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The #OptOut Movement and Decoloniality in Education: Youth Sense-making, Social Media Representations, and Moving Beyond Colonial Knowledge Towards Unbridled Utopia

By

Bryce Larkin Chessell Becker

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Education

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Kris D. Gutiérrez, Chair
Professor P. David Pearson
Professor Minoo Moallem

Spring 2021

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Abstract

The #OptOut Movement and Decoloniality in Education:
Youth Sense-making, Social Media Representations, and Moving Beyond Colonial Knowledge Towards Unbridled Utopia
by

Bryce Larkin Chessell Becker

Doctor of Philosophy in Education

University of California, Berkeley

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In this three-article dissertation, I expand how scholars understand the opt-out movement against statewide testing in the United States and offer a framework for reorganizing learning ecologies outside a testing paradigm. Framed by the ways that knowledge is defined, divided, categorized, and standardized within a system that seeks to hierarchically sort people, I understand statewide testing to be an everyday instantiation of coloniality within education. I thus explore the ways in which the opt-out movement might be viewed as a decolonial attempt, with knowledge claims being tied to claims of humanity, and importantly, rights (including land rights). In the first article, I examine how youth grapple with their own relationships to statewide testing, using an online discussion board, Reddit. I frame their sense-making using the framework of historical action to better understand their nuanced discursive moves. In the second article, I highlight how a subgroup of opt-out participants used public social media posts to vocalize their motives in the movement, centering on themes of race, inequity, civil disobedience, and knowledge subordination, and contextualizing statewide testing within its sordid history. I relate these motives to the agenda of coloniality and how these motives within the movement might indicate a move toward decolonizing knowledge within the K–12 education system. In my final article, I offer the learning as movement framework as a utopian design approach for the literacy learning sciences and an alternate to knowledge standardization. I explore how designing learning ecologies that view learning as movement aligns with the work of decolonial scholars who call for us to re-signify meaning and identity to work towards alternate epistemic futures.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

In the late hours of December 2, 2020, I was dreaming about my dissertation, like any doctoral candidate consumed by anxiety. In my dream, I was explaining to a friend what I meant by saying that knowledge is colonized—that there are different forms of knowledge that are accepted as such, and forms that are instead subordinated in order to maintain power hierarchies. In this dream, I used my hometown, Silverado, California, as an example. I told my friend that in the rampant southern California wildfires in 2007, what we call science said that my rural canyon street should have burned down. The hurricane-strength Santa Ana winds, the steep slopes, the vegetation, and the extreme dry conditions all said that my one-way street and its homes, nestled into the steep hillsides, should have burned. Yet, the Indigenous knowledge of the area, that of the Acjachemen people, held that the canyon was protected from wildfire.[1] Neighbors who stayed behind said that over and over again during the two-week mandatory evacuation, the flames came to the edge of our ridge and then receded. It defied "logic." In the end, the Indigenous knowledge prevailed. The fire did not break the crest and our homes, along with the yucca and ancient oak trees dotting the slopes, remained standing.

When I woke from my dreams on the morning of December 3, my phone was flashing with emergency alerts and texts from my mother, telling me that there was another fire in Silverado. My mom had evacuated to the suburbs "down the hill," as we say. Something in my body had known that night. Though I was 425 miles away in the Bay Area, my corporal knowledge was linked to the trauma ravaging Silverado and entered my dreams—another epistemic feat, defying what science and logic say are possible. As I write these words, I look out at the charred hillsides. This time, the fire—which started as a house fire not a wildfire—did sweep across the canyon. It surrounded my crevice of a street from three sides, coming within inches of our homes. The street is now abuzz as neighbors fortify their homes against looming mudslides and debris flows, and I wonder at the ways that we come to know, the ways that we are socialized and acculturated into forms of being, and how some forms are institutionalized while others are subordinated. How do we form communities of knowledge, learning, and practice? How do we blend our ways of knowing to shape our daily lives in ways that respect multiple epistemologies? How do we understand the natural world, and how do we decide what knowledge is important for our everyday lives and the lives—the heartbeats—of our communities?

As I have worked side by side with neighbors, during the COVID-19 pandemic, it has been striking how many forms of knowledge have come together to save our street and our canyon. There's the middle-aged canyon-kid-turned-fire-restoration expert who Zoomed in from wine country for a community meeting on mudslide prevention. There's Team Rubicon, a group of veterans who mobilize their skills at strategizing and their physical prowess to do local disaster relief. There are construction professionals raised in the canyon building rock walls and plywood reinforcements. Volunteer firefighters, teachers, hikers, and mountain bikers are pooling their knowledge of the local trails, the soil, the aftermath of ash, local wind and watershed patterns, and the local ecology. There are those who stayed in the canyons and those,

[1] I should note that this is what white settlers in Silverado say today, mostly erasing the name of the Acjachemen people when they tell it, raising some questions about how local knowledge was colonized here. I am in conversation with the Acjachemen Nation to better understand this piece of knowledge. They traditionally practiced controlled burns in the canyon area depending on conditions.

like me, who left to pursue a highly institutionalized education. Yet, we each hold a local knowledge of the hillsides, the vegetation, the way the soil moves beneath your feet, the way the rain trickles down the hillsides to form torrents that force boulders to tumble thunderously down the creek. There is local historical knowledge of what happened in the 2010 mudslides that followed the 2007 fire damage. There are official measurements of watershed and how much burned then (5%) versus how much burned this time (nearly 100%). I am thinking about the way that our collective knowledge moves together across experiences, localities, educations, professions, corporal memory of past fire and mudslide trauma, and adapted instincts. I am thinking of the ways that some of this knowledge, like percentages, is taught in schools, and how much of it is not. What do we teach, and how do we teach children to listen to or to suppress, ignore, or demonize their local ways of knowing? At what cost? How do we standardize what is to be learned across disparate localities to district, county, state, and federal levels? And I am thinking about how these ways of knowing represent literacies and the movement of learning with us across our everyday lives and spaces. These are the themes that flow through my dissertation.

Paper Organization

In this three-article dissertation, I focus on the ways in which dominant beliefs about literacy and what is official knowledge in school are permeated by ideologies founded in coloniality. These ideologies serve to uphold and justify the power structures introduced in coloniality. As the arbiter of what counts as legitimate and necessary knowledge within the nation-state, our educational institutions are complicit in this reproduction. One heavily employed tool to do so is statewide testing, in which students are measured against mandated standards. In my research, I investigate the opt-out movement against annual statewide testing, in which parents and guardians choose not to have their children participate in the testing. I explore how participants have framed their motives for opting out on public social media posts across the United States, considering whether it represents any decolonial option in pushing against these ideologies of standardized literacy and knowledge more broadly.

My work spans from digital social media ethnography to theoretical expansion. In my first paper, I present an empirical study examining how youth considered the opt-out movement and contested the role of statewide testing in their lives as students using the digital discussion board and news aggregation platform Reddit. I consider how they present their thinking about opt-out and apply the four indicia (or indicators) of becoming a historical actor (Gutiérrez, Becker et al., 2019) as an analytic framework to understand how they engaged with peers as they made sense of the role of testing in their lives and the possibility of opting out. I analyze how their engagement represents their development as potential historical actors against standardized knowledge as represented by statewide testing.

In the second paper, I present the findings from my empirical work looking more broadly at how the opt-out movement was represented in public social media posts. Opt-out has been publicly criticized as an elite white movement, but this fallacy ultimately serves to suppress certain voices within the movement (see e.g., Hagopian, 2014; Quinlan, 2016). I specifically consider whether there was a subgroup within the movement that sought to publicly engage on social media to promote it as a decolonial option within a colonial education system. This research has implications for how we frame movements publicly if we want to promote decolonial motives, particularly as social media activism grows increasingly relevant.

In my final paper, I present theoretical considerations, looking at relationships amongst

literacy, learning as movement, utopian methodology, and decoloniality. I promote a utopian methodology with a learning as movement frame to understand literacy as it happens and to foster literacy learning ecologies that allow the expansive space to challenge the ways that coloniality has constrained literacy. Understanding standardized testing to be a way that we regulate literacy and border linguistic epistemologies, I offer a way to reframe literacy across theory, research, policy, and practice. Taken together, I have aimed in my work to examine how a specific movement within the U.S. education system has the potential to contest colonial ways of constraining being and knowing, and to offer theoretical insights into how we can instead sustain movement in our learning spaces.

Theoretical Framework

Throughout my dissertation and each of the following three papers, I am informed by theory on coloniality, how it shapes education and constrains students from subalterned backgrounds, and how it is institutionalized through everyday practices. I also take a proleptic orientation toward the future, understanding that coloniality relies on us naturalizing the idea that the colonial organization of knowing and being is the natural order of things—on imagining no future outside of its frame. Thus, an orientation toward utopia is a necessary goal of decoloniality, organizing always towards an alternate reality. I expand upon these specific bodies of literature within each paper but offer a brief exploration here.

Coloniality and education. *Coloniality* refers to the set of structures and ideologies that were used to justify and uphold initial colonial occupation, but that continue to regulate everyday ways of being and knowing today. That is, coloniality is present and ongoing with structures that continue to colonize lands and their people today (e.g., Chase, 2020; Grande, 2004; Mignolo, 2000; Tuck & Yang, 2014a). In contexts like the United States, where non-Indigenous people still occupy the unceded land of forcefully displaced Indigenous peoples, coloniality undergirds and ensures the everyday project of settler colonization. Coloniality can be understood through the way that it organizes humanity and power hierarchically through subordination and domination. It maintains control through bordered understandings of being (Tlostanova & Mignolo, 2009), defining humanity based on race, gender, ability, and other social constructs, invested inherently in control, oppression, and hierarchy. Tlostanova and Mignolo (2009) further describe how coloniality relies on a "matrix of power" that exerts control over four realms: the economy, public discourse, authority, and knowledge and subjectivity. It maintains control over this last category "through education and [by] colonizing the existing knowledges" (p. 135).

Knowledge is institutionalized in schools and regulated through specific practices that control what counts as true knowledge, what is passed on to children, and what is deemed necessary to be a productive and worthy citizen subject of the nation-state (Mignolo, 2000; Tlostanova & Mignolo, 2009). The history of coloniality within the U.S. education system is well documented, particularly in the sordid history of compulsory and prohibited education of Indigenous and Black children (e.g., DuFresne, 2018; Grande, 2004; Span, 2009). Yet, coloniality in education is not relegated to the past; it continues to pervade the education system in pernicious and conniving ways. For example, statewide testing institutionalizes colonial definitions of what constitutes knowledge, science, and truth, centering always white knowledge and ideas of the standard. Consider, for example, the emphasis on "standard" English, which encodes one variation of English as the proper and appropriate form and is bolstered by racialized ideologies that imagine non-white bodies as incapable of producing it (see e.g., Flores,

2016; Flores & Rosa, 2016; Lippi-Green, 2012; Rosa, 2016; Silverstein, 1995). Although statewide tests are used in the name of ensuring that all students are educated equally, they have always been designed to do the opposite—to hierarchically sort students into those who have and those who do not, the proficient and improficient, those with merit and those without. Historically, standardized tests were introduced in schools to justify why students of color were tracked into lower tiers that fed into lower-status jobs (see e.g., Dixon-Román & Gergen, 2013; DuFresne, 2018; Oakes, 2005). Today, statewide testing is used to measure students against learning standards (as described in Background below). Yet, these standards are built upon ideas about which skills are normative, natural, and necessary to become a productive subject of the nation-state. In this way, standardized testing can be understood as a specific tool used to regulate which forms of knowledge are institutionally maintained, promoted, and validated. Likewise, learning standards can be understood as an example of *global design* (Mignolo, 2000) within education, deeming some knowledge to be universally important and natural, while erasing local knowledges and histories.

Global design. With the concept of global design, Mignolo (2000) explains how certain sets of ideologies have impacted life on a global scale at the cost of local experiences and epistemologies. These ideologies are taken up as though they are natural and universal, yet they too once originated locally. As he explains, colonial modernity is a global design rooted in the Enlightenment, when certain ideas about mobility, development, progress, the nation-state, and citizenship took hold. Coloniality, modernity, and the nation-state are enmeshed because only colonized nation-states are deemed modern. The structures of coloniality are used to justify mass oppression and subordination of certain people in the name of progress and the good of the state. Control of knowledge is integral to this: because knowledge (and language—both a form of knowledge and our means of communicating knowledge) are fundamental to our definition of what it means to be human, mass oppression is justified through an entrenched belief that those people who are harmed lack fundamental human capacities. Thus, the nation-state has a vested interest in controlling what counts as knowledge for its own vitality, subalterning local epistemologies in favor of global, modern understandings of the scientific, valid, standard, and secular (Mignolo, 2000).

Decoloniality and movement towards utopia. Thus, to act decolonially is to work to undo those ways of being and knowing that have been naturalized as global design. Decoloniality within education calls us to reject the forms of knowledge that have been institutionalized in order to continuously maintain settler colonial power (e.g., Chase, 2020; Coulthard, 2014; Grande, 2004), along with those everyday practices that are used to codify and instantiate it. Entrenched in colonial ways of knowing is also a focus on the individual, a focus that is promoted in a testing culture where individual scores and proficiency levels are emphasized and imply merit as nation-state subjects. Many decolonial scholars have thus emphasized alternative ways of knowing that center communal, ancestral, maternal, corporal, and spiritual forms (see e.g., Anzaldúa, 2007; Falcón, 2016; Lugones, 2010; Sandoval, 2000; Tlostanova & Mignolo, 2012; Tlostanova, Thapar-Björkert, & Koobak, 2016). These are collective ways of understanding, seeing, and doing that reject the bordered organization of life and instead envision life and knowledge in fluid motion, signified on local and lived terms (e.g., Sandoval, 2000; Terrefe, 2020). In this way, such scholars have called for a rejection of coloniality that reorganizes toward the local and values collaborative ways of learning and being.

This decolonial orientation toward the future is the proleptic lens that informs a learning-as-movement utopian approach toward the literacy learning sciences, as put forth in Paper 3.

Background

Thus, understanding statewide testing as one everyday instantiation of coloniality, I explore the opt-out movement as a movement that contests and rejects its naturalization as a necessary tool within the education system. The opt-out movement is a grassroots movement against statewide testing in schools, in which parents and guardians refuse to have their children participate in the testing. Largely considered a parent-led movement, it is also supported by many teachers, scholars and independent education advocacy groups, and is often typified as a response to the adoption of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS; Wang, 2017). The CCSS are the highly contested set of learning standards implemented across states in order to uphold what was then No Child Left Behind (now the Every Student Succeeds Act [ESSA], 2015). The CCSS were promoted as a means of ensuring that all students received equal education nationwide, and annual statewide tests were mandated to test against yearly progress towards these standards.

Opt-out is a federally protected right, (which I explore further in the Conclusion). The ESSA (2015) requires schools to report testing results for 95% of students in order to achieve state-defined Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) toward learning standards, and to avoid penalties through reduced funding. Lower reporting rates can result in reduced Title I funding (U.S. Department of Education, 2004, 2009), which are federal funds reserved for schools serving high-poverty populations (U.S. Department of Education, 2004, U.S. Legal, n.d.). If schools do not meet AYP, they have less flexibility with how their Title I funding can be applied, and after three years, it may be cut. However, states can decide whether or not to penalize non-Title I schools and how. Because these tests have direct implications for funding, they have been tied to several controversial trends within schools. For example, districts have used test results to evaluate and eliminate teachers whose students have low scores, and, in turn, have proliferated a "teaching-to-the-test" culture that detracts from meaningful classroom learning (e.g., Clayton, Bingham, & Ecks, 2019; Pizmony-Levy & Saraisky, 2016). Thus, opt-out is often typified as a protest against over-reliance on standardized assessments as an accountability tool and against the time that they take away from classroom teaching (Wang, 2017).

Scholars thus far have explored the social networking involved in the opt-out movement in New York (Wang, 2017), and maternal influence on the movement and its contestation of neoliberalism in Florida (Schroeder, Currin, & McCardle, 2018). Further, Mitra, Mann, and Hlavacik (2016) typified how the movement functioned to open up contested spaces in policy. Many of these previously studied structures and ideologies are based in coloniality, though they were not examined explicitly as such. For example, the gender and patriarchy that Schroeder et al. (2018) explored stem from the way that coloniality of being has denied full personhood to those who fall outside the categories of cis hetero man (e.g., Lugones, 2010; Tlostanova & Mignolo, 2012). Yet, scholars have thus far have not explored the movement's decolonial potential on public social media nationwide. Nor have they typified youths' own engagement with digital space in sense-making around the movement as they contemplate their own power to act upon their educations. This is where I enter the conversation. In what follows, I analyzed how the movement was represented publicly on social media platforms, and nationwide, in relation to coloniality, and how youth positioned themselves in their own contestation of statewide testing. In particular, social media (1) has a unique ability to challenge time and space conceptions,

which are bound by settler colonial modernity (e.g., Chase, 2020; O'Brien, 2010); and (2) is increasingly relevant in organizing resistance movements today. With this research, I aimed to understand whether the movement was framed decolonially and how it might function towards such ends. I further aimed to complicate common understanding of the opt-out movement, which has been popularly framed as white (see Clayton et al., 2019; Hairston, 2017; Pizmony-Levy & Saraisky, 2016; Quinlan, 2016; Wang, 2017). However, framing the movement as white erases crucial work by parents, teachers and scholars of color, and their co-conspirators (Packnett Cunningham, 2020; e.g., DuFresne, 2018; Hagopian, 2014) and obscures the reasons that motivate their advocacy within the movement (a potentially colonizing move in itself). Finally, in Paper 3, I offer a response to the constraining hierarchical and bound knowledge structures of coloniality and a call to decolonial practice. I extend my research by presenting a theoretical framework that invites literacy learning scientists in particular to imagine and design learning ecologies that allow for movement beyond the bordering logic that runs through testing and toward utopian futures.

Method

While in Paper 3 I offer a theoretical extension, in Papers 1 and 2, I present two sets of findings from my empirical digital social media ethnography (Postill & Pink, 2012; Varis, 2014). Digital space is ever evolving. As such, so must the research tools that we employ to understand them. To develop a set of methods appropriate for my study, I drew on the digital humanities (explored below) to understand how digital space is created and mediated; and multimodal critical discourse studies (Machin, 2013; van Leeuwen, 2013) to understand the affordances of the many discursive modes offered on social media platforms — such as image, text, and video –– and how power is imbued in, reproduced, and/or challenged through these discourses. I describe this in greater detail in Paper 2.

Decolonial digital humanities. I bridge decolonial theory with the digital humanities (see Risam, 2018) as a school of thought that explores the non-physical spaces of the digital world, how they come into contact with our physical spaces, and how they both (1) open new possibilities for participation and (2) are constrained by the power structures in which they are created. Digital space is sometimes imagined to be more boundless than physical space but is nevertheless (1) formed and occupied within colonized nation-states and (2) influenced by coloniality through the same bordered colonial epistemologies of those creating digital space and those acting in it. As Jenkins (2016) argues, organizing online bridges the digital and physical world; whereas some imagine these worlds to be separate, the digital space is used to impact physical space. Social media can be used to facilitate planning, share tactics, and share their participation (p. 19). In many ways, it operates under the assumptions of the imagined community, a concept developed by Anderson (1983/2006) to describe the rise of nationalism in nation-state formation. Here, social media users create imagined communities when they organize online because users are creating a community with people they will often never know but whom they imagine are out there sharing a common interest. Social media's participation culture has the idealized affordance of "forg[ing] a collective voice and efficacy through larger networks that work together to bring about change" (Jenkins, 2016, p. 41). However, political and civic participation via social media can be critiqued because the platforms themselves are run by corporations that control the degree to which people can participate and shape the spaces they are in, and by what means—that is, which semiotic resources (such as text, image, video,

audio, or hyperlinks) do they allow the user (Jewitt, 2013, 2016; Machin, 2013)? Therefore, I apply a decolonial lens to the digital humanities, understanding both the possibilities and constraints of digital space.

