies are better equipped to make practical recommendations to the schools that participate in their research and, more generally, to scholarly discussions on school belonging. This work involves raising critical questions such as, Are some school or district policies contributing to the exclusion of Black adolescents?

Whether school-belonging researchers choose to employ quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methodologies, scholarly outputs (e.g., journal articles, book chapters) should provide a description of both formal and informal school and district policies that contextualize the academic institutions where the research was conducted. These descriptions of the project sites might touch on a range of topics depending on the investigator's study including school policies and practices that exist around school safety, student governance, academic tracking, school discipline, and/or extra-curricular activities and service learning. Ideally, authors would provide more context for readers so they can better interpret the findings for themselves, and can better assess from the descriptions whether the practical recommendations offered could work in their school setting or district. Memos are helpful for this purpose because they guide the systematic documentation of key decisions that drive the design and implementation of school-based interventions. For a detailed account of the memoing process, see Birks, Chapman, and Francis (2008). Common in research approaches that employ grounded theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2008), memos can also help project teams in quantitative studies. In addition, memos can facilitate reflexivity, such as efforts to document how and why researchers are adjusting the scope and direction of their research based on conversations with key stakeholders in the school, new empirical evidence, or other related factors. Just as cross-cultural motivation researchers emphasize the need for reflexivity on theory refinement (R. B. King & McInerney, 2014), memos position researchers to explicate key information about project sites that justify the suitability of theories and methods and how knowledge produced by the study helps address racialized schooling experiences of Black students at partnering schools (Tillman, 2002).

Researchers can use memos to reflect on positionality to explore (a) who they are racially and culturally, (b) who they are relative to the school communities in which they have chosen to intervene, (c) the history of the school community in relationship to university-based research, and (d) how the answers found through these explorations fit within the broader sociopolitical reality of the community in which the school is embedded (see Milner, 2007). Not all researchers have a personal history with communities in which members of historically marginalized groups are present, nor do they possess cultural competence (nor the desire to develop it) to interpret their data in culturally sensitive ways. When researchers are distant from the communities that are represented in their scholarship, the

TABLE 1

Recommended Strategies and Guiding Questions to Critically Assess Instructional and Institutional Opportunity Structures for School Belonging

<i>Research Strategy</i>	<i>Guiding Question</i>
Strategy 1: Recognize existing school policies and environmental factors that could constrain suggested school belonging reform efforts	<p>What types of school policies have intended and/or unintended consequences for the promotion of cultural distinctiveness or citizenship (e.g., class size, length of classroom period, instructional technology, AP course underrepresentation; school discipline policies)?</p> <p>How (if at all) and with whom (if anyone) do administrators talk about supporting Black students' academic, social, and emotional, development? How is this different from how they talk about supporting students of other racial backgrounds? Do administrators encourage and incentivize teachers and coaches to demonstrate effectiveness at supporting Black students' academic, social, and emotional, development?</p> <p>Are Black students' voices and perspectives reflected in school's academic and student affairs policies?</p> <p>What messages do school bulletin boards, hallways, classrooms, and communal spaces (e.g., media centers, maker spaces) say about the opportunities students have to develop their cultural and heritage knowledge at school?</p>
Strategy 2: Identify the conceptual and operational boundaries of instructional and institutional opportunity structures	<p>Are different dimensions of school belonging associated with academic and psychological outcomes in the same way (i.e., positively or negatively), or in the same direction?</p> <p>What student profiles of school belonging emerge when assessing multiple dimensions of this construct, including cultural distinctiveness and citizenship? How do teachers interpret profiles of belonging when data are shared with them? How do dimensions of school belonging function synergistically to impact competence motivation and achievement emotions? Is profile membership somewhat dependent on classroom or teacher assignment? If so, what are the commonalities and distinctions in instruction that exist across these classrooms?</p>
Strategy 3: Develop observational tools that critically assess belongingness opportunity structures as conveyed through classroom discourse	<p>How are educators included in the processes of interpreting observations of their own classroom opportunity structures for belonging? How do students' perceptions of teacher beliefs and practices around citizenship and cultural distinctiveness triangulate with what teachers and observers say about peer-to-peer and teacher-to-student interactions in the classroom?</p> <p>How are observers integrated into the classroom (e.g., multiple observations, classroom visits, interactions with students in a short span of time)?</p> <p>In what ways do educators embed cultural and historical meaning into academic content and structure learning activities to empower [or stifle] students to substantively contribute as citizens?</p> <p>How are deficit- and strengths-based perspectives evident in the way teachers think and talk about Black students in their classes?</p>
Strategy 4: Situate examinations of school belonging opportunity structures within historical contexts	<p>What do administrators and teachers say about societal issues that impact the Black students' self-images? Are they aware? Do they acknowledge these issues?</p> <p>What are the existing local, state, and national affairs that have an impact on the social experiences of Black adolescents in school?</p>