Case for posts over human subjects. Decolonial scholars also influenced my decision to consider only public social media posts rather than including human subjects. In particular, I am informed by the work of Tuck and Yang (2014) and Patel (2015). As a white scholar not of the opt-out community, it was important that I not ask BIPOC and nondominant groups in the opt-out community to invest labor in my research or share knowledge with me at no tangible gain to them. Within the colonial institution, researchers often gain off of the communities that they research, even while claiming to do work to improve the lives of the community, which ultimately perpetuates power structures. This is especially dangerous in the field of education where academics seek to create new knowledge about knowledge itself, yet as soon as we take someone's knowledge and put it into the academy, it becomes knowledge that only certain people have access to (e.g., hooks, 1994; Mignolo, 2000; Tlostanova & Mignolo, 2012; Tuck & Gaztambide-Fernández, 2013; Tuck & Yang, 2014a). Therefore, I used public data—work that was already put in for a collective movement and intended to be public—and studied a movement rather than people. I refuse to study people and instead hold space for people to tell their own stories (if they want to) (Tuck & Yang, 2014a). I study statewide testing as an everyday "enactment of settler colonialism" (p. 814), examining "the relationships between people and institutions of power" (p. 815) as they contest the constraints of knowledge standardization. There are, however, points of tension in this decision and the level to which I can claim that my attempts at decoloniality were successful, which I return to in the Conclusion.

Data collection. I collected data over a period of 13 months, including public social media posts from the Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, and Reddit platforms. I began with hand searches of Facebook, Instagram and Reddit, and a script to scrape Twitter. I used relevant hashtags (described below) and, in the case of Reddit, keywords, as this platform does not primarily aggregate relevant posts using hashtags. However, I shifted my collection for Instagram and Twitter when the COVID-19 pandemic hit. Because the pandemic shut down U.S. schools, testing did not occur once the pandemic hit. Thus, the comments about opt-out on social media dwindled. This forced me to shift my research to more historical data. Twitter only allows scraping for the past seven days; more historical data is only available for purchase at an untenable cost. Thus, I had to shift my Twitter collection to a hand search as well. To account for this lost time, I purchased my remaining Instagram data from a company called Picodash, which offers its services at a much lower cost. Therefore, my data collection on Twitter and Instagram combined both hand searches and data scraping. The data here included public social media posts from August 2015 to the spring of 2020, spanning five years of the opt-out movement.

I selected hashtags that were popular in the opt-out movement and based on the current literature (e.g., Wang, 2017). These included, for example, #OptOut, #MoreThanAScore, #TestingIsSoGreen, #UnitedOptOut. As I did so, I also used snowballing and triangulation techniques (Gerlitz & Rieder, 2013) to expand my search with co-occurring hashtags. Hashtags serve to aggregate posts about the same topic for social media users; it is common to use multiple hashtags in one post to gain greater visibility. Thus, if I collected a post after searching #MoreThanAScore, for example, and that post also used the hashtag #RefuseTheTest, I added #RefuseTheTest to my search on all platforms. I did this until I reached saturation (Creswell,

2013; Small, 2009).

I first screened out posts that were not relevant to the testing opt-out movement at all. For example, #OptOut yields posts about testing opt-out, but also other movements encouraging people to opt out of e.g., Black Friday shopping, spam mail, or coal-based energy. #notesting is commonly used in posts against testing cosmetics on animals and now also COVID-19 testing. In the second round of screening, I removed posts that were critical of the CCSS or testing, but that did not indicate that they had actually opted out of testing or that were relevant to other testing (e.g., the SATs). Finally, coding allowed me to focus on the specific subgroup of opt-out activists that I was interested in given my decolonial lens. Though the nature of hand searches on these platforms makes screening numbers unattainable, from the Instagram data that I purchased alone, I screened 20,961 posts for those relevant to the opt-out movement; this gives some sense of the magnitude of the data screening and collection process.

Data coding and analysis. All together, I coded visual and textual data from 241 posts, using the MAXQDA12 software (VERBI Software, 2018). I describe my specific coding processes in greater detail in Papers 1 and 2. Briefly, I developed two codebooks by combining a priori codes based on the opt-out literature and my theoretical frameworks (i.e., the indicia of historical action in Paper 1 and decoloniality in both) with in vivo codes using language from the posts themselves (Creswell, 2013). After coding each post, I reviewed each coded segment to assure that I applied codes consistently and to identify any overlap or relationships amongst codes. From there, I collapsed my coding system and organized them into parent, child, and grandchild codes. Posts ranged from the seemingly superfluous to the deeply contemplative, and from conservative MAGA supporters to racial equality activists. In my research, I was interested in (1) how youth were made sense of their relationships to statewide testing and positioned themselves as historical actors (Gutiérrez, Becker et al., 2019), and (2) how themes related to decoloniality arose in the opt-out movement's discourse as represented publicly on social media. Therefore, I specifically focused on codes that related to these aims. Papers 1 and 2 present exemplars (Bezemer & Jewitt, 2010) based on these analyses.

A Final Note

In this three-article dissertation, I apply decolonial theory to consider the opt-out movement, where it has gone via social media discourse, and whether it represents a decolonial move within a deeply colonial education system. I offer, too, a framework for what lies beyond opt-out, to design ecologies that foster learning and knowledge aligned with a decolonial perspective rather than the constrained notions of learning that a testing culture perpetuates. Yet, I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge the harm of applying decoloniality as a metaphor rather than a real call to return land to Indigenous communities (Tuck & Yang, 2012). I offer this work not to detract from this call, but because I believe that there is no way that everyday white settler colonizers will be convinced to do so without first understanding how their everyday practices and institutions, like testing and schools, are rife with coloniality. I believe that close examinations of such micro-to-macro-level systems is required for any epistemic shift that will in turn convince white people to relinquish what is not theirs, indeed was not property in the first place. Statewide testing and knowledge standardization are tangible practices that can be examined through resistance movements to begin this work in the education system. But this work is merely one entry point, and not an ending point or cute project (as Michael Dumas' voice rings in my head). Alongside this kind of examination, I lift up the ongoing work of local

Indigenous communities who are working daily to counter the harm of ongoing settler coloniality (e.g., the Sogorea Te' Land Trust, found at https://sogoreate-landtrust.org/, who offer the Shuumi Land Tax to non-Indigenous people on Lisjan Ohlone land), as well as white communities who are working to revive their own local knowledges while interrogating their role and responsibility in undoing settler colonial harm (e.g., Jews on Ohlone Land found at https://www.jewsonohloneland.org/ and Kolektiv Goluboy Vagon found at https://www.kolektivgoluboyvagon.com/). Let the work continue.

Chapter 2 Paper 1: Statewide Testing and Discursive Digital Action: How Youth Navigate their Relationships with Testing through Online Historical Action

Abstract

In the U.S., increased statewide testing in schools has been met by increased resistance from parents and teachers alike, who have worked together to promote the opt-out movement. Yet, little is known about how youth themselves use digital spaces to discuss their positionality in relation to statewide tests. In the following article, I consider how youth use the digital platform Reddit to explore their relationship with statewide testing, and their agency to act against it. I apply the four indicia of becoming historical actors (as put forth by Gutiérrez, Becker et al., 2019) as an analytical framework to understand how the youth grapple with and contest the constraints that statewide testing places on their lives. As the youth display the signs of burgeoning historical action, I historicize both the youths' relationship with statewide testing, and the historical actors framework itself, within a decolonial theoretical lens to better understand the youths' lived constraints and the way we see meaning in their nuanced discursive actions.

Keywords: historical actors, youth movements, social media movements, U.S. statewide testing, coloniality of education, critical literacy

Statewide standardized testing is used for accountability in some form in all states. It has been required in the U.S. since 1994 when the Clinton administration mandated it for all states receiving Title 1 funding for high-poverty schools (Improving America's Schools Act, 1994; Kumeh, 2011). However, it gained particular momentum with the adoption of No Child Left Behind (2002) and then the Common Core State Standards (CCSS; National Governors Association, 2010). The CCSS, a set of K–12 learning standards that were adopted across the nation in 2009–2010, brought an onslaught of statewide testing to schools, which are deemed high-stakes accountability measures because they have significant implications for school funding and teacher employment (e.g., Hagopian, 2014). CCSS supporters tout their purpose of ensuring equal learning standards for each grade across the nation and holding schools accountable to students (McDonnell & Weatherford, 2013). But they have garnered widespread criticism from parents, teachers, administrators, researchers, and politicians alike, with particular concern over the rise in statewide testing (e.g., Hagopian, 2014; Ravitch, 2016; Wang & Fikis, 2017). They argue that too much time is spent on test preparation and administration, detracting from true learning. They further argue that testing causes undue stress on students and teachers alike, promotes cookie-cutter knowledge over deep, individualized knowledge, and lines the pockets of big corporations while mining children for data. In response, parents and teachers have led a grassroots opt-out movement, mobilizing guardians to legally choose to have their children abstain from participating in statewide testing (Hagopian, 2014).

In the digital era, there are many online spaces where youth, parents, teachers, politicians and other constituents can engage in questions about testing and organize against it. In particular, Reddit provides a unique space where people turn to answer questions and engage in discussion around different topics. Reddit (https://www.reddit.com/) is a social media website founded in 2005. Its content is user-generated, and includes news articles, images and videos, text, and discussion boards. It is organized into subreddits, which are user-created communities for specific interests. These range in topic from e.g., personal finance to shower thoughts (the miscellaneous unexpected thoughts that occur to you in the shower). Many subreddits serve overwhelmingly as spaces to ask other users specific questions about the given topic. Users can upvote and downvote content, which moves the posts up or down the page, gaining it more or less visibility. With its user-generated content and community spaces, Reddit provides an ideal opportunity to glimpse youth's sense-making and how they consider their agency as they confront systems that they feel confine them but that they may still have to answer to.

Here, I consider how youth specifically utilized this platform to question statewide testing within the U.S. education system, and how it allows us to witness youth's sense making and shifting orientation towards action as they contemplate their relationship to testing and opting out of it. I apply the theoretical lens of coloniality and decoloniality in education and use historical action as an analytical frame to conceptualize their discursive participation in this digital space. The opt-out movement against testing is largely considered a parent-led grassroots movement, yet little is known about how youth position themselves within the movement or against statewide testing more broadly. Spaces like Reddit allow us to consider how youth themselves question and contest statewide testing as they experiment with their agency within the U.S. education system.

Literature and Background

Global design in U.S. education and statewide testing. Statewide tests institutionalize a

colonial mentality that all people should assume the same definition of what constitutes knowledge, with the implicit—and often explicit—message that this is the monolithic knowledge necessary to promote the nation-state on the global stage. Historically, standardized testing was introduced in education to justify how people were sorted into disparate school and employment tracks along clear racial lines (see e.g., Dixon-Román & Gergen, 2013; DuFresne, 2018; Oakes, 2005). Today, statewide testing is used to measure students against the CCSS. As noted above, CCSS are a set of nationwide K–12 learning standards that were promoted as a way to hold all schools accountable to educating students equally. Yet, they both promote and enforce ideas about which skills are normative, natural, and necessary for the promotion of a productive subject of the state. They are a prescient example of what Mignolo (2000) calls global design within U.S. education, imposing standards that are deemed universal and erasing the specificity of knowledge within local spaces and histories. Global design refers to the way that a set of ideologies have been taken up and impact life globally, while subalterning local experience and knowledge. Yet Mignolo describes how everything comes from a specific location. He writes that even ideologies and matrices of power that are taken up as global designs originate as local designs. Their power relies on the erasure of this fact as they simultaneously seek to subsume other localities.

Colonial modernity is one such global design, impacting life around the world (Mignolo, 2000). Rooted in the Enlightenment, *modernity* is concerned with mobility, development, progress, the nation-state, and the desirable citizen. Only those nation-states that are colonized are deemed modern (Mignolo, 2000), and thus modernity cannot be separated from coloniality. *Coloniality* refers to the structures and ideologies that were first used to justify and promote colonial occupation and control, and that still pervade long after the initial events of colonization have occurred (e.g., Grosfoguel, 2009). Tlostanova and Mignolo (2009) typify these structures and ideologies as the *colonial matrix of power*, which consists of four overlapping areas of struggle: the struggle for control of (1) the economy, (2) authority, (3) the public sphere, and (4) "knowledge and subjectivity through education and colonizing the existing knowledges" (p. 135). That is, education, and the colonization of pre-existing knowledges, serve to establish and enforce colonial power. Schools institutionalize certain forms of knowledge—those of the powerful—thereby maintaining and imbuing them with more power.

Thus, my greater theoretical framework is informed by the history of coloniality within the U.S. education system and work by decolonial scholars to question and destabilize it. Historically, it is well documented how settler-colonizers in the U.S. used control of knowledge and schools to bolster their power (e.g., Grande, 2004). This is seen clearly in the history of "education" of Indigenous people, beginning with Catholic missions before the U.S. was even formed, and the first universities, like Harvard and William and Mary, including "civilizing" and "Christianizing" "Indians" as part of their guiding documents. Missions were directly supported by the government through policies like the Civilization Fund and used Indigenous children as free labor on the land that white settlers stole. They maintained control of Indigenous "civilization" and "education" into the 19th century when the federal government officially took over. Under the Indian Removal Act of 1830, the government forcibly removed children from their families, relocated them to unknown places, forbade Native languages and cultural practices, forced labor as vocational training, taught an Anglo-centric curriculum and pro-government allegiance, and left students undernourished in overcrowded spaces. When the schools became difficult to maintain, with compulsory attendance leading to overcrowding, reduced funding, and increased Indigenous resistance, the government transitioned students to

public schools, framed as a means of further "Americanization." Here, though crucially distinct experiences, the story of the colonized education of Indigenous children overlaps with the historical experience of Black students in the U.S., following slavery when it was a death sentence: First free public schooling was withheld (e.g., DuFresne, 2018), and Black organizers created their own grassroots, underground schools (Span, 2009). Then, when public schooling became compulsory, it was reshaped to support the agenda of inculcating an industrial work ethic and tracking students into different vocational jobs that were sorted according to their race (e.g., Oakes, 2005)—in short, to support the nation-state's shifting political economic agenda while maintaining its racialized organization and subordination. Though grossly simplified for my purposes here, these practices exemplify how schools in the U.S. were, from the outset, designed to control, sort, and subordinate subjects of the state through control of knowledge, all while instilling a global design that erased local knowledges. Today, everyday educational practices continue to be built upon this colonial foundation and perpetuate it; global design is still seen in the way that we take up certain beliefs about what types of knowledge a child needs to acquire in order to become an intelligent, and importantly, productive citizen. These types of knowledge are codified through standards and benchmarks like the CCSS, and the statewide testing that measures against them. This global design in U.S. education is framed by conversations about progress and keeping the nation-state competitive on the global front. Thus, I seek to expand our understanding of how youth explore their agency against statewide testing, with statewide testing serving as an everyday practice through which we willingly or unwillingly perpetuate coloniality.

Historical action. Assuming this lens, the indicia (understood as markers or indexes) of becoming a historical actor, as outlined by Gutiérrez, Becker et al. (2019), is an analytical framework that we can adopt to observe the nuance within the everyday actions that people take within and against the colonial structures that confine them. Related to the concept of transformative agency, as promoted by cultural historical activity theorists (e.g., Haapasaari, Engeström, & Kerosuo, 2016; Sannino, 2015; Sannino & Engeström, 2017), historical action grounds agency and action within the lived constraints of one's location. That is, their action is considered within the historicity that defines their lived experience, and they act specifically upon this history in order to practice, demonstrate, and expand their agency, and to bring it to bear on history proleptically. In this way, it provides an analytical framework that aligns with the goals of decoloniality, as a theoretical lens that calls us to question who produces knowledge, and to what ends, and invites us to act politically on such questions—to above all, remember that decolonizing is a verb and movement against structures[2], not to accept these as permanent structures but to actively and continuously push against them.

Gutiérrez, Becker et al. (2019) describe four indicia of becoming a historical actor. These can be thought of as signs that one is in the process of becoming a historical actor on a specific topic or injustice. Notably, this is a constant state of becoming, not a point of arrival. One might

[2] It is, however, not only a verb that acts upon structures, but calls for the actual return of land, as Tuck and Yang (2012) articulate. Here, I believe that part of compelling people to make such moves relies on both their ability to recognize how all of the structures governing their lives rely on colonial ideology, and their ability to begin to act upon those structures in acts of increasing scale. As fellow non-Indigenous settlers continue to grapple with their role in continuously recolonizing stolen lands, I encourage you to look into Indigenous organizing on your land, and support them. On the land that I occupy, the Sogorea Te' Land Trust allows those living on Lisjan Ohlone territory to pay an annual land tax: https://sogoreate-landtrust.org/shuumi-land-tax/.

also find themself in this state of becoming over one injustice, and never act upon another. Indeed, the first index of historical action is that one must feel a *double bind* (as articulated by Bateson, 1972, and expanded by Engeström, 1986, and Pacheco, 2012)—they experience an injustice in their everyday lived experience and feel constrained by it. This constriction inspires one to act in everyday but consequential ways. In the second index, there is "*a breach in the social order*" (p. 294). That is, the person or people who experience the double bind challenge the social hierarchy; they disrupt the normative order of things, drawing the normative into question. Third, the person or people *cyclically experiment* with this social order. They do not challenge it once, but continuously push against the status quo, in large ways and small, testing and tinkering with their forms of action, drawing on new information as they experiment with new social roles and orders. The fourth index is that the actor *expands the object of activity*. This index most explicitly draws on cultural historical activity theory (see e.g., Nasir & Hand, 2006; Yamagata-Lynch, 2010). Here, object refers to the goal or thing (e.g., social construct) being acted upon, not a physical object. Gaining a deeper understanding of their place in history, and their ability to act upon it, the person views their action as part of a larger project not an isolated event.

As Gutiérrez, Becker et al. (2019) note, these signs in the process of becoming historical actors are not rigidly sequenced steps, but rather happen concurrently and iteratively. Nor is historical action a point of arrival, but rather an ongoing process of becoming. Youth may demonstrate that they are in one of the four areas more than the others at a given time, but they do not graduate from one step to another and will likely continue to grapple with that piece as they continue to consider their place historically and their ability to act upon history and the future. Thus, in the cases below, I will highlight the predominant indicia that the youth demonstrate but will not evaluate them with some concept of "progress." Importantly, this is in keeping with decolonial theory, as ideas of progress in the modern nation-state are tied up with coloniality, as described above.

Purpose of study. Given these issues and complexities, I applied historical action as an analytic to understand youth's online discussion of statewide testing and their relationship to the coloniality of knowledge represented therein. In the following study, I asked: How do youth utilize Reddit as a digital tool to think about their potential as historical actors? How do we see youth contemplating historical action? How do we see the four indicia of this process of becoming at play as they grapple with their relationship to testing through online peer conversation? How does the historical actor analytic allow us to understand youth's relationship with the coloniality of knowledge that statewide testing enforces?

Methods

This study is part of an emerging tradition of qualitative research in digital spaces. As new digital platforms continue to emerge and evolve, so too do our methodological tools. Thus, I draw on digital humanities and the work of scholars across multimodal critical discourse studies (Machin, 2013; Van Leeuwen, 2013) and digital (Varis, 2014) and social media ethnography (Postill & Pink, 2012) to craft a set of methods that match the specificity of my study. The data here are part of a greater social media ethnography exploring how participants framed the opt-out movement on social media in relation to coloniality.

Data collection. To locate posts and discussion threads on Reddit, I generated a list of

relevant search terms. These included the following: opt out, united opt out, refuse the test, more than a score, statewide testing, state testing, CCSS testing, CAASPP (the California state test), Common Core testing, standardized testing, and testing. Some of these were more general terms related to statewide testing, while others were adapted from popular hashtags that people used to promote the opt-out movement over social media (e.g., I adapted #refusethetest to the search term refuse the test); although Reddit can be considered a social media platform, it differs from more image- and post-driven sites in that it does not use hashtags for users to self-organize their content, but rather topic-specific discussion boards. Consequently, I searched each of these terms on the Reddit homepage to gain results from across the site, and then searched them on targeted subreddits based on their specialized interests. These included r/school, r/students, r/Students_AcademicHelp, r/teenagers, r/ApplyingtoCollege, and r/SchoolSystemBroke.

As I reviewed search results, I screened out unrelated posts. These were numerous, but particularly during COVID-19, many posts about schools and testing related to COVID-19 tests specifically, rather than statewide standardized testing. Additionally, amongst posts about statewide testing in schools, I focused on posts that were meant for discussion. That is, I did not include posts that only included links to news articles unless they engaged users in further conversation about opting out. Notably, news articles were primarily posted by adults not youth, and adults used these to have political conversations (e.g., anti-Obama rants), rather than engage in conversation about opting out itself. As youth were the focus here, I excluded such posts from my analyses. Finally, it is important to consider ethics when using digital data. Reddit is a public forum; anyone can access the posts, making it exempt from ethics board approval requirements. However, as others have noted (Highfield & Leaver, 2015), drawing attention to digital activity through research can expose individuals to more attention than they would otherwise receive. Because I focused on posts by youth, I have omitted all identifiers like usernames and have paraphrased content as much as possible for the sake of analyses in order to protect my "participants" who did not opt into this study. Additionally, my research is about the phenomenon of using a digital platform to become historical actors, not about the individuals themselves.

Data analysis. My screening process yielded 24 discussion posts most directly relevant to the present case study. Informed by critical textual discourse analysis (Luke, 2019; Van Dijk, 2009), I analyzed these posts by applying the historical action framework, as described above. As I analyzed youth's posts about statewide testing, I considered how youth were questioning the coloniality of testing even as they did not apply this specific theoretical language to the dilemmas and constraints that they felt within their lives as U.S. public school students. I analyzed the discourse of each post, following an iterative qualitative coding process that included the four indicia as deductive codes, and child codes that arose inductively during my analyses (e.g., Creswell, 2013; Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). I used this coding process to consider whether the youth exemplified one or more of the historical action indicia; to elucidate the four indicia specific to youth's relationships to statewide testing; and to explore how these indicia did or did not highlight moves to contest the enactment of everyday coloniality within their educations.

Findings

The Reddit posts laid bare many dimensions of students' relationships to statewide testing. Posts ranged from seeking test-taking tips to questioning grammatical errors on the

exams, and from contesting the tests' purposes to actually opting out. Here, I organize these findings based on the four historical action indicia that they most significantly elucidate, although importantly, more than one indicium is present in several posts, as the process of becoming a historical actor is ongoing and iterative. Through the examples below, we see that youth displayed all four indicia as they made sense of their positionality and agency against statewide testing, which represents an everyday manifestation of the coloniality of knowledge within their U.S. educations. As they moved from understandings of their individual experiences to the systemic, there was variance in their individual approaches, yet we see regularity in their questioning and discursive practices, which I turn to now.

Double bind. Across the youths' posts about statewide testing and opting out, it was clear that they felt multiple, layered double binds, particularly as students who, aspiring to attend college, remained captive to the education system for the time being. As Gutiérrez, Becker et al. (2019) describe, the first index of becoming a historical actor is that

> A double bind is felt, experienced, and, in some cases, made visible and objectified. The double binds that are made visible are those that manifest in the sociomaterial world when the cultural resources prove inadequate for resolving a given dilemma. (p. 3)

As students grappled with the role of statewide testing, and the possibility of opting out, they articulated double binds that influenced their decision-making and future actions. Fundamentally, the youth turned to Reddit because they had a tenuous relationship with testing, though the nature of this tension varied. For several students, they simply did not know what statewide testing was for. The tests took up multiple schooldays, yet they turned to Reddit to ask whether the test scores "determine which high school [you] go to?," "why [] we have them and why [] people [are] opting out," and if the scores went to colleges. They felt a tension of being beholden to statewide tests, but not knowing what role they actually played in their lives. It is also notable that they turned to peers to ask these questions, rather than asking their teachers, who should have such answers; for example, students might have asked teachers what the tests were for during classroom test preparation time. This also suggests a breach in the social order, as discussed below.

The concern that statewide testing scores might go to colleges reflects a broader theme across youths' posts, in which college was a top priority. Several students questioned statewide testing yet did so in the same breath as they voiced concerns over college admissions and the SAT or ACT, the standardized tests that often govern admissions. This reflected a double bind because students felt that they should not be subjected to statewide testing, but also felt that they needed to focus their attention on other forms of standardized tests because they still sought to succeed in the U.S. education system beyond high school. That is, while they critiqued that secondary schooling relied heavily on standardized tests, they felt anxiety around the standardized tests that would determine their college admissions. For example, one student posted, "I feel that the tests do not accurately measure my knowledge or ability," and "I personally would rather study for my Advanced Placement Tests and ACT which are actually considered by colleges." They did not challenge that the AP tests and ACT are also standardized, so presumably also fail to accurately measure their knowledge or ability. Thus, although they had a sense that standardized tests are not fair in myriad ways, their lives were still dictated by them if they aspired to attend college, leaving them with the internal conflict of being within a system

where they feel some form of unjust constriction (i.e., having their knowledge mis- or underrepresented), yet needing to succeed within it. (Notably, as I write, college admissions are changing; see, for example, Jaschik, 2020, on the University of California's recent decision to eliminate the SAT and ACT from their admissions process).

This reflects a tension between protecting individual lived experience and acting upon the system, which also arose as students discussed the merits of opting out as a direct action against statewide testing. For example, in one opt-out discussion, a user pointed out that "teacher salaries, performance reviews, and even employment" are affected by test scores. They argued that the people who opt out are more likely to come from higher socioeconomic backgrounds, which might mean that more students with higher scores would be opting out, "leaving the under performing [*sic*] students to represent that teacher and the school district." Thus, they went on, students who would score well might not want to opt out if they are worried about the lives of their teachers or even siblings who might attend the school after it is punished with resulting funding cuts. However, they argued that it "isn't clear cut. Are the consequences to the individual teacher or school worth participating in an inherently flawed and antagonistic system?" The tension here is between short-term individual consequences and long-term systemic change, leaving a double bind for students who have individual choices to make. Indeed, such tensions are central to many decolonial conversations, in which theorists point out the extreme difficulty of escaping a system that defines and confines you, your everyday actions, and how they—and you—will be taken up (e.g., Anzaldúa, 2007; hooks, 1994; Moallem, 2002; Sandoval, 2000; Sivandandan, 1974; Terrefe, 2020; Tlostanova & Mignolo, 2012). Even as we attempt to address ills within the system, we often recreate them because our very means of addressing them arise from or are subsumed by that system. (For a compelling example, see Ong, 2003, on the role of social workers in reproducing the U.S. nation-state through their work with Cambodian refugees even as they sought to challenge its injustices.)

Breached social order. In the second index,

> A breach in the social order is enacted, experienced, and perceived individually or collectively. Breaches challenge the status quo, normative practices and boundaries, and commonly held beliefs. The breaches may be minute, but they are significant enough to disrupt the ongoing narrative about the person's place in the social world." (Gutiérrez, Becker et al., 2019, p. 4)

This index is visible in the very act of posting about statewide testing on Reddit. As soon as youth chose to reach out to their peers on a public forum, they breached the social order of schooling, which tells youth that teachers and administrators are in charge. Guiding teachers and administrators is a set of laws and policies that they adhere to, and students are largely taught that this is the natural order of schooling. Critical pedagogy theorists have written extensively on this power hierarchy (e.g., Freire, 1970; hooks, 1994). Students are not taught to turn to each other as they feel the constraints of schooling in their everyday lives. Thus, drawing on each other to wrestle with the questions of testing breaches the social order that they are inculcated with when formal schooling begins. For example, many students turned to Reddit to ask each other if they should opt out, how, and if there were repercussions. Referring to California statewide testing, one student asked, "Should I opt out of CAASPP testing?" Another wrote,

> I'm a high school junior and for the next two weeks we have the new CAASPP standardized testing. Does anybody know what the protocol for opting out of the test is. I've heard rumors that its [*sic*] possible and as far as I can tell I have the legal right but I'm having a hard time finding a definitive method. Any help would be greatly appreciated.

Youth turned to their peers in these instances, rather than their teachers or administrators. The social order, established through colonial schooling, would tell them that these adults would be most knowledgeable on the topic, as they oversee testing and everyday classroom life. By turning to their peers, there is a sense that these authority figures are not to be trusted on this topic, perhaps representing different interests and not the students'. Although youth regularly turn to each other on digital platforms, when they do so specifically around school-related dilemmas, they breach the social order to establish a new community of knowledge amongst people with more equally distributed social power. Importantly, it is also a breach in the order that youth turned to each other publicly in a call to pool knowledge across a vast and disparately located community. Publicly pooled knowledge defies the structure of what colonial modernity inculcates (e.g., Falcón, 2016; Lugones, 2010; Sandoval, 2000)—that knowledge is scientifically vetted and not of the common people but of those in power, who regulate its dissemination. Thus, by enacting this breach, the youth disrupt their and their peers' social place, becoming their own authorities on statewide testing.

Students also used humor as a means to challenge the social order, particularly through memes. Memes are online texts that spread over social media, involving an image and accompanying text, often with humorous intent. On Reddit, posts that involved memes might initially appear less substantial, yet they were a medium that allowed youth to express hypocrisies (also viewed here as double binds) that they faced as student test-takers. For example, one youth posted a meme (Figure 1) about the conflicting messages that students receive about writing essays:

Figure 1. Student uses SpongeBob SquarePants (Hillenburg, Hill, & Jennings, 1999) "internal scream" meme to joke about conflicting messages they get about writing essays.

Here, the youth breaches the social order of schooling as they highlight the double bind of receiving conflicting messages from two authority figures in their lives: teachers, who have power over their everyday lives as students, and tests, which come with specific sets of directions that confine their actions and performances. By calling out the contradiction between these messages, they challenge the power that both forms of authority have over students. Doing so on a public forum calls for others to note the contradiction as well. It is a minute breach in the order, but it draws authority into question in a way that repositions students as savvy to arbitrary constraints.

Cyclical social experimentation. Just as the very act of posting about testing on Reddit indicates a breach in the social order, it also indicates cycles of social experimentation, as the youth deepened their stances on testing and opting out together, as well as their plans to take action. As Gutiérrez, Becker et al. (2019) write, these cycles "occur over time," "can be short or long term and involve creating new models of participation and/or repurposing tools" (p. 4). People tinker with social order to imagine new possibilities.

In many cases, youth experimented by making a political statement that could be taken up publicly, contested, expanded, or challenged to action. They regularly used Reddit to try on different stances with each other and revise these stances cyclically in response to feedback. For example, the youth above who stated that "tests do not accurately measure [their] knowledge or ability" was taking a political stance on testing. By posting this statement publicly, they experimented with how peers would react and carry the conversation further, and how they would or would not shift this orientation into action. Importantly, this youth posted on a subreddit called r/changemyview, which, as the title suggests, encourages respectful debate. Such a move suggests that the youth was openly in the process of social experimentation; they took a stance that they should opt out of testing because they did not agree with it, but directly requested peer feedback. This move was not unusual; youth also posted on Subreddits including r/explainlikeimfive and r/AmITheAsshole, both of which specifically request feedback and indicate that the poster is experimenting with their position and open to a cyclical interaction that will expand their orientation toward the issue at hand. The process of debate that ensued in this particular post was notable as youth brought up opposing views and explained their stances ("From my view"), asked clarifying questions ("Can you explain," "Would you mind elaborating on"), expanded the conversation ("What would that look like?"), and lauded each other on points well made ("You bring up a great point"). All of this was done in the interest of deepening the conversation around testing and opting out. This exemplifies cycles of social experimentation because they were working with, expanding and altering their arguments and stance-building around testing. They also replied to each other repeatedly, tinkering their stances and showing an investment in cyclical experimentation.

Youth also experimented with what action might look like beyond the discussion board. One youth posted a sample of a protest sign on the subreddit r/schoolsystembroke and asked for feedback on it. The sign had five separate messages about children and schooling on it, with text in different fonts, sizes, colors, and directions. The message at the top read "Stop this unconcentful Standardized testing!!! We, the teachers and students are tired of it!!" Here, the youth was experimenting on multiple levels: They were testing different messages to convey their views on the education system. They were testing their approach on peers by soliciting feedback, and, by designing a protest sign, they were testing the idea of protesting as a form of action against the education system. By seeking feedback on whether or not their protest sign

was effective, they indicated not only that they were interested in acting, but also that they knew that there was a form of literacy knowledge out there amongst peers; they requested their peers' distributed knowledge (e.g., González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005) as they tinkered with their experimentation. Further, the youth was experimenting with social order as well by bringing teachers into their statement. Turning to peers for feedback first, it is clear from the grammatical issues in the sign that they designed this sign on their own, despite making a statement that places teachers and students side by side as co-conspirators in a common struggle. Although some peers respond harshly to the overwhelming design and content (e.g., replying simply "dogshit"), many do join in the youth's experimentation by offering constructive pointers. They recommend, for example, not having "so many different things crammed in there," having just "1 icon . . . 1 sentence . . . 1 message . . ." and "posing a thought-provoking question." Joining in an open discussion, the youth together experiment cyclically both on political opinions about schooling and what action should look like. Importantly, as the youth experimented with action through their online discussions, they also expanded the object of their activity, which I turn to now.

Expanded object of activity. The fourth index involves an expanded object of activity, "a refiguring of purpose and meaning, and a sense of one's historical role and connection to the larger stream of historical events" (Gutiérrez, Becker et al., 2019, p. 4). Here, the objects of activity were expanded both within the context of the Reddit posts themselves and in the actions that youth discussed. That is, as youth discussed statewide testing and schooling at large, the focus of the post routinely shifted, expanding from a post about a specific testing scenario, or a specific student's relationship to testing, into a discussion about the role of testing or schooling more broadly and how to challenge a system that they found unjust. This expansion indicates that the youth were able to locate themselves within a broader cultural historical context, connecting their experiences to more deeply seated issues. For example, one youth posted what they themself called a "rant" by the end, meandering from complaints about spending three "whole goddamn days" on "stupid ass, boring, and frankly pointless tests" to why students "get forced to learn about subjects or topics that many people have no interest in" when "America says it values freedom over all." It is clear that the youth was "pissed off," but their peers took it up to transform it into a meaningful back-and-forth (with 17 comments), rather than leaving it as a one-sided rant. Some responded with what they viewed as the merits of learning subjects that students do not think they care about or need. Another user pushed the conversation, "you know you don't HAVE to take it, right?" then clarified "you can either refuse to take the test or just drop out completely." They continued by saying that if their peer hated school, maybe they should "stop wasting [their] time," drop out, and start at community college instead so they could start learning what they wanted to learn. Here, the expanded object of activity moves beyond the expanded object of the discussion post, and into an expanded idea of action related to the post's content. The responding youth pointed out that the youth could act upon the binds that they felt, turning the rant into an agential move. They even concluded that "if more young people refused to go to school . . . maybe the system would be forced to change?" This suggests that the responding youth not only understood that they could act upon the constraints they faced as students, but also that such action is situated within the greater U.S. educational context, with potential consequences on the system itself, not only within their individual lives. The youth refigured their roles as students, engaging in conversation and identifying an ability to make a choice—one that could impact both their immediate circumstances and the greater education

system—rather than simply accepting what was imposed upon them at school (i.e., doing the statewide testing without contestation). That is, through their online experimentation, they began to conceptualize how the constraints of the systems that bore upon their daily lives as students (here, statewide testing) could be transformed to shape their roles as actors within and upon the school system.

Discussion

In their Reddit posts about statewide testing, youth embodied all four indicia of becoming historical actors, both through the act of online discussion itself, and through their moves toward direct action. Mignolo (2000) writes that the power of coloniality rests in its "macro-narratives," and that to "undo them and be able to do something beyond their scope, you need to deal with the structure and content of knowledge that have been naturalized in those macro-narratives" (p. 32). In the U.S. school system, statewide testing promotes a macro-narrative by naturalizing certain forms of knowledge as those necessary for a successful future within the nation-state and those that indicate some level of intrinsic intelligence and thus worthiness. As the youth here question the role of testing in their lives, they draw this macro-narrative into question, and consider whether they must remain idle subjects of that narrative, or if they have agency within the system to work against it and speak of their specific locality. Stating directly that the tests don't "measure [their] knowledge or ability," the youth show that they feel bound by their positionality within the macro-narrative of standard knowledge, and this double bind leads them to engage with peers as they contemplate their positionality and potential action, breaching social order by engaging peers as experts, cycling through experimentation discursively, and discussing what role individual action might have in their own lives and within the broader education system.

The act of applying the historical action indicia as an analytic here also created the secondary opportunity to test its utility with one dataset. My predecessors developed the concept of the historical actor while working on the Migrant Student Leadership Institute project (see Espinoza, 2003; Gildersleeve, 2010; Gutiérrez, 2016; Vossoughi, 2014), and we expanded it by laying out the four indicia of becoming with three vignettes across institutional and public datasets. Here, I applied it to one natural dataset taken from a public online forum and was able to test and deepen our understanding of the framework itself. It proved to be a useful tool to analyze the fine-grained, nuanced nature of historical action as it takes form—to highlight the meaning behind what might appear, at first glance, to be youths' mundane complaints or musings. Yet, applying this analytic framework also highlighted the necessity of contextualizing it more culturally and historically, it in itself being part of many overlapping activity systems.

Double bind and the decolonial thought of W. E. B. Du Bois. In the historical action analytic, the first index is the presence of a double bind, providing what is perhaps the clearest relationship between docoloniality as a theoretical framework and historical action as an analytical framework that can help us understand decolonial action as it takes shape. Double bind, which was coined by Bateson, Jackson, Haley, and Weakland (1956), was expanded and popularized within education by Engeström (1986). It is meant to capture the inner tension and conflict that one feels as a result of their activity system and is part of cultural historical activity theory (CHAT), a school of thought that situates learning and development within cultural and historical contexts, with tools and artifacts that fundamentally mediate and are mediated by these contexts (e.g., Cole, 1996; Engeström, 1999; Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003; Moll, 2003; Pacheco,

2012; Yamagata-Lynch, 2010). Theorists in this school seek to understand human activity and learning as highly contextualized. Yet, as these scholars have all theorized learning, they have done so within contexts shaped by coloniality, where learning has been constricted by colonial ideas of development and knowledge. Thus, you cannot remove coloniality from the theorization even as it goes unnamed, particularly when knowledge is controlled as a way to control the racialized bodies that coloniality wishes to subordinate. Assuming this lens then, the double bind relates also to previous theorizations that specifically dealt with racial positionality in one's activity system. Almost a century earlier, W. E. B. Du Bois (1897, 1903) theorized what he named double consciousness, in which he articulated a tension that stems specifically from being a Black man in the white supremacist United States. In a study framed by decoloniality, Du Bois's original articulation is important to credit and include: because coloniality relies fundamentally on race, any activity system occurring within a colonized locality is mediated by race, as is any double bind felt (or not felt) within it. Indeed, the preeminent decolonial scholar Walter Mignolo (2012) lifts up Du Bois's double consciousness, along with several other concepts: Wright's (1993) double vision, Anzaldua's (1987) new mestiza consciousness, Calderón and Saldívar's (1991) borderlands of theory, and Subcomandante Marcos' (1997) double translation (p. 84). True to decolonial thought, each speaks of lived tensions of being from the specific history of their location within the global project of coloniality. The power of such concepts to ignite new ways of knowing lies in the lived experience of a dichotomy, living both interior to the project of colonial modernity, and yet being defined as external to it specifically for its own reproduction. The tension of this very lived experience points to the need for a new epistemology, from which action can arise, and yet, one is ever functioning within the constraints of the colonial-modern project.