conclusions they draw from their data can be misguided, confusing, or even harmful. This ethical burden rests with the researchers, given that educational opportunities for Black students depend in part on the cultural competence of the academicians who investigate them. The combination of cultural frameworks, time spent within school communities, and critical reflection on positionality is crucial for arriving at culturally sensitive data interpretations and for responsible research reporting. We assert that these research practices help investigators avoid research questions that “amplify minority student failure and deficits” (Harper, 2010, p. 64) and encourage researchers to instead

pursue research questions that advance theory about the belonging and competence motivation of historically marginalized populations.

### Strategy 2: Identify the Conceptual and Operational Boundaries of Instructional and Institutional Opportunity Structures

Conceptually speaking, interpersonal, instructional, and institutional opportunity structures should all be assessed as sources of school belonging and not as measures of the school-belonging construct itself. Researchers are therefore

urged to carefully consider whether items within their social-relational measures provide them with enough precision to assess either opportunity structures or school belonging, rather than assessing both in one measure.

The meaning that investigators assign to school belonging often covers a broad scope (Juvonen, 2006). They also employ measures of school belonging that encompass several social-relational elements and sources. Empirical research suggests that the factor structure of belongingness constructs is multidimensional in nature (Wallace, Ye, & Chhuon, 2012). Above and beyond the contributions of factor-analytic approaches to understanding dimensions of belonging, there are measurement concerns in school-belonging research that have conceptual implications. Because factor analyses are given meaning by researchers and are based on correlations among items, researchers may need to conceptually separate what measurement studies have not.

We offer some examples of measurement complexities that researchers could keep in mind as they introduce constructs designed to assess cultural and political aspects of schooling. Table 2 displays the names and working definitions of 18 belongingness-related constructs we obtained by conducting a forward citation

search of Goodenow (1993) using Thomson Reuters Web of Science database. The working definitions (see Table 2, column 3) describe many related school-belonging constructs, including being connected, respected, cared about, accepted, safe, and included. The superscripts (see Table 2, column 2) identify the content of each associated school-belonging measure.

Items found in measures related to school belonging covered 10 topics, with several topics often found within a single measure. Examples of each topic are as follows: Affect items, such as “I am proud to be a student at my school” (Anderson-Butcher, Amorose, Iachini, & Ball, 2012), reflected the emotions students experienced in school. Competence items, such as “I feel sure about my schoolwork” (Murray & Greenberg, 2000), reflected students’ confidence in their potential to successfully complete their schoolwork. Mattering items, such as “I do not feel like I am important in this school” (Roeser et al., 1996), reflected students’ perceptions that their membership in that classroom or institution was not valued by others. Fairness items, such as “Teachers at this school treat students fairly” (E. M. Anderman, 2002), reflected students’ perceptions of equitable student treatment by adults. Helping items,