These are the cultural histories in which the concept of the double bind arose, a colonized context in which white men could theorize about the lived tensions impacting development in their activity systems without naming race. Perhaps the shortcoming of double bind as a theory, then, is not so much that the theory does not name race, but what the absence of race from the theorization normalizes, and what the absence of its predecessors' names cements. Here, in a study framed by decoloniality, it is important to credit Du Bois and the many scholars of color who have expanded the theory (e.g., Falcón, 2008; Gilroy, 1993; Hines, 1993; West, 1982), as the question of colonization has always been one of race and erasure. Within coloniality, any constraint that one does or does not feel can be linked in some form to their racialized identity. Although race was not the explicit focus of coloniality within this study, the coloniality of U.S. education, and standardized testing within it, is tightly bound to its underlying role in justifying racial subordination and supremacy within the colonial-modern context, and thus remains important to note.

Further, it is important to note that the concept of historical action, and the indicia of becoming, developed through work with youth of color and of varying immigration statuses, meaning that the coloniality of their activity systems—and our activity systems as scholars theorizing about their lives (with academia being highly colonized; see e.g., Dillar, 2012; Mignolo, 2000; Moallem, 2002; Ortega, 2017; Patel, 2014; Shahjahan & Morgan, 2016)—had particular bearing on their lives. Therefore, although the historical actor indicia framework is applicable across a wide range of theoretical frameworks—which has obvious benefits—it is important to name the historical roots of such thought in a way that incorporates voices beyond that of a white man who was able to ignore race and coloniality as a crucial binding construct within learning systems. In this way, we told only a partial history of our own piece even as we

wrote about the act of historicizing, and we recolonized the academic literature. Thus, the historical actors indicia lend themselves well to a decolonial analysis, yet as actors ourselves we must constantly reanalyze and reimagine the constraints and possibilities of such a framework.

Becoming critical when bound by the colonial. Indeed, the double bind index dominated youths' posts; the majority of posts about testing dealt with the constraints that they felt in their lives as students, rather than specific ways to act upon these constraints. Youth grappled with the idea that statewide tests, the Common Core, and schooling more broadly were problematic in various ways—including, notably, how they misrepresented and restricted knowledge—but they less frequently posted about opting out or other moves to resist. The double bind was felt by many, but there is a sense that they are within and of the system, without the power to act upon it. This is not surprising if we consider the power dynamics within U.S. schools. This dynamic is well documented, particularly by critical pedagogists, the most lauded being Paulo Freire (1970). Briefly, Freire describes how classrooms can both empower and disempower students, becoming complicit in social hierarchies. To unsettle power dynamics, teachers must relinquish some authority in the classroom, instead providing an environment where students can become conscious of the oppressive elements they face, construct knowledge themselves, and seek change. Here, as youth turn to an online forum to ask questions that could have theoretically been discussed in the classroom itself, it seems that their teachers have not fostered an environment where the power dynamics around testing can be challenged. In turn, youth may not have felt the power to do much more than air their grievances amongst peers in this separate space. Many also might not know that opting out is even an option, which is also indicative of who holds knowledge and how it is disseminated in schools.

Importantly, many of the youth's posts reveal traces of critical literacy, which is a specific set of practices arising from critical pedagogy and a concept that indeed complements both decoloniality and historical action. Critical literacy involves the analysis and use of texts (in all forms) to question and act upon power (e.g., Luke, 2012). It raises questions like who produced a text, for what purpose, and for whose benefit; who has access to the text; and what power does it reproduce. It interrogates the history of ideas presented or obscured by a text and seeks to disrupt unequal power distributions by prompting more critical text consumption and inciting subsequent action (e.g., Comber, 2015; Luke, 2012; McLaughlin & DeVoogd, 2004; Shor, 1999). Arguably, a double bind, the first index of becoming a historical actor, begets a need for critical literacy. Youth might first sense that they are constricted by greater structures that bear upon their everyday lives. This double bind might then motivate them to dig deeper into the feeling and apply a critical lens to their situation. In the case of statewide standardized testing, a test is indeed a text that the youth are forced to interact with in their everyday schooling. The youth here felt the constraints of these texts and took a step back to consider what role tests actually play in their lives. Although my purposes here were in part to explore the utility of the historical action indicia as an analytic within a decolonial lens, it is important to note that the actions seen here, being more at the exploratory phase of curiosity, may be more indicative of critical literacy practice and critical theory more broadly, and less indicative of truly decolonial work. The relationship between these theories is beyond the scope of the present paper and articulated by scholars before me (e.g., Bartholomew, 2018; Grande, 2004), but for my purposes, critical theory, originating in the Frankfurt School and a Eurocentric history of reason, can seek to disrupt power without grounding it in a critique of the coloniality of such concepts as history, time, reason, knowledge and being. Further, one might apply a critical lens to an

observed or felt power imbalance, and seek to disrupt said power, yet still take actions that ultimately reify coloniality. Of course, this is a risk of any action—that we inadvertently reinforce that which we seek to disrupt. For example, if the act of opting out is actually a state-sanctioned form of dissent, does it reinforce state power by dissenting in the way that they have already approved within the system that they have created and seek to maintain? Similarly, if the students above chose to opt out, they would be choosing the path of resistance that has been created by adults, including policymakers, government officials, administrators, teachers, parents, and voters. Because adults have power over educational policy and practice, perhaps students' choice to participate in opting out would ultimately serve to reinforce the power structure and social order. To be truly decolonial, activity must be reorganized in a way that dismantles the power hierarchies that were introduced for colonial rule and continue to control knowledge today, creating new ways of being and knowing.

Here, the youth embody all four indicia of becoming historical actors, recognizing a lived bind, breaching the social order, experimenting with one another cyclically, and expanding their thinking from the individual to the education system at large. Yet their actions remain largely discursive and less material—mostly talk and not action. Though the discursive is crucial to any movement, and arguably transformative for youth who are grappling to understand their positionality within the system, they are certainly in the act of becoming and any tangible decolonial effects are a long way off. What is important here is that their actions in this online forum are oriented towards understanding the specificity of their location within the colonial U.S. education system (even if they do not name it as colonial at this point) and understanding the way that their being and knowledge are defined within it through a set of historical decisions around standards and testing.

Limitations and Future Directions

The present study provided a glimpse of how youth utilize digital spaces to question their relationship to statewide testing. Although some work has been done to understand the opt-out movement, this has been largely focused on parent and teacher organizers, with little known about how youth themselves contest and experiment with their positionality as the actual test takers. I was particularly interested in how they did so in a space that they defined for themselves, without adult organizing. In the study here, I was limited by the present national moment when schools across the U.S. were closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to closures, statewide testing halted. It remains to be seen how testing will resume or is perhaps forever changed when schooling returns to an in-person format. Presumably, this will vary state by state, as do testing policies. At the time that I write this, Education Secretary DeVos has announced that testing must continue in Spring 2021 (Stratford, 2020). Given the rapidly changing landscape of COVID-19 responses in education, and the upcoming election, this announcement seems premature. Regardless, social media is a rapidly innovating world led by its youth consumers who continuously enact ingenuity (McDermott & Raley, 2011) to push these digital tools towards fresh nuanced purposes. Currently, TikTok, the fastest growing social media platform of 2020 (Post, 2020; Rasool, 2020) is arguably the most popular platform for today's youth. TikTok is a video-sharing platform where users post short videos straight from their smartphones, often including challenges or dance choreography. Further research on youth experimentation with historical action would fruitfully center on this platform, as youth have demonstrated compelling organizing on this platform already. In spring 2020, TikTok users organized against Donald Trump by buying out tickets to his Tulsa Rally (Lorenz, Browning, &

Frankel, 2020). This led him to grossly overestimate how many would attend, and the president was gravely embarrassed when the majority of seats remained empty. Thus, youth have already demonstrated the potential of historical action in these digital spaces. Furthermore, whereas Reddit has a discussion board format, TikTok's short, engaging video format is specifically meant to promote a viral trend culture. This might better serve youth for the purposes of actual experimentation and organized action. That is, different social media platforms might better lend themselves to the different indicia of becoming historical actors and more fruitfully foster this process amongst youth. Whereas Reddit proved to be an outlet for youth to articulate their experience of double binds within statewide testing and schooling, TikTok might be a better platform for experimenting with actions against these double binds and expanding the object of activity from their singular experiences with statewide tests to a national trending movement for change. We are in a moment of forced massive transition within the U.S. education system—a moment ripe for intentional organizing against systemic injustices that were formerly taken for granted within education. Digital spaces, such as the forums provided by Reddit, give us the privilege of witnessing as youth lead us by demonstrating the critical engagement necessary for change particularly within deeply colonial institutions—to remind us of the specificity and historicity of their locations and their power to shape this locality.

Chapter 3 Paper 2: The Coloniality of Statewide Testing and the Decolonial Potential of #OptOut

Abstract

Statewide testing can be understood as a specific tool that is invested in coloniality through its role in regulating which knowledge is institutionally maintained, promoted, and naturalized (Tlostanova & Mignolo, 2009). Thus, I consider the decolonial potential of the opt-out movement, in which parents and guardians remove their children from statewide testing, thereby rejecting its role in knowledge regulation. In this digital social media ethnography (Varis, 2014), I analyze how opt-out is represented publicly on social media in relation to coloniality. I nuance our understanding of the public discourse within the movement, which is often typified as white (Quinlan, 2016), considering its potential to create contested spaces in policy (Mitra, Mann & Hlavacik, 2016) that push towards decolonizing education from within. Findings suggest that a subgroup of participants explicitly place statewide testing within a greater U.S. education context that continuously subordinates racialized students. Their online discourse provides insights into the potential of organizing against a colonial education system using social media spaces, which are increasingly important organizing sites. This work expands our understanding of the movement's social media discourse, with implications for decolonial education scholars to consider the role of resistance movements like opt-out in decolonizing U.S. education policy through epistemic shift.

Keywords: opt-out movement, statewide testing, education standards, coloniality of education, social media movements

In education's accountability era, mass standardized testing is promoted under the guise of educating all students equally. Our K–12 school system relies heavily on the use of annual statewide testing to make decisions about such factors as school funding and closures, district enrollment options, and remedial programming (e.g., Neill, 2016; Ravitch, 2016). Yet, the very constructs that we test, the tools we use to test them, and the schools where we promote them are born from an intricate system in which schools served to institutionalize, justify, and maintain a hierarchy of racialized division and oppression (Chase, 2020; Cook-Gumperz, 2006; Dixon-Román & Gergen, 2013; DuFresne, 2018; Grande, 2004; Mignolo, 2000; Shepard, 2000; Urciuoli, 1995). Thus, in the present study, I use public social media posts to explore the opt-out movement, a grassroots effort in which parents and guardians remove their children from statewide testing. I analyze the discourse that participants used nationwide to consider the movement's potential towards refusing this history and creating alternate structures of knowing from within the system.

Background

Statewide testing and the opt-out movement. Although opting out is not new, it became a more organized, grassroots movement after the 2009–2010 adoption and implementation of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS; Wang, 2017). The CCSS are the highly contested set of standards implemented across states in order to uphold No Child Left Behind (now the Every Student Succeeds Act [ESSA], 2015); they were designed to implement the same educational standards for student learning nationwide. To test progress towards these standards, each state was required to administer annual statewide testing. The opt-out movement arose in response to this standardization and is largely considered a protest against over-reliance on standardized assessment as an accountability tool and against the time they take away from meaningful classroom teaching and learning (e.g., Wang, 2017). It is considered a parent-led movement, (perhaps, in part, because teachers in some states are not allowed to promote it explicitly; see California Teacher's Association, n.d.). However, some teachers' unions encourage members to remind guardians of their right to opt out, and independent educational organizations have also had a freer hand in promoting the movement.

Federal mandates about opting out. It is commonly understood that federal law allows for 5% of students in each state to opt out of statewide testing. If more than 5% opt out over a three-year average, the state may be penalized with reduced federal funding. This, however, is indirect. Each state decides whether or not they allow parents to opt out. The ESSA (2015) stipulates that schools must report testing results for 95% of their students in order to reach Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). AYP is the state-defined minimum progress that schools must make each year in order to meet state requirements for progress towards state definitions of proficient or advanced performance (U.S. Department of Education, 2004), and to receive Title I funding (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). Title I allocates federal funds to schools serving high-poverty populations to support additional programs (U.S. Department of Education, 2004; U.S. Legal, n.d.). If a school does not meet AYP, they have less flexibility with how their Title I funding can be applied, and it may be cut altogether if AYP is not met after three years. However, states can decide independently whether or not to penalize non-Title I schools and how. Thus, the opt-out movement has occurred within a set of complex federal and state regulations, with direct implications for school funding and, in turn, educational opportunity.

Despite (or arguably because of) these implications, activists in some places have mobilized with great success—see for example the stories of Garfield and Nathan Hale High Schools in Seattle (Seattle Education, 2015a; Todd, 2015) or opt-out rates over 20% across New York (Clukey, 2016)—staying true to their motivations.

A brief history of standardized testing. But to fully understand this resistance against statewide testing, we must first historicize standardized testing's role in U.S. education. Standardized testing is founded in positivist epistemology, a belief that empirical observation can reveal truths, and that we can objectively measure something without ideological interference, using scientific method (Dixon-Román & Gergen, 2013). Historically, standardized tests were introduced in U.S. schools to isolate skills (in a behaviorist model) to track students for the workforce. Testing was not in the interest of developing well rounded learners, but rather to support industrialization and to justify how students were sorted into disparate vocations based largely on race (Gould, 1996; Hagopian, 2014; Oakes, 2005; Shepard, 2000). By using tests that were viewed as objective and scientific, racially stratified job opportunities could be justified within a national discourse of freedom and opportunity for all—with scientific proof of inferiority, unequal opportunity was justified based on meritocracy, hiding racialized motives (Hagopian, 2014; Rethinking Schools, 214).

Today, statewide standardized tests are used in the name of assuring that all students are being educated equally, but as Dixon-Román and Gergen (2013) argue, they "have been employed in the service of freezing the social order" (p. 4). Standardized tests are actually not invested in getting all students to the same point. Both the nature of how we create standardized tests and how we use them to prioritize certain kinds of knowledge over others, with testing being so central to our education system, assure that we cannot ever reach a point where all students are considered equal and there is no social hierarchy (e.g., Hagopian, 2014; Neill, 2016; Oakes, 2005; Dixon-Román & Gergen, 2013). For example, we still rely on a normal curve, but this is incongruous with current learning theories that show us that actually most students can master material given the right learning conditions (Neill, 2016; Oakes, 2005). Additionally, both test content and administration are culturally biased, with students from low-income and non-dominant racial groups likely to perform lower than higher-income, White peers (Hagopian, 2014; Rethinking Schools, 2014). This, Oakes argues, is evidence against the assessments because the only way to justify why these children consistently perform lower on standardized tests is to say that those racial and income groups are less intelligent, which is indefensible. Standardized tests are created for the very purpose of differentiating amongst students, not to one day discover that they are all equally adept. And, of course, tests would have no place if they found this, so testing corporations are literally invested in assuring that we always discover difference amongst students—difference that, conveniently, will also require remediation through these same corporations.

The control of knowledge and coloniality. Given the historical origins and introduction of standardized testing in schools, it can be understood as a specific and everyday tool that is invested in coloniality through its role in imposing racial hierarchies and what Mignolo (2000) calls *global design*. Global designs are the structures that influence life on a global scale, by imposing certain ideologies that are deemed universal while subalterning local ideologies. Colonial modernity is the most prominent global design today. *Coloniality* refers to structures and organizing hierarchies that were introduced during colonization but that remain long after

initial occupation occurs, and continue to regulate daily life (e.g., Grosfoguel, 2009). Most important, it creates and maintains a hierarchy of being that defines White, abled, cis, heterosexual men as human, and those oppressed groups who are labeled in opposition as subhuman. *Modernity* is concerned with concepts of mobility, development, progress, and the nation-state and citizenship. It is rooted in the Enlightenment and liberalism of the West, which emphasized science and reason, and is linked to coloniality because only those nation-states that are colonized are deemed modern. To maintain its role in global life, colonial modernity relies on the control of four overlapping spheres: authority, the public sphere, the economy, and knowledge (Tlostanova & Mignolo, 2009). In particular, I am interested in the way that coloniality is reinforced through control of knowledge today. Standardized testing plays an integral role in this because we use it to regulate which forms of knowledge are maintained and institutionally promoted and validated. It is invested in erasing local design, with global design being framed as superior and the inevitable path towards progress and the future, both for the nation-state and for the individual as a productive citizen subject.

Decoloniality, then, entails a decentering of colonial ideologies and structure in favor of local knowledge and sovereignty (e.g., Falcón, 2016; Grande, 2004; Lugones, 2010; Mignolo, 2000; Sandoval, 2000; Tlostanova & Mignolo, 2009, 2012; Tlostanova, Thapar-Björkert, & Koobak, 2016). In the U.S. educational context, it calls for us to reject the forms of knowledge that have been naturalized in order to establish and maintain settler power (e.g., Chase, 2020; Coulthard, 2014; Grande, 2004). This requires not only unsettling the specific practices that are used to codify and instantiate this power, such as standardized tests, but also to reimagine what counts as viable knowledge to begin with, and how knowledge is institutionalized and hierarchically valued for the nation-state's promulgation.

Given this historical context, I aimed to understand how the opt-out movement pushed against testing as a construct founded in coloniality. Thus, in the following paper, I apply a decolonial lens to analyze the discourse of the opt-out movement as presented by a subset of participants on social media platforms, aiming to understand whether the movement presents a decolonial option from within the U.S. education system. Opt-out proponents have previously articulated their motives across different media and on the ground (e.g., Hagopian, 2014), and scholars have also sought to typify the social networking involved in the movement, particularly in New York (Wang, 2017). Here, I am specifically interested in the ways that the movement was represented publicly on social media platforms in relation to coloniality because social media (1) has a unique ability to complicate time and space conceptions, which are bound by settler colonial modernity (e.g., Chase, 2020; O'Brien, 2010), and (2) is increasingly relevant today, both before COVID-19 and as COVID-19 restricts activists' ability to mobilize in person. As the pandemic continues to shift our social realities, it is likely that our increased reliance on social media and digital platforms will endure into the future. Education activists should attend to social media as an increasingly important site for organizing. This work adds to the literature on the U.S. opt-out movement (1) by expanding our understanding of the motives and discourses represented on social media, particularly in a movement that has been typified as white upper-class, and/or conservative (e.g., Clayton, Bingham, & Ecks, 2019; Pizmony-Levy & Saraisky, 2016; Quinlan, 2016); and (2) by elucidating where opt-out participants might intervene in their social media discourse as they seek to expand contested spaces (Mitra et al., 2016) in education policy toward equity and racial justice. By lending insight into how people contest one form of coloniality as it manifests in U.S. education policy today, I offer implications for decolonial education scholars to consider the role of resistance movements like opt-out in decolonizing U.S.

education policy through epistemic shift.

Method

Data collection and scope. In the present study, I collected public social media posts from August 2015 through April 2020, spanning five school years up until the COVID-19 pandemic when statewide testing halted due to school closures across the country. I hand-collected public posts, which include both textual and visual data, from Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram. Given the large number of Instagram posts to screen, I also purchased Instagram data using a collection service called Picodash. With both methods, posts were identified by searching the movement's hashtags (e.g., #OptOut, #MoreThanAScore, #RefuseTheTest). To begin, I selected hashtags based on current literature on the movement (e.g., #TestingIsSoGreen, #OptOutIsSoWhite, #CommonCore, #CCSS, #OptOut from Wang, 2017). As I collected data from one hashtag, I used snowballing and triangulation (Gerlitz & Rieder, 2013) to expand my search terms with co-occurring hashtags. On social media, it is common practice to use multiple hashtags side by side in order to catch a wider audience, as people who are interested in the same subject may be talking about it in different ways. For example, if I collected an Instagram post after searching the hashtag #OptOut, and the post also included the hashtag #RefuseTheTest, I added this hashtag to my list of search terms. When gathering hashtag data, I removed posts that pertained to other opt-out movements. For example, there are movements to opt out of vaccines, union membership, sex education, taxes, junk mail, government control, coal-based energy, and Black Friday shopping (#OptOutside led by Recreation Equipment Incorporated). #NoTesting is also used prolifically against testing cosmetics on animals. Initial screening left me with 217 posts, which I coded following the process described below.

Public data and the case for non-human subjects. All posts in this study were posted publicly. Although privacy on the coding level might be binary—in that a user decides whether to have a public or private account—it is not binary on the research ethics level. A user might choose to maintain a public account, meaning that anyone could view their post hypothetically, but researchers must consider how inclusion in a study might make someone's account more public than they had intended, drawing more attention to them and potentially putting them at risk based on the subject matter (Highfield & Leaver, 2015). Therefore, unless the poster was a prominent public figure in the movement, I have omitted identifiers, including usernames, in order to protect my "participants" from potential harassment or voyeurism.

Furthermore, in keeping with decolonial research perspectives (Patel, 2015; Tuck & Yang, 2014a, b), I conducted this study without human subjects. In academia, researchers often profit off of racialized communities and nondominant groups for their own gains within a colonial institution with no tangible benefit to the participants, ultimately perpetuating the power structures by promoting their own power and the power of the institution as the arbiter of knowledge. This is especially dangerous in the field of education because academics are ultimately trying to create new knowledge about knowledge itself, but as soon as someone's knowledge is added to the academy, it becomes knowledge that only certain people have access to—a structure that was created to be hierarchical and exclusionary and to legitimize some forms of knowledge while delegitimizing others (e.g., hooks, 1994; Mignolo, 2000). Therefore, I used information that was intended to be public, and generated by labor that they already put in for a collective movement. I did this also to study the movement rather than people. Drawing on Tuck

and Yang (2014b), I study statewide testing as an everyday "enactment of settler colonialism" (p. 814), examining "the relationships between people and institutions of power" (p. 815) as they contest the constraints of knowledge standardization through testing. Social media allowed me to look at motives with a decolonial lens without asking organizers to do more labor for me. This presented both drawbacks and hopeful directions, as I discuss in the conclusion.

Virtual ethnography and multimodal critical discourse analysis. This focus on the movement as manifested on social media can be classified as digital (Varis, 2014) or social media ethnography (Postill & Pink, 2012). As the digital world continually shifts, virtual ethnographers adapt qualitative research methods accordingly. Here, I drew on the affordances of multimodal critical discourse analysis, as illustrated by van Leeuwen (2012) and Machin (2013). Virtual ethnographies are inherently multimodal, given the multiple platforms included and the multiple communicative affordances of each. Multimodality is an approach to understanding interactions that involve multiple modes of communication (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001) or semiotic resources (Machin, 2013)—that is, different ways of communicating information both implicitly and explicitly. By design, social media platforms allow e.g., text, audio, photograph, and video to work in tandem. Although multimodality provides a frame for considering the many facets of interaction, it should be applied through social theory to understand what shapes these interactions (Jewitt, 2013). Here, I apply decolonial theory to consider the potential of the opt-out movement, as it played out on social media, in disrupting and dismantling the power dynamics within testing. Importantly, the digital environments of social media platforms are multimodal, yet also limited in how different modes are elevated over others. For example, Instagram began as an image-sharing platform, and the layout emphasizes the image more than the text. Twitter and Facebook began as text-centric platforms, but users can now post images as well. These are built into the platforms from their conception and thereby affect how users are oriented towards each platform. In an Instagram feed, the image appears first, with the text beneath it. On Facebook and Twitter, the text appears first followed by the image. Thus, some of the emphasis on different modes is built into the structure of the platform (Jewitt, 2005, 2016). However, there are nuances to this. For example, images can have text on them (especially in a meme culture).

I use critical discourse analysis (CDA; Luke, 2019; Van Dijk, 2009) to analyze the discourse that parents, teachers, supporters, and students used to describe motives for opting out. Notably, although this is critical in name, I take a decolonial frame. Critical theory and decolonial theory are not inherently at odds with each other but are distinct theoretical frameworks (see e.g., Bartholomew, 2018; Grande, 2004). Because there is not an established decolonial discourse analysis I consider this a CDA, rather than discourse analysis, in that my analysis is specifically oriented toward questioning power and shifting it; these are the main tenets of criticality. Yet, I do this power analysis with a specific interest in decoloniality as a type of power analysis that locates power structures within coloniality.

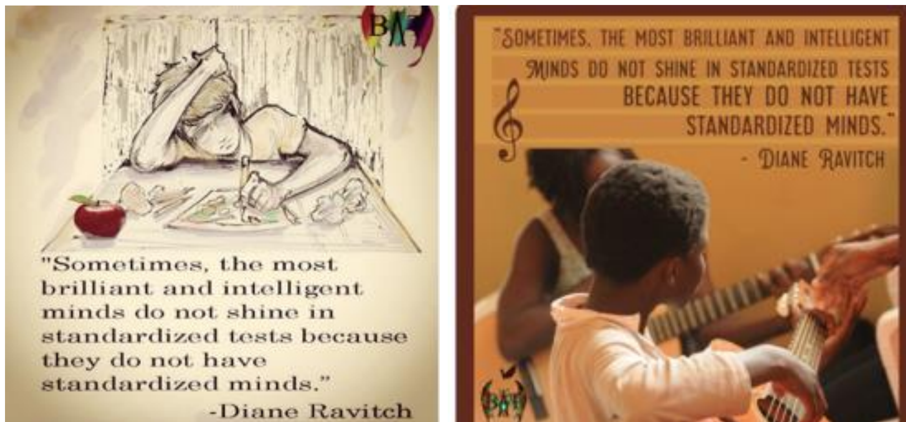
Finally, I coded my data using the MAXQDA12 software (VERBI Software, 2018) to look for emerging themes across the posts and the movement. I combined a priori codes based on previous opt-out research and in vivo codes based on what the posts themselves said (Creswell, 2013). I then collapsed codes and organized them into parent, child, and grandchild codes, reviewing each coded segment for consistency and relationships across codes (Creswell, 2013). This study is part of a larger project analyzing the opt-out movement on social media. Importantly, the opt-out movement has garnered support across the political spectrum, and

supporters espouse a wide range of motives (see e.g., Pizmony-Levy & Saraisky, 2016). Thus, in this paper, I specifically focus on codes that related to my aim of understanding whether and how any motives might support decolonial goals within U.S. education. From the resulting code structure, I selected those codes that captured themes about knowledge production and categorization, as well as how this is used to sort, rank, exclude, and confine certain bodies accordingly. In what follows, I present exemplars from each of these codes (Bezemer & Jewitt, 2010) to illustrate how these themes surfaced across the movement.

Findings

My search of public posts on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter revealed that, within the opt-out movement, a subset of activists used social media to vocalize ideals that challenged how knowledge and learning were constructed in ways that could be linked to coloniality, as well as how coloniality categorizes racialized bodies through everyday tools, like testing. There was an overarching theme that knowledge, learning, and students' lives could not and should not be contained or controlled by government-imposed standards, and thus could not be captured on statewide standardized tests. Therefore, such tests were an unjust measure that should not dominate our education system but, rather, should be resisted. Although I primarily focus on posts that might be viewed more generally as "liberal," as I discuss below, resistance to big government spans the political spectrum. The findings below are loosely organized into three overlapping themes: the convictions that (1) knowledge is not standard and cannot be captured by a number; (2) doing so detracts from meaningful learning; and (3) testing is neither just nor objective, particularly when it comes to race. Within each, I provide examples that are illustrative of how these themes surfaced across posts. I relate these findings to coloniality in U.S. education in order to understand the movement's positionality within a decolonial framework. Taken together, the findings suggested that a subgroup of participants were motivated by their understanding of statewide testing as a tool that re-instantiates inequality, racial subordination, partial knowledge, and bounded learning, and that they publicly promoted the opt-out movement on social media using this discourse. These opt-out participants placed statewide testing within a greater U.S. educational context that continuously subordinates certain groups of students. In this way, they articulated, with varying complexity, the role of testing in re-instantiating inequality and hierarchy within a colonial education system, at times naming coloniality directly. However, coloniality was rarely named explicitly. I explore the implications of this below. Overall, their motives and discourse provide insights into the potential of organizing against a colonial education system from within that system using social media spaces, as well as how we might organize discourse intentionally toward these ends.

Knowledge isn't standard. Within opt-out posts, a subgroup focused specifically on how knowledge was constrained by standardized testing. Manifesting in varied ways, the resounding message was that knowledge could neither be standardized nor contained. For example, across these posts, several users reposted a quote from Diane Ravitch, a historian of education and founding director of the Network for Public Education: "Sometimes, the most brilliant and intelligent minds do not shine in standardized tests because they do not have standardized minds" (Neufeld, 2015, para. 5; Figures 2 and 3).



Figures 2 and 3. On the left, a screenshot of Stand4KidsNM's August 31, 2015, post, reposted from the Badass Teachers Association. This image, showing a child in stress, was commonly shared on social media amongst movement participants. On the right, a screenshot of Susan DuFresne's April 6, 2019, tweet, nearly four years later, using the same Ravitch quote. DuFresne is another well-known educator and activist in the opt-out movement, who, importantly, focuses on the history of racism within U.S. schools. This image highlights music as a form of knowledge that children cannot exhibit on standardized tests.

Such posts highlight that not all forms of knowledge are captured on tests, and that when we reduce knowledge to tests, we exclude many students' brilliance. This reductionist nature of testing was also commonly captured with the phrase "I am more than a score." Indeed, this phrase was popular on the ground and throughout the movement; (see Hagopian's 2014 book bearing the phrase, which beautifully presents the words of opt-out students, parents, teachers, and activists). Often converted to the hashtags #iammorethanascore or #morethanascore for social media, these posts implied that standardized tests, which reduce students to a number, failed to capture the full repertoires of knowledge that students embody. This slogan appeared in posts as hashtags, images of protests signs and t-shirts worn to school, and memes. For example, one Instagram post included the image of a student holding a protest sign, seen in Figure 4 below. In this post, the opt-out supporter also invited families to a "community dialogue on education" and offered to answer any questions about why families should "#refusethetest."

Figure 4. Image from an Instagram post promoting the opt-out movement and an event inviting families to discuss the movement in Massachusetts and Rhode Island.

The slogan called people to recognize that testing reduces children to a test score, ignoring their full capabilities and potentials. This sentiment aligns with a critique of coloniality in education, as coloniality has constricted what counts as knowledge and how it can be demonstrated by defining and institutionalizing subjects and what constitutes proof or truth within them. More critically, it also harkens to a history of using statistics and standardized tests to purportedly prove inferiority amongst Black, Indigenous and other racialized groups through scientific measurement, as I explore further below.

Testing detracts from expansive learning and thought. While such posts focused more on knowledge that students already had but could not demonstrate on tests, other posts focused on the learning that might happen if tests did not dominate schools. For example, some emphasized that arts, music, sports, and extracurriculars "cultivate" growth and "enrich" children, teaching another form of success beyond the constraints of tests. They argued that testing detracted from such learning both by focusing disproportionately on the tests and their tested subject matter and by taking funding away from these other areas. They also argued that testing detracts from developing skills like critical thinking. There was a shared sentiment that, because tests focus narrowly on a prescribed set of knowledge and skills, which we drill through test preparation and narrow focus on test results, we are training students not to think critically. For example, they imagined an alternative curriculum that "invites students to read, ask questions, explore ideas, and think critically," implying that these were stifled through a heavy emphasis on testing. In another post (Figure 5), an image showed children entering with wings that presumably represent their ability to take flight through learning, but being pumped out the other end wingless and wearing badges on their arms:

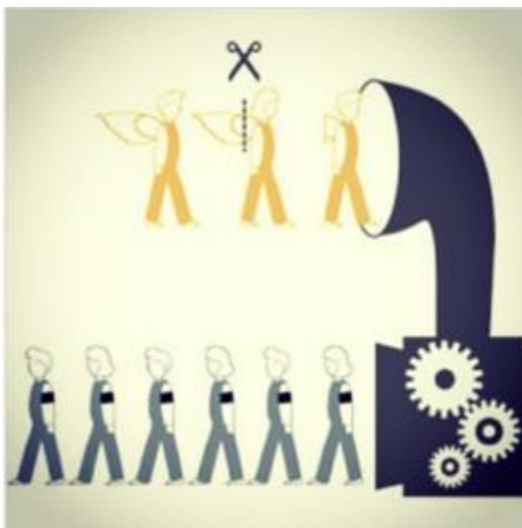


Figure 5. Opt-out image depicting children's metaphoric wings being clipped as they enter school and leaving uniform.

This image critiqued the factory model of education. Posting it with the hashtags "#commoncore #highstakestesting #refusethetest #pearson," amongst others, this opt-out proponent suggested that the CCSS and statewide testing function to stifle learning by controlling it. This concern aligns closely with critique of coloniality in which scholars argue that coloniality thrives, in part,

by controlling knowledge toward a nation-state agenda (Tlostanova & Mignolo, 2009). It also aligns with a critique of the history of standardized testing within U.S. schools as a tool for producing workers during industrialization, which I discuss further in the next section. This supports an analysis of coloniality and colonial modernity specifically, in which people are sorted according to the nation-state's political and economic agenda, with schools being a tool for social reproduction (Alarcón, Kaplan, & Moallem, 1999; Grande, 2004; Jordan, 1985).

Notably, this sentiment also related to the in vivo subcode *indoctrination* that arose in my greater research about all opt-out proponents on social media. Indoctrination is related to creating uncritical thinkers in that it is the process of inculcating someone with beliefs, but here indoctrination was a term primarily used by right-wing conservatives (seen through their simultaneous commentary including pro-MAGA/Trump, anti-vaccination, anti-sex education, ultra-right Christian sentiments). Yet, through its relation to the broader concept of critical thinking, it highlighted how political lines are blurred when it comes to beliefs about governmental control. Sentiments against government control are shared across the political spectrum, even as the word itself is largely deployed by right-wingers. For example, the tweeted image in Figure 6 below is representative of indoctrination posts, which largely focused on schools indoctrinating students with liberal ideals:

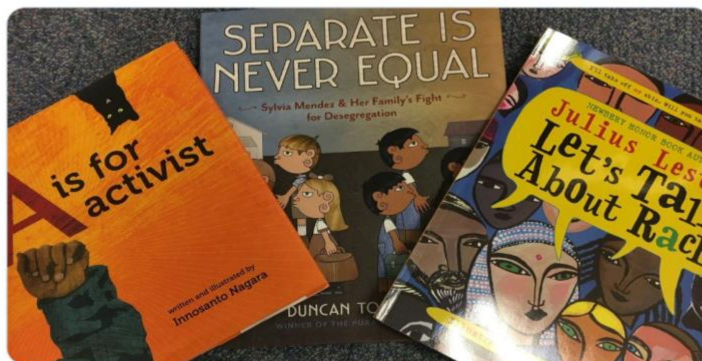


Figure 6. Example from a conservative tweeter using the idea of indoctrination to argue against national education standards as a liberalizing threat.

This tweeter complained that elementary school students were "being indoctrinated" by "#CCSS" and called for people to "StopFedEd." In particular, this tweeter claimed that government control of education, through national standards, was indoctrinating students about institutionalized racial discrimination. Thus, despite the relationship between critical thought and indoctrination, the latter could hardly be viewed as a decolonial concept, even as the idea of government control is central to both. The fight here against indoctrination was framed specifically against dismantling the colonial subordination of racialized and otherized people.

Here, I pause to highlight two contrasting cases, as supported in qualitative research (Creswell, 2013). Although they do not represent the discourse chosen by this group of opt-out supporters overall, their exceptionality brings to the fore an important theoretical consideration: In the first, a Latino teacher retweeted a news article about how New York's Black and Latinx students are disproportionately placed into lower academic tracks, setting a lower bar. He retweeted with his own commentary "Mi gente latina no sabe del #deepstate" [My Latin people don't know about deep state] and went on to include several additional hashtags, such as

"#optout #keepusdumb #indoctrination #indoctrinate #notest #notesting #agenda #corruption." He also tagged New York City schools and used hashtags for the New York Department of Education and U.S. Department of Education. *Deep state* refers to the belief that there is conspiracy within the government and with top finance figures to control and manipulate policy. With his tweet, the teacher suggests that the government seeks to indoctrinate Black and Brown students by providing lesser educational opportunities. He implicates testing in this systemic indoctrination agenda by using these claims to position himself against testing (#optout, #notest, #notesting). Systemically ranking and subordinating racialized bodies, and using institutionalized knowledge to maintain this, is fundamental to coloniality. Here, I cannot draw conclusions about his political alignment, but his use of the word *indoctrination* specifically in relation to the government's racialized sorting of people falls outside the outspoken right's more dominant use of the word, where they rarely use it to contest coloniality's pervasive constructs (but rather, as seen in Figure 6 above, to thwart such attempts).

Similarly, the other outlier here spoke of the government's use of education to subordinate specific racial groups, but in this case the tweeter directly referred to the U.S. settler colonial project. Linking to her blog, she called for an end to overtesting, and argued that the ESSA is "a guide for the assimilation of our Native Americans...again!" Although, *assimilation* has been historically used with positive connotation in the dominant national U.S. discourse (consider, for example, the long-popular idea of the melting pot), it is related to the more negative concept of indoctrination, which can be viewed as the process by which governments and institutions assimilate people. She also included the hashtag "#endfeded." Like *indoctrination*, this hashtag was popular amongst right-wing opt-out proponents, but not to refer to the government's attempts to assimilate Native people. By referring to big government in this context, the tweeter directly added settler colonialism to the opt-out conversation, as well as the history of U.S. public education as a tool to extend a settler-colonial agenda. She further implicated testing as a tool to enforce assimilation.

Taken together, these cases directly bring coloniality to bear on the opt-out conversation. In particular, they highlight how concepts like indoctrination apply across political views to contest the government's control of people to serve a specific, sometimes hidden, agenda. Whereas right-aligned opt-out participants espoused fear that children might be indoctrinated with e.g., a pro-queer "agenda," these tweeters localized big government in the United States' historic and continued interest in subordinating students of color and the use of education to do so.

#Optoutforjustice: Poverty, race, and civil disobedience. Indeed, several opt-out proponents critiqued statewide testing as a tool that subordinates students of color or students living in poverty; simply serves as a proxy for structural inequality; or otherwise promotes continued educational disparity. These codes surfaced 58 times. In these posts, activists used such claims to promote opting out as a moral imperative—in some cases seeking to hold their audience responsible to children—as well as a form of civil disobedience. In such posts, the proponents placed statewide testing within a greater U.S. educational context that continuously subordinates certain groups of students, viewing testing as just one tool for doing so. In this way, they contextualized, with varying success, the role of testing as a gatekeeper (read: border patrol) within a deeply problematic system.

Measuring "inequality." Many supporters used their social media posts to name how

standardized tests are not the objective measures that they are purported to be. They frequently named poverty in some form, stating that tests measure affluence rather than knowledge. They also named the effects of poverty on students' everyday lives, including disparate access to transportation, heat, and steady employment for parents. One tweeter reminded followers that some students are taking statewide tests while drinking Flint water and challenged politicians to test under the same conditions. Nearby, a Detroit teacher tweeted that one of his students had a reading test passage about "maple sugar collection, composting, and how to properly use a hoe in vegetable gardening." He went on to question how she might score compared to students with home, community, or school gardens, or parents who work in plant sciences. With this tweet, he called into question how affluence and resources at home, in the neighborhood, and at school, as well as familial education and employment, could impact a student's test performance. Across these and similar posts, opt-out proponents argued that underlying factors impacted students' scores, and that these factors arise from greater systems of inequality that are entrenched in the United States, making a focus on test scores unjust and untenable in the struggle for educational equality. Although they did not always name it as such, many linked such issues implicitly to race, using code words like "urban," referring to specific locations with high populations of Black and Brown people, or posting images of students of color.