TABLE 2  
Summary of Constructs in the School Belonging Literature: 1993–2012

<i>Study</i>	<i>Construct</i>	<i>Working Definition</i>
E. M. Anderman (2002)	School Belonging <sup>AF, FA, SA, SF</sup>	Connectedness with one’s school.
Anderson-Butcher et al. (2012)	School Connectedness <sup>AF, SA</sup>	Relationship with one’s school.
Battistich et al. (2004)	Sense of Community: School Supportiveness <sup>HE, MA, SA</sup>	Feeling respected, valued, and cared about by others at school.
R. A. Brown, Leigh, and Barton (2000)	School Connection: Commitment <sup>AU, SA</sup>	Socioemotional ties with school.
Godfrey et al. (2012)	Safe, Inclusive, Respectful Climate <sup>FA, HE, MA, SF</sup>	Perceptions of school as safe, inclusive, and respectful for students.
Goodenow (1993)	Belonging or Psychological Membership in Classroom or School <sup>AF, AU, CO, FA, MA, SI</sup>	Acceptance, respect, inclusion, and support by others at school.
Henry, Swaim, and Slater (2005)	School Bonding <sup>AF, SA</sup>	Commitment to conventional academic and social endeavors at school.
Hill and Werner (2006)	School Attachment <sup>AF, SF</sup>	School-related affect.
Linnakyla and Malin (2008)	Peer Acceptance and School Belonging <sup>SA, SI</sup>	Acceptance and support from peers and teachers at school.
Murray and Greenberg (2000)	School Bonding <sup>AF, CO, RE, SF</sup>	Feeling safe and comfortable in school environments.
Nasir, Jones, and McLaughlin (2011)	School Connectedness: Interpersonal Connection <sup>MA, SA</sup>	Attitudinal bond between individuals and their school and broader social contexts.
Roeser et al. (1996)	Relatedness: School Belonging <sup>CO, ET</sup>	Perceptions of the interpersonal aspects of the schooling environment.
Rosenthal, London, Levy, and Lobel (2011)	School Belonging in STEM Major <sup>MA, SA, SI</sup>	Fit between being female and attending school as a STEM major.
Smerdon (2002)	School Membership <sup>MA, RE, SA, SI</sup>	Interpretations of in-school relationships, commitment to academic work, commitment to one’s school.
Summers and Svinicki (2007)	Classroom Community <sup>SA, SI</sup>	Feelings of connectedness in the classroom.
Sung and Yang (2008)	Students’ Supportive Attitudes <sup>AF, IM</sup>	Attachment and loyalty to one’s school.
Vieno, Perkins, Smith, and Santinello (2005)	Sense of Community <sup>AF, HE, AU</sup>	Psychological aspects of social settings and groups in school that satisfy affiliation needs.
Voelkl (1996)	Identification with School: Belonging <sup>AF, MA, IM</sup>	Accepted, respected, and included in school.

*Note.* Superscripts denote the topics assessed by the survey items in each of the measures. AF = affect; AU = authenticity; CO = competence; FA = fairness; HE = helping; IM = importance; MA = mattering; SF = safety; SI = similarity; SA = social attachment; STEM = science, technology, engineering and math.

such as “When I’m having a problem, some other student at this school will try to help me” (Battistich, Schaps, & Wilson, 2004), reflected students’ perceptions of social interdependence within their schooling environment. Importance items, such as “School is a waste of time” (Voelkl, 1996), reflected students’ perceptions about the value of attending school. Safety items, such as “I feel safe in my school” (E. M. Anderman, 2002), reflected students’ perceptions of school as a place where they were free from being harmed. Similarity items, such as “Students think of me as not fitting in with any group” (Smerdon, 2002), reflected students’ perceptions of commonalities between themselves and others in their school. Social Attachment items, such as “I’ve made friends in this class” (Summers & Svinicki, 2007), reflected students’ perceptions of interpersonal bonds with other individuals in their classroom or institution. Authenticity items, such as “I can really be myself at this school” (Goodenow, 1993), reflected students’ perceptions that they perceived their school to be a place where they did not have to act fake in order to feel a sense of inclusion. As this analysis and previous analyses of school-belonging measures suggest (e.g., Libbey, 2004), the school-belonging literature can be conceptually murky and very difficult to navigate. For this reason, we urge scholars to be diligent about conceptualizing instructional and institutional opportunity structures as conceptually distinct from school belonging itself.