Race. Others, however, named race explicitly. Opt-out has been previously critiqued as a predominantly white movement, in which privileged white parents gripe about the extra stress placed on their children and the time it takes away from learning (e.g., Pondiscio, 2015; Quinlan, 2016). Their choice to opt out has been criticized as yet another white maneuver to protect only white children because high opt-out rates are punishable with reduced school funding, which could, in turn, further harm under-resourced schools attended primarily by Black and Brown students (Hairston, 2017; Riseman, 2016; Taylor, 2016). However, calling the opt-out movement white erases the important work of parents, teachers and scholars of color, and their co-conspirators (Packnett Cunningham, 2020; e.g., DuFresne, 2018; Hagopian, 2014). Importantly, it also erases the messages that they have made central to their work in the movement, which focus more pointedly on the racist underpinnings of testing—a colonizing move in itself. As one proponent points out, those who call the movement white "haven't spent much time in Philly or the Bronx," calling attention to the fact that a whole faction of the movement is made invisible with such claims. Indeed, many opt-out supporters highlighted racism as a motivating reason to refuse testing. Quoting education scholar Ibram X. Kendi, one prominent supporter tweeted, "Standardized tests have become the most effective racist weapon ever devised to objectively degrade Black minds and legally exclude their bodies." On Instagram, a teacher urged her followers, "Do you know that standardized testing sprung out of the eugenics movement? Look it up." Similarly, someone tweeted "Standardized testing comes from an age when we were measuring cranium size to determine intelligence." Both posts here referenced the history of using "scientific" measurement specifically to prove that Black people and people of color were lesser, to justify slavery, and to uphold continued racist policy and practice in the United States (e.g., Hagopian, 2014). Indeed, its history in the eugenics movement[3] is well documented (e.g.,

[3] Importantly, as I write this, it has only been one month since my own institution, University of California, Berkeley, has publicly disavowed a fund in the School of Public Health specifically designated for eugenics research (Watanabe, 2020). Let us not be surprised at the subversive

Bouche & Rivard, 2014; Funk, 2018; Hagopian, 2014; Rethinking Schools, 2014; Neill, 2016). Another teacher tweeted, "The social/cultural inequalities in the literature selections on these exams is NO ACCIDENT. #racisttesting #antiracisteducator #notesting." The examples go on: "#justanotherformofracism," "#zerotoleranceforracism," "#schooltoprisonpipeline," "#InstitutionalRacism," "We need to disrupt the invisibility of racism." The message here is resounding: Statewide testing is a specific example of institutionalized racism within a more broadly racist U.S. education system. Further, these racist underpinnings are not accidental but rather a systematic means of excluding racialized students that re-instantiate structural racism in our education system today. Testing is rooted in the ongoing project of racial subordination within the United States, a means of proving that certain bodies deserve less because they are lesser. This is, of course, a project rooted in the United States' very foundation, since settlers colonized Indigenous lands and people, using and abusing stolen people from Africa—a project that, to be justified amongst a purportedly moral Christian society, required proof that those whom it harmed were exceptions because they were not human after all (e.g., Mignolo & Tlostanova, 2006; Sivanandan, 1974; Tlostanova & Mignolo, 2012; Tuck & Gaztambide-Fernández, 2013; Tuck, Guess, & Sultan, 2014; Wilderson, 2010). In a project that continues to subordinate Black and Brown bodies today, these opt-out proponents called on others to recognize and historicize the role of testing in continuing to frame students of color as lesser, and to justify why they receive fewer resources. These messages from within the movement can hardly be called white.

In one of the only direct mentions of coloniality, a tweeter quotes a conference presenter, "Don't colonize black communities. You're not saving them." With testing promoted as an accountability tool to assure that all public school students receive the same education, this tweet calls out the role of testing in actually colonizing communities of color rather than assuring equality. Imposing standards of what counts as knowledge does not save students of color, here Black students, but rather seeks to control and denigrate them. Together, these social media posts indicate that this subgroup of opt-out proponents support the movement specifically as a means of resisting and calling out the historically racist underpinnings of testing and the way that it is used within a broader public education system that continues to denigrate and subordinate students of color each day.

Civil disobedience. Similarly, opt-out for these activists represented a form of civil disobedience. Calling for others to participate, they summoned their audience to join the "#publicedrevolution": "Stand up for what's right," "You have power!!! Act on it," "Civil disobedience is required." In doing so, they communicated that they viewed opt-out as a way to push against something unjust; it represented a way to resist from within the system. In some cases, they framed it more generally, as seen in Figure 7. In this post, the mother framed opting out as a dangerous but necessary choice. Although vague about the dangers, she called for parents to stand up on children's behalf.

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ways that eugenics ideologies still permeate our education system when it is still allowed to permeate our top institutions blatantly.

Figure 7. Image from an Instagram post, in which a parent calls for others to join her in standing up against statewide testing.

In other cases, such as a tweet quoting Professor Yohuru Williams, opting out was placed in a lineage of civil disobedience linked specifically to racial justice: “Rosa sat, so Malcolm could walk, so Obama could run . . . so Rubio could charter!?” Here, Williams framed school privatization and testing as a setback to progress in racial justice. They were called out as institutionalized forms of racial subordination that could not be taken apart from the long history of Black struggle in the United States. Not stated directly in the short quote, testing has played a role in charter schools and privatization, as test scores are used to direct money away from public schools, which are increasingly attended by Black and Brown students, and into charter schools (e.g., Buras, 2012; Eastman, Anderson, & Boyles, 2017; Public Schools, n.d.; Ravitch, 2016; Saltman, 2012). This link between statewide testing and redirecting funding away from students of color came up repeatedly. For example, another academic tweeted that the Common Core and charter schools were used in the “gutting of” Detroit’s “public school system,” which “was detrimental to that city’s Black American population.” By specifically juxtaposing education privatization today with the history of civil disobedience against institutional racism, Williams implicates the U.S. education system in continued institutionalized subordination; exposes the racialized component of testing; and frames opt-out as an almost essential move to continue this struggle. In this way, opting out becomes a racial imperative.

Interestingly, this Williams’ quote, and many other posts surrounding the themes of race, justice, and civil disobedience, originated from the 2016 United Opt Out National Conference, which was themed “Transcending Resistance, Igniting Revolution” (Seattle Education, 2015b). In particular, one teacher was live-tweeting from the conference. This is a practice in which people are encouraged to tweet in real time from an event. Doing so generates publicity and interest with a wider audience. It is common to do this by quoting speakers to give the outside world a snapshot of what kind of conversations are happening in that space. Of course, a conference is more likely to be attended and run by academics and education professionals. Thus, these tweets tell us that the conversation about the relationship between standardized statewide testing and racism, inequality, and even coloniality was indeed happening, but they also raise questions: How often was this part of the conversation? In what ways did this conversation reach into other spaces with the more general public? What does it mean if this

conversation did not make it widely into the mainstream conversation on social media? Further, while the live-tweeter sometimes attributed the quotes to specific people by tagging their Twitter accounts, at other times he omitted names. In the tweet described above, no presenter was given credit for saying "don't colonize black communities." What does it mean that this tweet brought the topic of colonization directly into the social media conversation but did not attribute the claim to its speaker? For example, there is a history within the academy of white people erasing the voices of scholars of color who have articulated ideas before them (e.g., Ahmed, 2004; Bailey & Trudy, 2018; Smith, 2018; Tuck & Gaztambide Fernández, 2013; see the Cite Black Women movement), which is itself a colonizing move. But beyond this, crediting the speaker here might have allowed people to follow up with that person or look into their other work to further inform themselves about the relationship between testing and coloniality, thereby deepening the cause.

Notably, this poster was one of two posters who frequently addressed these themes in their opt-out support but had large spurts on social media in Spring 2016, and then disappeared from the hashtag-driven conversation on social media. One remains on the board for a prominent group in the opt-out movement. The other co-founded an organization heavily involved in the movement and has pro-opt-out articles online dating back to 2013. His posts include images of himself wearing opt-out t-shirts. Thus, both cases suggest that their involvement reached far beyond social media support and spanned more time than their posts would imply. Perhaps, then, social media was simply not their preferred method of engagement. Indeed, the role of social media in the movement overall is unclear, yet important to understand in the current day, as discussed below. What is clear is that during their involvement in the movement on social media, they used their platforms to focus the conversation on issues of inequity that can be rooted in educational coloniality.

Discussion

Taken together, the themes that arose in what might be generally termed the more "liberal" or "progressive" faction of the opt-out movement cannot be typified as specifically decolonial. Importantly, only two posts here referred to coloniality directly, and both were from the 2016 conference mentioned above. Without directly talking to opt-out participants, I cannot claim that their motives overwhelmingly revolved around decoloniality specifically. Rather, I have applied this theoretical lens to understand how the opt-out movement itself might function against colonial constructs within education in order to consider its potential in pushing against how we define knowledge, and the ways in which these definitions perpetuate coloniality in U.S. education. That is, this subgroup understood statewide testing as a tool that promotes and re-instantiates inequality, racial subordination, partial knowledge, and constricted (or bound) learning. Each of these relate to the ongoing project of coloniality. It is not that participants viewed or articulated these atrocities as colonial issues—though, to be clear, some did—but rather that they articulated atrocities that can be deconstructed and understood through this lens, and as such, it is important for decolonial education scholars to consider the role that the opt-out movement, or other forms of resistance against practices with colonial underpinnings, might play in challenging the grasp of coloniality on our education system. Importantly, I have omitted additional prominent themes that can ultimately be linked to settler coloniality and colonial modernity. For example, many opt-out proponents critiqued the role of big money and corporations in statewide testing and education reform; (Indigenous scholars have articulated the incompatibility of capitalism and Indigenous epistemology; see Coulthard, 2014). Here, I have

focused on themes of knowledge production and which bodies are framed as capable of holding knowledge, as I was specifically interested in the movement's potential to promote an epistemic shift.

At its core, decoloniality is about shifting what counts as knowledge, and who is able to produce, hold, and regulate it. It is an epistemic shift, or delinking from what we know as sanctioned knowledge, as Tlostanova and Mignolo (2012) articulate. It is learning to unlearn, and a move to the non-modern (Lugones, 2010; Mignolo, 2000; Tlostanova & Mignolo, 2009, 2012), meaning that knowing is understood outside the terms that modernity insists upon, like constructs of progress. To do this, we have to undo the colonial myth that humanity is a point that people can arrive at because that masks the way that coloniality frames many as inherently and always subhuman. It also involves undoing settler colonial-modern beliefs about what is natural order and progression, which justify domination and oppression. As Moallem (2002) articulates, "The official knowledge of both colonial and post- or neocolonial education continue to rely on the notion of 'standards,' itself based on normative notions of subjectivity as defined by national, racial, sexual, and class hierarchies" (p. 369). The opt-out posts here relate to these calls by making transparent the history of testing, what it does and does not measure, and what it naturalizes. Rejecting statewide testing, these proponents have articulated motives that align with an epistemic shift, calling for a local and nationwide movement to reconsider how we regulate and define knowledge within the U.S. school system and how this regulates students' bodies.

Knowledge isn't standard, but it's still categorized and contained. This subset of opt-out supporters on social media largely agreed that standardized tests fail to capture knowledge, arguing that it detracts from whole forms of learning and knowing and reduces children to a number that cannot possibly represent the capacity of their minds. They pushed against how knowledge has been defined by testing constructs. Indeed, these sentiments can be understood through a decolonial lens: the idea that knowledge can be defined, categorized, and bordered into discrete units and subjects is founded in coloniality in order to subordinate certain forms of knowledge to maintain colonial control (e.g., Chase, 2020; Falcón, 2016; Grande, 2004; Lugones, 2010; Mignolo, 2000; Sandoval, 2000; Tlostanova & Mignolo, 2009, 2012).

As Mignolo (2000) articulates,

> the power of coloniality and, therefore, of the coloniality of power, lies in the persistence and the hegemony of 'macro-narratives.' In order to undo them and be able to do something beyond their scope, you need to deal with the structure and content of knowledge that have been naturalized in those macro-narratives. (p. 32)

In the U.S. education system, we have a macro-narrative about what subjects are important to a child's future success. The underlying narrative is that their success relies on them becoming productive citizens of the nation-state. Thus, we prioritize certain subjects, like STEM, over others as the Unites States seeks to remain competitive on the global scale. This, indeed, prioritizes not the individual child's wellbeing but that of the nation-state. Yet, it is framed as being for the child, as the child's wellbeing is viewed as dependent upon the nation-state as its protector and arbiter of freedom and rights (e.g., Nguyen, 2012). These are the enduring and naturalized narratives that are adopted in a colonial education system, one founded in erasing Indigenous peoples and epistemologies, controlling enslaved Black people, and grooming white children and their subordinated peers for their hierarchical position in the workforce. This history

is obscured, however, by narratives that promote education as the key to opportunity. In this narrative, we adopt nationwide standards like the CCSS, with a discourse of holding our system accountable to educating all students equally (itself a narrative that masks inequities like school funding policies and privatization). And to uphold such standards, we implement testing against those standards. Yet, this assumes that all children should learn the same thing, which assumes that one set of knowledge is universally important. Thus, to reject statewide testing by calling out that “knowledge isn’t standard” is to reject the way that certain epistemologies have been naturalized through colonial power over knowledge. Thus, such motives within the opt-out movement align with decolonial thought that calls us to push against the notion that such power-imbued processes are “natural, normal and/or inevitable” (Chase, 2020, p. 21).

Yet, arguing that there are forms of knowledge beyond those captured on standardized testing does not equate to understanding coloniality in education or wanting to decolonize it. For example, many opt-out advocates argued that testing detracts from the arts in schools. However, they do not specify what counts as art. Are the children in DuFresne’s post (Figure 3) above playing classical guitar or riffing some blues? Would arts advocates accept Bomba in schools or only classical music? Indeed, each field has its own history of colonization—what is added to the official canon, deemed worthy, and used to mark intelligence or prestige within the field—even as fields are ranked hierarchically against each other (e.g., Mignolo, 2000; Moallem, 2002; Sandoval, 2000). Thus, even as some opt-out motives align with decolonial thought on some level, social media posts cannot tell us how deeply these motives run when it comes to the school system beyond testing. That is, do they wish to challenge what counts as knowledge, as represented on standardized tests alone, or across the curricula? Challenging the prioritization of math and science over the arts is one step, but would they take the next to challenge what counts as art, or how the natural world is understood? Is arts programming enough to satisfy these proponents, or would they challenge what counts as knowledge production within the arts themselves? The subordination of epistemologies occurs indeed within already subalterned fields themselves (e.g., Moallem, 2002; Lugones, 2010).

When a movement truly moves across space. In part, the standardization of knowledge can be viewed as a means of controlling movement within the nation-state, and who has access to what forms of mobility. In keeping with decolonial thought about the contrived nature of borders, the social media posts here represent movement across spaces. As we saw in particular with the poster from the opt-out conference, posting online represents a bridge from the physical to digital space, and also a bridge between otherwise disparate physical spaces, allowing messages to reach across large expanses of time and space. Decolonial theorists emphasize how colonial modernity constructs time and space as static, linear, and bounded (e.g., Kaplan, 1996; Mignolo, 2000). Thus, organizing via social media allows us to challenge these constructs and allows a part of the conversation that was being held in more academic spaces to reach a more public audience. Of course, digital spaces come with their own sets of colonizing dilemmas surrounding who creates the spaces, with which affordances and constraints, for which users, and for which audiences, for example (e.g., Pink, 2012; Risam, 2018; Savage, 2010). Yet, by bridging time and space, social media platforms allowed opt-out participants to move across spaces as they organized. It is important to note that many (though not all) of the more decolonial-leaning messages here were posted by education scholars and teachers. This is a group of opt-out proponents who presumably have access to a different set of resources about the history and implications of education policy and practice in the United States than the general

public. Of course, true to colonial control of knowledge, this is no accident. It is the common irony of decolonial theory that those who have access to the language and theory to critique coloniality by name are often those most interior to its structures (e.g., de Sousa Santos, 2018; Mignolo, 2000). Particularly in a field like education, where knowledge about the systems is hierarchical and siloed across professionals, academics, politicians, and parents, de Sousa Santos' (2018) call for decolonial thinkers to work alongside activists is crucial. As he argues, we need a collaborative knowledge that moves from knowledge about to knowledge with, bonding our theoretical knowledge with the lived emotions and experiences of those on the ground. The study of social media in activism is thus important in this call to action: Because social media allows people to span time and space in order to connect with greater audiences, it has the potential to spread decolonial thought and desire, rather than keeping such information insular. This move in itself might be considered an attempt to deconstruct the hierarchy of knowledge within education activism, arguably a decolonial act itself.

Indeed, the opt-out movement has been laudable in this effort. Certain players in the movement have always attached opt-out to a greater issue of systemic inequality in education and specifically racial inequality, and have sought to connect information across the different players. We see the work of activists like Jesse Hagopian—a high school ethnic studies teacher and Black Lives Matter in Schools activist in Seattle, who, working alongside parents and students themselves, was central to opt-out success there—or Out Out Philly—who, as evidenced by their name, are organized around the opt-out movement, but have long organized events around Black Lives Matter and racial inequality, including book readings, forums, and movie screenings, using social media accounts to do so. We see how the Opt Out Bus, which drove across the country in Summer 2016 to gather support for the movement, transformed also into a Black Lives Matter Bus, knowing that their mission against testing was rooted in resistance against institutionalized racism (see e.g., DuFresne, 2018). For some opt-out activists, the work has always centered on race and on connecting co-conspirators (Packnett Cunningham, 2020) in the struggle, across constituent groups and across space. The interconnectedness of their arguments and their networks, and the way that they view elements of our education system as operative in the continued subordination of Black and Brown bodies—a subordination that began in this country with its settle colonial foundation and has been continuously re-instantiated through intricate and conniving ways—suggests that coloniality is central to their struggle, whether named or unnamed.

Implications and Future Directions

This research lends insight into how people contest one form of coloniality as it manifests in U.S. education policy and practice today. With it, I aimed to deepen our understanding of the nuance within the opt-out movement, and what felt pressing to this group of activists in the everyday colonial bordering that they came up against. Their reasoning provides insights into the potential of organizing within a colonial system against that system in social media spaces, which is important as education activists continue to push against other colonial constructs within U.S. education. I present this research in a historical moment of angering yet hopeful irony—the time of both the COVID-19 pandemic and increased support for the Black Lives Matter movement amongst the non-Black public. As I analyzed these posts, it became obvious that some of the reasons these opt-out supporters have put forth for several years are now at the forefront of many people's minds: these tests do not represent students' real lives. Suddenly during COVID-19, when students' educations have been drastically interrupted and altered,

people are echoing this message. The tests do not represent the stress that children are experiencing, the extenuating circumstances they face, the lack of needed resources at home, or the other forms of learning taking place in their lives—but hasn't this always been true? Future research could explore how opt-out discourse has been taken up since COVID-19. Exploring this discourse in digital spaces has indeed become more prescient as our lives increasingly, if resistantly, move to digital spaces. Perhaps, the reasoning that this opt-out subgroup has given can lead a reinvigorated push for testing reform—or abolition—into the future as we reimagine what schooling looks like in a COVID-19 and post-COVID-19 world.

Importantly, politicians have already taken this historical moment to call for education reform. On May 5, 2020, New York Governor Andrew Cuomo tweeted, "As we prepare to reopen we have the opportunity to reimagine and build back our education system better." An inspiring start, yet he went on, "We will work with the @gatesfoundation and develop a blueprint to do this." Even in New York, where the opt-out movement has been most successful, Cuomo wants to reimagine education with the same companies that many advocates have loudly blamed and stated their opposition to. This raises the ongoing concern that you cannot change a system by using the same tools that got us here, or with the very people who are literally invested in perpetuating the system as it stands (see, for example, Audre Lorde's famous *The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House*; 1984/2007). We cannot change without reimagining what counts as knowledge, or which bodies are viewed as human enough to contain knowledge, and shifting power away from those who profit from the current definitions of these. Thus, the current moment is an opportunity to reimagine, yet the same players are situated to commandeer it.

This takes me, then, to my final point: There is no denying that the testing that the opt-out movement resists is founded in coloniality, from the ways that they construct knowledge to the ways that the tests themselves are normed. In this sense, opt-out represents a movement against coloniality. Yet, so long as the movement participants themselves do not understand its purpose in such terms, or those who do understand it as such do not popularize it to the masses in this way, its power to decolonize remains stunted. As one presenter at the opt-out conference admonished, "call those colonizing racist #edreform policies exactly what they are!" Without decoloniality as a central argument, the opt-out movement might succeed in reforming or even abolishing statewide testing as it currently stands, but we are likely to see another form of colonial knowledge standardization take the helm. After all, testing follows from a compelling argument—that we must hold all schools accountable for educating all students equally. It's a persuasive argument that falls in line with the very message that keeps the U.S. nation-state afloat: opportunity for all. As long as we can perpetuate that message, its atrocities against whole factions of society—needed for its very promulgation—can go on in disguise. Education has long been used in this national discourse, and I don't see it ending without explicitly attending to its settler-colonial complicity as we organize against it.

Chapter 4 Paper 3: Moving Beyond Linguistic Bordering: Utopian Designs for New Futures

Abstract

We explore learning as movement as a utopian methodological approach that reorients how we shape and understand literacy learning ecologies with youth from racialized backgrounds. Understanding linguistic practice as integral to learning, and to common beliefs of what it means to be human, we consider how static notions of language are deployed as border-marking tools within settler coloniality, supporting a logic that justifies pernicious racial subordination. Within education, these ideologies frame certain learners as illegitimate and deviant, with particular implications for literacy learning. The learning sciences are uniquely positioned to re-signify what it means to be a literate body and to design learning ecologies in which youth move across these borders. Aligning ourselves with decolonial scholars, we argue that a utopian methodology with a learning as movement frame allows us to forefront expansive learning design as we work alongside youth from otherized backgrounds toward visions of an alternate epistemic future.

Keywords: raciolinguistic ideologies, epistemic shift, utopian methodology, social design-based experiments, learning as movement, literacy in the learning sciences

In this conceptual paper, we advance a utopian approach to designing for expansive and just forms of literacy and methods of inquiry organized around an imagination about who youth might become—a proleptic dimension of learning that brings "the end into the beginning" (Cole, 1996, p. 183). This approach is at once future-oriented and historical and, thus, as critical learning scientists and literacy scholars, we employ frames that capture the dynamic nature of language and literacy and the potential of powerful literacies (Crowther, Hamilton, & Tett, 2006), while also accounting for literacy's historical and ongoing link to settler colonialism.

Learning, from this perspective, cannot be contained, nor should it be conceptualized as static. Instead, by attending to the intersecting flows of embodied activity, conversation, and movement, we see that learning involves movement across conceptual borders and disciplines and across physical spaces—within the body and as we carry our knowledge and understandings with us into our many communities and ecologies, both beloved and contested. This movement pushes against the ways that educational practice and linguistic ideologies, rooted in coloniality and power reproduction, seek to constrain students within white norms of learning and being. A learning as movement framework (Gutiérrez, 2005, 2008, 2020; Gutiérrez & Vossoughi, 2010) helps us understand and challenge the ways that literacy has been historically constrained within schooling practices. As we have written elsewhere,

> Learning as movement was intended to unsettle how we see what counts as learning, where we see learning, and especially to imagine what new perspectives and epistemological footings are called for in attending to new sets of relations and spatial reconfigurations. (Gutiérrez, 2020, p. 2)

Through the frame of learning as movement, youths' learning is refracted through decolonial, historicized, cultural-historical, and, importantly, spatialized frames in which the sociocultural, political, spatio-temporal, and historicized nature of people's everyday practices can be brought into focus. This historicized and proleptic framework calls for utopian research methodologies (Brown & Cole, 2001; Gutiérrez, Jurow, & Vakil, 2020; Levitas, 2013) whose multi-sited sensibilities allow us to imagine possible futures where learning is not constrained by colonial constructs, but rather fostered through unfettered movement across time and space. Speculative approaches, particularly in Mirra and Garcia's work (Garcia & Mirra, 2020; Mirra & Garcia, 2020), also foreground possible futures and argue that it is not about settling research in the notions of critique or repair—that the systems in place are designed to function as they do. As with utopian methodologies, speculative approaches include imagining and enacting new kinds of systems and relationships.

Our work in literacy bridges several areas of expertise and work within education, as indeed many decolonial scholars argue is fundamental to any decolonial aims (e.g., de Sousa Santos, 2018; Mignolo, 2000; Sandoval, 2000; Tlostanova & Mignolo, 2009). In the learning sciences and human development, we are uniquely positioned to do this crucial work as we seek to advance our understanding of what it is to meaningfully learn and engage in powerful literacy practices (Crowther et al., 2006). Bridging work in decolonial theory, critical learning sciences, linguistics, sociocultural theory, translanguaging, and spatial theory, we call for a nuanced approach to literacy research and practice that understands learning as perpetually moving and frames research as a site that must always be oriented toward the expansive—towards challenging the confined borders of literacy learning within a settler colonial context in order to understand the ingenious literacy moves that youth with racialized and otherized identities make

to refigure their futures. Though this work applies across the learning sciences, we draw on our expertise in language and literacy with youth from otherized backgrounds to elucidate its potential.

As a boundary-pushing frame, we view learning as movement to be essential in the utopian methodology that we employ in our work with youth from otherized backgrounds because of the ways that language, literacy, and learning have been historically constrained within the U.S. Inspired by the work of decolonial scholars, we view this framework to push against the ways that coloniality has bordered knowledge and practice to stifle meaningful and localized learning. Thus, we begin by grounding our work in raciolinguistic ideologies, coloniality, and language borders to illustrate how youth from racialized backgrounds are constrained by static notions of what it means to do literacy—notions that are founded in a set of structures meant precisely to subordinate. We then move into emergent scholarship on learning as movement, which allows us to work beyond this bordering logic to understand the ingenuity in everyday literacy moves. We end by bringing in utopian research methodologies, including social design-based research, to show how an orientation toward movement is essential to work that seeks to support youth as they shape their own learning toward an alternate future (Gutiérrez et al., 2020). In doing so, we argue that learning as movement is a framework that allows us to approach our work with youth from racialized and otherized backgrounds with an epistemic lens that honors youth-led learning towards building a collective utopia, and that such an epistemic shift is indeed necessary if we are to foster the learning ecologies that deconstruct colonial constraints and allow for expansive ways of being.

Raciolinguistic Ideologies, Coloniality, and Bordered Learning

First and foremost, learning is a social process. Taking a Vygotskian perspective, language is socioculturally situated, the tool of tools (Vygotsky, 1986)—it helps us to communicate, to relate, to learn, and to articulate our learning. Language is also fundamental to our understanding of what it means to be human. As such, it is imbued with ideologies that inform how we understand, listen to, value, and use specific language practices within our learning ecologies. These ideologies can constrain students in sometimes subtle, sometimes overt ways.

Raciolinguistic ideologies. We situate our understanding of language, learning, and movement within the analytic frame of raciolinguistics (Rosa, 2019; Rosa & Flores, 2017). Raciolinguistics illuminates how race and conceptions of race influence language use, as well as how language constructs race. Rosa and Flores (2017) argue that "the co-naturalization of language and race [is] a process of raciolinguistic enregisterment, whereby linguistic and racial forms are jointly constructed as sets and rendered mutually recognizable as named languages/varieties and racial categories" (p. 17). Thus, because we are interested in expansive horizons for youth from racialized and otherized backgrounds, we must first ground our work in the ideologies and structures that constrain their everyday possibilities. Across domains, dominant ideologies are used to frame certain groups as having and others as lacking, invested always in reproducing power. Linguistically, the United States is permeated by a belief that one Monoglot English variation is "standard" (hooks, 1994; Lippi-Green, 2012; Silverstein, 1996), and that true citizenship hinges on its mastery. It goes unmarked—that is, it is conceived of as the norm, while other variations are marked as lacking, deviant, deficient, or not belonging. It is also commodified, imagined as a discrete unit that can be obtained, and in turn, bestowed by

institutions (i.e., schools) and their authorities (e.g., teachers). Standard English is framed as a tool to grant students access. This goes hand-in-hand with the ideology that standard English is more appropriate than other varieties for certain spaces, like school and the workplace (Flores & Rosa, 2015).

Of course, the idea of a standard language is contrary to what we know about language and human existence, that both inherently have great variety (Lippi-Green, 2012). Further, the promise of standard language is empty because certain bodies will always be framed as non-standard. Indeed, bodies that are racialized as not white are imagined to be languageless—that is not capable of legitimate language at all—tracing to how the colonizer frames the colonized as having no language and in need of colonial intervention (Rosa, 2016). If bodies are viewed as incapable of legitimate linguistic practice, their very humanity is drawn into question because language is fundamental to our definition of what sets humans apart from animals. These ideologies are in part racialized in order to allow other factors to go ignored (Flores & Lewis, 2016). That is, by focusing on linguistic practice, and how certain bodies fall short of dominant ideologies—refuse to be standardized or, to put it another way, tamed—the structures undergirding these racist ideologies and mass inequity are perpetuated.

Coloniality and control of knowledge. In the United States, these ideologies and structures are specifically founded in and used to obscure the ongoing project of settler coloniality. Although the case we present here focuses on the U.S. and its history of language policy and practice in schools, coloniality impacts life globally (Mignolo, 2000). *Coloniality* refers to structures and organizing hierarchies, both material and discursive, that are still present after colonial occupation (e.g., Grosfoguel, 2009); importantly, we also refer to settler coloniality here because where we reside in the U.S., each day that people occupy land that they are not locally indigenous to, regardless of complex political and corporal histories, is another day of colonialism (e.g., Tuck & Yang, 2012). As Tlostanova and Mignolo (2012) and other decolonial scholars articulate, colonialism created a racial hierarchy that defined white men (and their practices) as human, and people of color, women, queer people, non-Christians, and other oppressed groups as subhuman. This *coloniality of being* was used to justify colonial occupation and rule, and was upheld by the control of four overlapping spheres, not the least of which is "control of knowledge and subjectivity through education and colonizing the existing knowledges" (Tlostanova & Mignolo, 2009, p. 135), enforcing ideas of what is normative and natural in order to reproduce categorical colonial hierarchies.

Certainly, the U.S. as an example has a sordid and ongoing history of this, from the compulsory isolated and inhumane boarding schools for Indigenous children (Grande, 2004) to the slaying of Black people in chattel slavery seeking to become literate (Mitchell, 2008) to the many manifestations of English-only policy and deficit-oriented or elite white-favoring dual language programs we've seen in recent decades (Flores, 2016; Flores & Rosa, 2015; Valdés, 2015). What we emphasize here is that the coloniality of being and knowledge, with a long history undergirding it, continue to subordinate and otherize specific groups of learners today, framed always as monolithic groups lacking the skills, knowledge, and merit that education must instill in them in order for them to gain the freedom to move, both metaphorically and physically. Understanding how coloniality is implicated in whose language and literacy practices matter is central to the historicizing moves needed to re-mediate deficit conceptions of literacy (Gutiérrez, Morales, & Martinez, 2009).

Bordering language, knowledge, and bodies. In particular, control of language and literacy have been integral to colonial control of knowledge and to the ongoing process of nation-state making, in which ideologies demarcate who is framed as belonging within a nation-state's borders and restrict access and movement across space. These structures and ideologies can therefore be understood as bordering practices. Indeed, languages naturally have extensive contact with and influence on each other but were originally bordered into discrete knowledge units to serve nation-state formation and align with geopolitical borders (Urciuoli, 1995). They were sponsored and imagined as discrete precisely to erect an us-them border. This linguistic ideology has been applied within languages, too, erecting microborders between otherwise fluid linguistic skills. As Urciuoli articulates,

> Border-marking language elements are locational markers: They assign people a place, often opposing places between those who "have" the language and those who do not. Borders are places where commonality ends abruptly; border-making language elements stand for and performatively bring into being such places. (p. 539)

Thus, border logic first sought to confine linguistic practices for the nation-state and specifically frame some as in-proficient—and in turn, not belonging to, or deserving of, the nation-state. In a settler colonial nation-state, hierarchies of being are perpetually invested in staking territorial claim, and language and literacy are no exception to this territorialization. We see how the dominant linguistic ideologies described above continue to bolster settler coloniality as an ongoing project today, particularly as they shape learning environments and the ways in which youth from non-dominant linguistic backgrounds, tied unceasingly to race, are constrained—imagining the white settler as natural citizens, and racialized learners as perpetually striving toward a citizenship that is not quite theirs, and indeed cannot be theirs so long as they occupy racialized bodies. In this way, language and literacy are deployed as border-marking tools, in which whiteness frames itself as the unattainable utopia.

Yet, in the spirit of Sandoval (2000), language and literacy could be re-signified, used not for bordering but instead towards emancipatory ends that refigure what it means to be a learner, a languager, and a literate body. How then do we counter the pernicious ideologies that continue to subordinate whole groups of learners within an education system espousing to promote opportunity and equity for all? We argue that a learning as movement framework and utopian methodology allow us to challenge the static notions of language, literacy, and learning that have been used to constrain learners within the settler colonial project, allowing instead for an alternate future.

Learning as Movement

Attention to people's movement across a range of practices and spaces helps make visible the complex nature of learning and how knowledge production occurs across space. Focusing on what takes hold and is produced in people's movement invites literacy researchers to challenge the static and bordered notions of language and literacy that serve to justify and re-instantiate colonial hierarchy and subordination. Here, we lift up the work of scholars who have typified the fluidity of linguistic practice before and alongside us, offering examples of important work that informs our own thinking; we view learning as movement as a concept that allows us to bring such work together, as advocated by decolonial thinkers (discussed below; e.g., Anzaldúa, 2007; de Sousa Santos, 2018; Sandoval, 2000).

Translanguaging. *Translanguaging* has gained increasing popularity for its focus on the fluidity of linguistic practices. García and Wei (2014) argue that translanguaging as a concept moves away from discourses about language that continue to frame languages as separate entities, even though we know that this notion was a European invention. For example, García and Wei highlight that "bilingualism" still imagines two monolingualisms, rather than capturing the dynamic and fluid movement the occurs across a languager's full repertoire. Translanguaging expands on languaging—a concept that focused on language as a verb, something that is always used in interaction and is therefore always creating and being created—by emphasizing movement. It challenges the schooling practice of trying to fit students' linguistic repertoires into confined spaces.

As a sociocultural and political practice, language is always in movement; that is, language is dynamic. Translanguaging allows us to value students' local practices within otherwise monoglossic educational institutions, making fluid language practices normal, and creating a space where students can view their practices positively. In turn, a translanguaging understanding of linguistic practice helps students to have fuller understandings and learn more deeply (García & Wei, 2014). The concept of translanguaging has been applied within literacy (Smith, Stornaiuolo, & Phillips, 2018) and composition (see the January 2016 special issue of *College English, Volume 78*, Issue 3). However, we specifically locate our understanding of translanguaging, and the relationship of literacy, movement, and embodiment, within the analytic frame of raciolinguistics (Rosa, 2019; Rosa & Flores, 2017), as described above.

Sociopolitical emergences. Another related concept is that of *sociopolitical emergences*, put forth by Flores and Lewis (2016) who argue that to really work against our racialized linguistic ideologies we need to begin by analyzing the historical, racial and political contexts in which we find ourselves, rather than always focusing on the students who are impacted by these contexts as objects of anomalous study. Focusing on *emergences* calls us as researchers to think about how practices and categories come into being from their specific cultural and historical locations (consistent with Mignolo, 2000), and that linguistic practice is always in a state of becoming. This state of becoming can also be understood as movement. By framing practices as emergent, Flores and Lewis (2016) highlight the ongoing nature of linguistic practice and how static classifications are reductive, arguing that "proficiency is not an objective process but is rather negotiated and renegotiated through social interactions" (p. 120). They specifically name how movements in the field often perpetuate raciolinguistic ideologies by being ahistorical, ignoring e.g., neoliberal and political economic forces on migration, and implicitly continuing to set monolingualism as the norm. With their poignant theoretical interrogation, they leave us with implications for how we view the classroom and student practice, calling us to focus on practices beyond categories, and to also flip the lens onto raciolinguistic ideologies and the structures and discourses that undergird them.

Spatializing literacy. In the past two decades, there has also been a spatial turn in literacy research, in which space is no longer a static backdrop but rather foregrounded and understood as dynamic (Mills & Comber, 2013). Spatializing literacy can provoke a destabilization of power by emphasizing that literacy practices are inextricably social and material. Citing Dixon's (2011) work in post-Apartheid South Africa, Mills and Comber argue that students' bodies are regulated by normative classroom literacy practices and that, in turn,

"meaning-making potential can be seriously curtailed" (p. 414). Further, invoking Soja (1989), they hold that spaces are never neutral, but rather regulate social practices "in the interests of maintaining and reproducing established hierarchies" (p. 417). The authors promote *critical pedagogy of place* as a means to help students understand social and geographical influences on their lives. Students and schools are located in "places of historical, political, economic, and environmental contestation and . . . negative representations . . . have long plagued state-funded schools in high poverty areas" (p. 416). By spatializing literacy, we draw these constrained histories and spaces into question and allow students to reshape their localities. Mills and Comber also highlight the contributions of New Literacy Studies and emergent digital literacies. These literacies are notable because they transverse physical space for "cross-cultural, cross-generational, and transnational connections" (pp. 417–418) while operating in virtual spaces. They argue that multimodality also necessitates new research methods that better capture the complexity of digital spaces; we return to this below.

One powerful example of spatializing literacy is seen in Larson & Moses' (2018) ethnographic work in which a remarkable collaboration with a local African-American community worked to transform a local store in a "food desert" into a hub of healthier food practices. The ensuing utopian vision began to take shape as community partners co-constructed a new space with implications for consequential change that would ripple throughout the community. Larson and Moses theorized the "Freedom Market" as a central node, what activity theorists would call a germ cell concept of the core relations from which a new practice would be built (Engeström, 2006). What started as a community participatory project around the corner market transformed into a project in which the change that was happening across an emergent grassroots network of justice initiatives became important to document. The authors observed that their attention to movement and connections across the nodes oriented them to a focus on "pathways, boundaries, and edges" (p. 6) that made visible new transformative trajectories for community members. Here, the potential and social futures were best indexed in the community's literacy practices and forms of engagement that participants produced in their movement across the nodes. Of significance, the networked relations and practices of change evinced that consequential learning and change is neither unidirectional nor found in a single site.

Epistemic movement. What these theorizations share is an understanding that we cannot capture students' repertoires (Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003) or learning through static notions of what it means to be literate bodies. Rather, as researchers and practitioners, we must challenge bordered framings to allow movement across spaces, contexts, concepts, and skills. Understanding learning as movement lends itself to understanding students' full repertoires, rather than how they are displayed in predetermined, prescribed and constrained contexts—constraints with a sordid history purposefully designed to subordinate. Allowing for movement across time and space allows for a proleptic futurity, one in which learners from non-dominant backgrounds are free to imagine a future in their own terms beyond otherizing ideologies and structures.

We view learning as movement as a framework that forefronts radical possibilities (Anyon, 2014), a framework that pushes our work in literacy toward the generative possibilities of linking research on learning and design to social movements as we seek to work side by side with learners toward alternative futures. We are not suggesting that social movements are research sites in ways that recapitulate the status quo of the academic entering communities of

practice for gain, but rather that social movements are fluid networks of activity wherein profound learning and identity work, distributed joint activity, and the development of local, situated, and distributed shared practices are made possible; these are networks for imagining new sociopolitical and ethical horizons that are neither fixed nor static, but instead moving horizons of radical possibility. Of particular interest, social movements also involve everyday people who are rarely recognized as historical actors (Espinoza, 2003; Gutiérrez, 2008; Gutiérrez, Becker et al., 2019) engaged in forms of lived civics (de los Ríos & Molina, 2020)—everyday people who, in doing something ordinary, transform their practices into something consequential.