Current scholarship at the intersection of educational and developmental psychology provides illustrations of ways instructional and institutional opportunity structures may be assessed. For example, Byrd’s (2017) School Climate for Diversity–Secondary Scale includes a measure of cultural socialization, which is conceptually similar to support for cultural distinctiveness. This measure includes items such as “At your school, you have chances to learn about the history and traditions of your culture” (p. 710, Table 1). Another example comes from the civic socialization component of the Youth Civic Character Measures Toolkit (Syvertsen, Wray-Lake, & Metzger, 2015). Dimensions of civic socialization in schools include measures of Teachers’ Civic Modeling (e.g., “My teachers take action when they see others being treated unfairly”) and Teachers’ Sociopolitical Discussions (e.g., “In my classes we talk about problems facing our community”). Important to note, these items should continue to be empirically assessed as items in measures that predict school belonging, rather than as “indicators” in measures of school belonging. In quantitative investigations, this would mean that instructional and institutional opportunity structures could be empirically assessed in addition to measures of school belonging, just as goal structures and achievement goal orientations are conceptualized as distinct

constructs in achievement goal theory research (Ames, 1992).

### Strategy 3: Develop Observational Tools That Critically Assess Belongingness Opportunity Structures as Conveyed Through Classroom Discourse

Racial discourse can be leveraged as a pedagogical tool for promoting feelings of acceptance, respect, inclusion, and support within classroom contexts. Critical race theorists often view classrooms and schools in the United States as racialized contexts (DeCuir & Dixon, 2004) because they are embedded within a larger society that perpetuates racial injustice through their social, political, and economic structures (Bell, 1992). Instructional and institutional barriers may exist that influence the culture of the classroom and school, and thus suppress students’ belonging in myriad ways that are not easily captured by self-report measures.

Researchers therefore should develop observational protocols that document how teachers create supportive opportunities for cultural distinctiveness among Black students, as well as protocols that assess students’ uptake of these opportunities. Multidimensional state-space grids are observational tools that can be used to assess students’ uptake of teachers’ provision of instructional practices that are intended to support students’ belongingness needs. For example, Turner, Christensen, Kackar-Cam, Trucano, and Fulmer (2014) developed an observation protocol to document the dynamic interplay between middle school teachers’ pedagogical practices and students’ behavioral engagement. Specifically, they observed teachers four times each year for 3 years. Each observation was videotaped, but observers coded teachers’ instructional behaviors in real time using a two-dimensional grid. Teacher motivational support was represented on the *y*-axis, and student behavioral engagement was represented on the *x*-axis, each ranging from 0 (*none*) to 3 (*high quality*). “Support for belongingness” was among the observation categories for motivational support; it was operationalized and coded in terms of teachers’ respectfulness toward students and opportunities for collaboration. This methodology can be used to assess instructional school-belonging opportunity structures such as the extent to which teachers emphasize emancipatory pedagogical principles like communal responsibility and reclamation of heritage (J. E. King & Swartz, 2015). Investigations such as these could extend our understanding of the ways that students respond to teachers over time as teachers reflect on and improve their efforts to dignify, stimulate, celebrate, and tap into the value of Black students in their classrooms. Moreover, teacher-focused school-belonging intervention studies involving a high number of professional development contact hours would be ideal for investigating the role that school–university partnerships play over time in the

development of instructional and institutional belongingness opportunity structures for students of color.

#### Strategy 4: Situate Examinations of School Belonging Opportunity Structures Within Historical Contexts

Another opportunity for school-belonging research is to provide greater insight into how historic events impact Black adolescents' perceptions of fit within academic spaces. Historic events affect communities, the schools embedded in those communities, and the individuals who attend and work at those schools. In line with a situative approach to studying motivation (Nolen, Horn, & Ward, 2015), we argue that taking an ecological view of schools also involves documenting historic events that shape the way Black adolescents perceive and interpret their social encounters in and around schools. For example, the election of the 44th president, Barack Obama, a Black biracial man, influenced the way Blacks were socialized by family, community members, and the media regarding what it meant to be Black in the United States and the social progress that Blacks were capable of making in U.S. society (Winters, 2016). Educators also had a new point of leverage when discussing issues related to scholastic achievement and race, and they could use the example of that moment in time to help students develop new future possible selves. Research in science education supports this assertion. During his time in office, specific aspects of President Obama's racial and hip-hop identity could be leveraged as points of conversation within science lessons; in turn, Black adolescents were able to belong to, and value, science, technology, engineering and math subjects (Emdin & Lee, 2012).

The 2008 election of Barack Obama represents a positive example of how historic events can shape Black adolescents' experiences at school and beyond; but Black adolescents also can be shaped by historic events that are both tragic and traumatic. The current level of racial tension in the United States may lead Black adolescents to question the value society places on Black lives. Police shootings of Black people, Black Lives Matter demonstrations, and gentrification are all sociopolitical factors that affect Black adolescents' outlooks in the here and now. The countless reminders of these societal issues via social and traditional media make these matters difficult to overlook. For example, the 2017 uprisings of White supremacist demonstrations over retaining confederate memorials and monuments, and President Donald Trump's defense of them, has increased public awareness surrounding what these confederate symbols have and still represent to many people of color. Relatedly, nearly 200 schools are named for confederate and White supremacist icons such as Robert E. Lee (E. Brown, 2015), a 19th-century confederate general who staunchly advocated for brutality against Blacks. Whereas teachers at these schools may sincerely desire to create a sense of belonging for all their students, having to

attend a U.S. school that memorializes White supremacy sends an equally, if not more powerful, negative message to Black students in these schools about their lack of belonging in school and in society. To many people, these school names seem just as problematic as confederate statues because both are "exemplary of racial tension and supremacy and hatred and violence and a racial history that has yet to be reconciled, and that still shapes American policy and politics" (Wesley, 2017).

Future research on school belonging among Black adolescents must consider local, state, and national events and policies specific to race, politics, and social justice. Researchers who take time to understand historic events can situate their research questions and findings (and even their operationalization of motivation and school belonging) temporally. Sociocultural and historic events such as political rhetoric, election cycles, job prospects, changes in neighborhood demographics, and public health concerns (e.g., the contaminated water crisis in Flint, Michigan) affect how schools function and affirm the people who occupy them. A fuller understanding of school-belonging opportunity structures therefore requires that investigators actively "resist the tendency to depoliticize the situated nature of learning and withstand the inclination to ignore the always-present historical and ideological dynamics and contexts" (The Politics of Learning Writing Collective, 2017, p. 95). Documenting the way that schools respond to and symbolize historic and contemporary societal issues can be critical for understanding how Black adolescents establish continuity between scholastic and racial identities in achievement settings, which in turn can help researchers contextualize how different generations of Black adolescents make sense of the institutional opportunities they have for belonging in schools and the societies in which their schools are located.

## CONCLUSION

Educational psychology research, inclusive of school belonging, typically suggests that motivation is perceptual rather than structural (Hickey, 2003; Zusho & Clayton, 2011). By presenting a broader perspective on sources of school belonging encompassing interpersonal, instructional, and institutional opportunity structures, we outline research pathways for investigating structural aspects of school reform (e.g., quality instruction, comprehensive academic curricula, school policies) that are not addressed by brief social-psychological interventions in education (Yeager & Walton, 2011). Culturally sensitive school-based research approaches that assess students' racialized encounters with school policies and curricula remain marginalized within the scope of competence motivation research in general (Byrd, 2015; DeCuir-Gunby & Schutz, 2014; Williams, Woodson, & Wallace, 2016), and more specifically in research that assesses

students' opportunity structures for school belonging. By attending to the race-based theoretical perspectives, constructs, and research strategies outlined in this article, researchers can contribute to the school-belonging literature base through a systematic consideration of cultural and political dimensions of academic environments. It is our hope that the ideas discussed herein will lead psychologist to consider new ways of reducing psychological and structural barriers to the educational and social progress of Black students who are embedded within U.S. classrooms, schools, districts, and communities.

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