This aligns with the work of decolonial theorist de Sousa Santos (2018), who argues that scholars must partner with activists who are doing the work on the ground to push against the structures we theorize about. To truly value everyday knowledge and challenge institutionalized ways of knowing, we must shift our own ways of knowing to be in partnership with everyday activists, or as we frame them, historical actors. Indeed, decolonial scholars have articulated aspects of this in myriad ways: Grosfoguel (2016) advocates for an extra-activist methodology, shifting from knowledge about to knowledge with, and both Mignolo (2000) and Sandoval (2000) with her methodology of the oppressed call us to talk and move across disciplines and knowing spaces, drawing on the affordances of each to build new ways of knowing that challenge the bordering logic that coloniality has brought to bear on knowledge and being. And Tuck and Yang (2014a, 2014b) call us to refuse research, to study not people but the structures bearing upon them, allowing people to decide what knowledge is sacred to them and should be protected from the academy. In doing so, they advocate for a shift in the researcher lens, which refuses to view communities of color and practice as objects to dissect.

Those who take a critical learning sciences approach to literacy are specially positioned to heed these calls. As critical learning scientists, we study knowledge formation as it happens, and seek to foster ecologies in which learners are free to move in their own becomings, as knowing beings who can act upon history toward their own visions of the future. In this way, we are not only uniquely positioned but indeed obliged to consider carefully how we shape these ecologies and our own roles in colonial re-instantiation or movement instead towards utopia.

In part, this work calls us to take the back seat, to honor and listen to what youth and everyday historical actors are teaching us about knowledge formation and breaking down bordered logic. Consider then the current intergenerational, multiracial, and multi-ethnic social movement reshaping the country in response to police brutality and anti-Black racism. One remarkable shift is that Gen Z-led protests have been replicated across the U.S., notably by Black youth. These Gen Zers are leveraging their exceptional literacy skills to share information rapidly across social media platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok to inspire, recruit, and educate their peers (and in many cases adults), organizing remotely to create coordinated networks for social change. This ingenuity and ability to coordinate with purpose and solidarity to thwart injustice has spanned across issues including environmental justice and was also seen as Gen Z TikTok users and K-pop fans trolled President Trump's campaign in the U.S. by ordering thousands of fake tickets to massively disrupt his ultimately underpopulated Tulsa rally (e.g., Lorenz, Browning, & Frenkel, 2020). These youth-led movements can be understood as learning spaces, in which youth move horizontally across their everyday spaces, developing their own peer-led communities of learning as together they engage critical literacy practices by applying their literate understandings of how social media networks work, utilizing the strengths of each platform, and writing and creating compelling material, as they seek to challenge and

shift forms of power that constrain the lives of their communities. The racialized ideologies that are born out of coloniality would have us believe that the youth leading these movements are lesser, incapable of legitimate linguistic practice, and thus stunted learners. Yet, we see them leading movements that are consequential, deploying intricate language and literacy skills and drawing on complex, fluid repertoires to organize movements that act upon history and imagine a different way of being. At the same time, as Garcia and Mirra (2020) admonish, we also cannot fall into the trap of "the youth will save us"—letting adults off the hook to thus remain complicit or inert.

In design-based work with colleagues, we have examined such rich sites of literacy and learning and have theorized the transformative agency (Haapasaari, Engeström, & Kerosuo, 2016; Sannino, 2015; Sannino & Engeström, 2017) observed in these practices as the process of becoming a historical actor (Espinoza, 2003; Gutiérrez, 2008; Gutiérrez, Becker et al., 2019), in which everyday people negotiate everyday dilemmas, pushing against the intentions of systems and their designers to resist local, historical, and sociopolitical inequities. We have further theorized historical action and have identified four indicia of historical action to provide a way of seeing how social transformation and the processes of change unfold, however seemingly mundane (Gutiérrez, Becker et al., 2019). These indicia define a non-linear, iterative process in which youth (1) experience a double bind in their everyday lives; (2) breach the social order, either individually or collectively, to challenge normative practice; (3) experiment with social organization in a cyclical manner; and (4) come to understand their experience as part of something bigger that they are called to act upon. What needs further understanding is how youth engage with the historical meaning of their lives as they participate and help constitute meaningful social movements and their radical possibilities, and the role of literacy in this process of becoming historical actors.

Jean Anyon (2014) first advanced the idea of radical possibilities, in which she argued that school reform must be understood in the broader context of political, racial, and economic inequities. In that work, she cautioned us against becoming complicit with a social system that produces greater levels of socioeconomic and racial inequity. We literacy researchers must engage this moral imperative—an imperative that cannot be disconnected from thoughtful and consequential research, or from the structural, spatial, and social architectures that help to shape and constrain agentic forms of identity and learning. That is, we must align our methodologies as we work with youth to design spaces towards this futurity.

The notion of learning as movement is an attempt to do this, to account for what gets learned across everyday life to capture people's fuller humanity and to call simultaneous attention to the sociohistorical, the cognitive, the relational, and the spatial—a matrix that centers the sociopolitical and forms of resistance that challenge the very notions of space and movement within, asking: Who belongs and how? What are the relations both locally and historically between subjects and space, and how does space come to be both racialized and a place of valued cultural life? How does this relate to learning and identity development? And ultimately, how might social movements allow us to further theorize literacy within the learning as movement frame to privilege an epistemic shift? An epistemic shift calls us to rethink what we frame and understand as knowledge and, inherently, our orientation towards who can generate and possess knowledge (e.g., Mignolo, 2000; Tlostanova & Mignolo, 2009, 2012). Consequential literacy work also calls us to shift how we understand the learning that could take place when academics partner with the activists who are spearheading social movements on the ground, to understand learning not as hierarchical, as the academy would suggest, but rather as something that occurs

across spaces from the academy to the streets (de Santos Sousa, 2018)—there is complex, meaningful literacy learning taking place in the networking that youth engage in and as we connect the classroom to the streets and back. By challenging static, constrained notions of knowledge and learning, learning as movement encourages us to see learning in the way that youth travel across their spaces and develop literate activist identities that push against colonial constraints in the everyday.

Such an epistemic shift in how we define and value knowledge has also been theorized in the concept of *border thinking* (Mignolo & Tlostanova, 2006), in which borders are not only material but also discursive and embodied. Border thinking arises from a discrepancy of living within the colonial matrix and yet not "belonging to its memories, feelings and ways of sensing" (Tlostanova, Tharpar-Björkert, & Koobak, 2016, p. 217). It is a means of valuing the knowledge that is embodied by those who are relegated to the borderlands of colonial society, acknowledging that a person's specific location within coloniality affects their ways of knowing (Mignolo, 2000). Tlostanova, Tharpar-Björkert, and Koobak (2016) call us to do this by disidentifying from the ways that coloniality restricts identity formations. By doing so, we "blur boundaries between agency and knowledge" (p. 223) to allow plurality in our knowing and being. It understands the border as a liminal space where complex identities live (Lugones, 2010). It is in these spaces, we believe, that youth become historical actors, learning to engage their consciousness not toward despair (Sandoval, 2000) but rather transformatively. How then can we support youth as they explore the radical possibilities in these ways of knowing, as they make literate moves to "create an *other* world" (Tlostanova & Mignolo, 2009, p. 145).

Moving Toward Utopia: Implications for Proleptic Approaches to Literacy

We have argued that rupturing educational inequality involves new forms of inquiry that have transformative potential—intellectually, educationally, and sociopolitically—for vulnerable communities (Gutiérrez et al., 2017). These approaches involve reconceptualizing new technologies and infrastructures that support the production of valued knowledge, emphasizing the values that youth collectively deem important. This is exceedingly important as rapidly growing infrastructures are reproducing and expanding inequality, making the demand for just and consequential literacy all the more urgent (Bowker & Star, 2000; Gutiérrez, 2018). Mindful of how language and literacy are deployed as border-marking tools within the settler colonial project—as markers of humanity that feed into a logic of racialized subjugation and mass atrocities—we seek to re-mediate literacy education (Gutiérrez, Morales, & Martinez, 2009). Within bordered logic, certain learners are framed monolithically as lacking the skills, knowledge, and merit that only education towards white norms can amend; and yet, through the racialization of their bodies, this remains an empty and conspiring promise. In the critical learning sciences, we are uniquely positioned to re-signify what it means to be a literate body, shifting what counts as literate activity and literate communities, and following first the examples of youth themselves as they traverse borders in the spaces that they themselves design in order to act towards an alternate future. Further, as critical literacy scholars, developing a historicized view of the present—that is, how the past is indexed in the present—is central to a cultural historical view of learning and helps us develop and engage in newly imagined projections. This attention to history helps open up the process of prolepsis, the "cultural mechanism," as Cole (1996) has written, "that brings the past into the present" (p. 183).

Consequential literacy inquiry, with its proleptic orientation towards learning, thus demands a utopian methodology that centers learning as movement because such an approach

challenges the bordered logic that seeks to confine learners from otherized backgrounds, and instead allows alternate orientations toward the future, in which youth themselves signify meaning. Just as we limit students when we approach learning as static, so too do we limit our understandings of learning when we approach research statically. A utopian methodology invites us to understand the possibilities of the future by allowing expansive space for learning in our inquiry. Utopian methodology is an orientation toward research that holds utopia as both a possibility and its perpetual aim (Brown & Cole, 2001; Levitas, 2013). Countering popular ideas that utopia is a fantasy, it centers us on—indeed holds us accountable to—the hope for an alternate future. Utopian methodology emphasizes not only theory, but also reorganizing practice (Brown & Cole, 2001), transforming the present toward a vision of this alternate future (Levitas, 2013). They invite us to see these radical futures as we conduct our research. To orient ourselves toward utopian methodology with its learning as movement frame then is to push against the ways in which coloniality seeks to assimilate people into its project and confine them into its hierarchical constructs of power and being, instead centering a proleptic orientation that insists on new ways of knowing.

Given our critique of coloniality, and in particular its pernicious and self-reproductive impacts on education broadly and literacy more specifically, utopian methodology aligns with decolonial methodology laid out before us by such powerful scholars as Patel (2014, 2015), Tuck and Yang (2014b), and Smith (2013). Indeed, decolonial scholarship seeks at its core to undo coloniality's grip on our structures of knowing and being, with both the implicit and explicit goal of an alternate future. Integral to decolonial argument is the understanding that coloniality is not the natural and necessary order of things, but rather a design meant to be accepted as such—a design that can be rejected. Orienting towards the future, decolonial scholars would argue that there is no one utopia, but that collective visions of an alternative future must allow for one's specific location within the colonial project (e.g., Alarcón, Kaplan, & Moallem, 1999; Mignolo, 2000). From a critical learning sciences perspective, a utopian design is never finished but instead under constant collective revision. Thus, we must design ecologies in which learners can engage in historical action, striving towards expansive versions of utopia. Importantly, learning ecologies must first and foremost be consequential to learners' lives.

Admittedly, a utopian methodology does not inherently frame current societal or educational issues as rooted in coloniality, but rather hinges more broadly on an understanding that we are aiming for an open-ended better future and aiming to make that imaginary a reality. Although we align ourselves with decolonial scholars and critical learning scientists, we view utopian methodology with a decolonial analysis to be particularly relevant to our goals in literacy learning. We argue that a utopian methodology with a learning as movement frame allows us to keep design for consequential learning at the forefront of our goals, committed to pushing constantly towards utopia. Importantly, utopia is not a fixed point but rather ever-evolving with social demands and realities.

Our work has previously centered on working alongside youth as they develop collective visions of utopia, designing learning environments in which they come to understand the historicity of their social positioning and the ways in which they might act upon it towards utopia. This is seen in our concept of becoming historical actors (Gutiérrez, Becker et al., 2019), as described above. Youth may or may not understand their positioning to stem from coloniality, but in terms related to an entrenched history of politics and economy meant to subordinate certain racial, ethnic, and linguistic groups, amongst other social categories of oppression. We understand our work in the critical learning sciences then to be centered on designing

environments in which youth are free to do this deep exploration with the care and intention that allows space for the hopefulness of utopia—not a naïve, romantic, and fruitless hope but a hope that begets a necessary alternate future. Thus, this methodology invites us to design ecologies where learning as movement is valued in practice *as* research is taking place, to orient research toward creating expansive space in the now, rather than implementing research practices that themselves remain static (and thereby have no emancipatory relevance in students' everyday lives). That is, we are called to do design research that is guided by meaningful learning as it happens. This is fundamental to our orientation towards social design-based experiments (e.g., Gutiérrez & Jurow, 2016; Gutiérrez, Jurow, & Vakil, 2020), an example of utopian methodology, in which we design ecologies where learners are free to move, to forge new ways of knowing, and to value how their knowledge moves with them across the many spaces of their lives.

This pushes against the ways that coloniality, and its bordered raciolinguistic ideologies, seeks to constrain learners to specific ways of knowing in stifled learning spaces. In doing so, we amplify the call of decolonial scholars to forge new epistemologies by working alongside activists and everyday learners. In the realm of language and literacy learning, social design-based research allows us to work together with learners within larger racialized structures while valuing the richness of their translanguaging repertoires as indeed vital to their imagined futures. Thus, we believe that these learning communities, in which we embed our research, must be oriented towards learning as movement. This multi-sited approach allows us to account for youths' learning and sense-making in their everyday movement—to deconstruct the static notions of literacy that re-instantiate coloniality in everyday schooling and instead organize ecologies in which youth are free to move beyond the constraints that coloniality brings to bear on their lives as learners and towards an expansive utopia.

Chapter 5 Conclusion

> Schools, as a part of a nation built on white supremacy, reflect this culture. From pedagogy and curriculum to policy and private interests, schools do the bidding of a nation constructed to eradicate Indigenous populations, ensure that populations of color are trained to populate low-income home, work, and incarceration spaces, and maintain property rights for European Americans. (Patel, 2015, p. 67)

With this dissertation, I sought to nuance our understanding of the opt-out movement against annual statewide testing in the United States. Although previous work has typified the social networking within the movement (Wang, 2017) or how it has opened up spaces for contestation within policy (Mitra, Mann, & Hlavacik, 2016), research has primarily focused on the movement within singular states like New York and Florida rather than nationwide, and has not focused on public social media posts across popular platforms. Further, some activists have featured youth voices within the movement, such as Hagopian's (2014) *More Than a Score* compilation. Here, I deepen our knowledge of the movement by examining how youth grappled with their relationships to testing using the platform Reddit as a space to experiment with their roles as historical actors (Gutiérrez, Becker et al., 2019). My research further complicates our understandings by situating statewide testing within a larger education system founded specifically in coloniality. By framing statewide testing as an everyday instantiation of coloniality within the U.S. education system, we might nuance our understanding of the opt-out movement against it and how movements more broadly can work decolonially within the system. This social media-based research in particular has bearing on these understandings in a moment when social media organizing and activism is proliferating.

Overall, I found that youth engagement on Reddit surrounding statewide testing exemplified the four indicia (or indicators) of becoming historical actors (Gutiérrez, Becker et al., 2019). Historical action situates action and agency within an awareness of the historicity of one's lived experience. The indicia include (1) feeling a double bind, (2) breaching a social order, (3) experimenting with it cyclically, and (4) expanding the object of activity. These indicia are meant to help us see historical action as it takes shape as people navigate, contest, and re-mediate (Cole & Griffin, 1983; Gutiérrez, 2008) the structures that bear upon their daily lives. Here, youth experimented with the social organization of testing culture, feeling bound by their roles as subjects of the education system, but opening possibilities to shift their positionality by (1) connecting with peers online and (2) engaging in extended discourse about their options and the implications of any actions they might take. Here, I complicated our understanding of youth engagement with the movement specifically via social media, as well as our understanding of how the indicia of becoming a historical actor framework itself can serve as a tool for examining decolonial moves.

In Paper 2, I examined public social media posts from the opt-out movement that articulated motives surrounding knowledge formation, representation, and standardization; inequality and in particular racial inequality; and civil disobedience. These themes were relevant to my broader emphasis on the coloniality of epistemology and being. With this work, I nuanced our understanding of the opt-out movement by highlighting both (1) a subset of messages that are sometimes overlooked within a movement that has been popularly framed as a group of privileged white parents (Quinlan, 2016), and (2) how such motives might be understood in relation to decoloniality. In particular, some activists explicitly linked standardized testing to a

history of racial subordination within the education system, suggesting that they viewed opt-out as a move to act upon this history, whether or not they named this history as colonial. Overall, this subgroup of opt-out activists was less publicly visible in social media spaces than the more conservative faction. However, there is evidence that much of their work on the ground and in spaces like organized conferences has emphasized this historicity of institutional racialized oppression and included direct conversation of decoloniality. Thus, with social media playing an ever-increasing role in organizing, this research raises questions about how to successfully build public coalitions for decolonial movements that truly move across spaces, from the academy to the streets to the social media feed, as emphasized by de Sousa Santos (2018).

In Paper 3, I offer a response to the hierarchical and bound knowledge structures of coloniality that have served to subordinate and control, and a call to decolonial practice within the learning sciences. The statewide testing that is challenged by activists in Papers 1 and 2 succumbs to and continuously reinstitutionalizes colonial control of knowledge in the ongoing project of the U.S. settler colonial nation-state. In contrast, using a learning as movement framework as utopian research methodology allows us to frame, understand, and foster learning beyond such constraints. That is, learning as movement directly contests these ways of knowing, and asks: How do we design ecologies that foster learning and knowledge more aligned with a decolonial perspective rather than the ones promoted by a testing culture? The opt-out participants and opt-out curious (in the case of the students on Reddit) shared a sense of being constrained, and contested static notions of what counts as knowledge or which bodies are framed as capable of being knowledgeable. The learning as movement framework within utopian methodologies centers on broader horizons in learning, on escaping the borders of hegemonic colonial knowledge structures and the ways that they pervade the current U.S. education system.

Constraints Within this Research

As described in the Introduction, I intentionally conducted my research without human subjects. However, there are limitations here. First, I acknowledge that although the posts that I included in my data were public, this does not mean that people intended to have their posts included in research. They intended to participate in the opt-out movement publicly, but did not have a say in their inclusion here. For this reason, I protected “participant” identities, except in the few instances where I name scholars who have been quite vocal about their opt-out support on a national scale. Further, I sought to approach this study from the lens of understanding how the public might interpret these posts if they came across them; although there is some authenticity to this (as the public would not e.g., conduct interviews with an opt-out poster), one must also question the legitimacy of interpreting what is meant by a message without talking to the person who posted it; ultimately this raises questions of colonizing itself. In seeking to understand the human motives that drive a movement, there are obvious benefits to talking to the people who are taking part in the movement. Ultimately, I believed it was more important to prioritize a refusal of research (Tuck & Yang, 2014a) by looking purely at how the movement was represented. If opt-out participants want to further articulate the relationship between their motives and decoloniality in some medium, they should do that of their own volition without my profit. Many activists have highlighted their related motives (e.g., Hagopian, 2014). My research here does not seek to diminish this work, but rather to consider the discourse that participants have used in a specific context (public social media posts) and whether or not it can be understood decolonially, with implications for how the movement is framed moving forward.

A limitation with focusing on public social media posts is that we do not get a taste of

how people promoted opting out within their private networks. Perhaps participants vocalized their motives more candidly in the private sphere; there are clear government surveillance reasons that more radical participants might want to protect their views, particularly when children are implicated in their activism. One might also wonder if there are certain characteristics of people who are more likely to post publicly versus privately, as understanding and locating privacy settings requires a certain level of digital literacy. This could notably skew my results in terms of the proportion of certain political messages in my data versus others.

The Relationship Between Policy and Advocacy

A perpetual question within this research was how much the legality of opt-out constrains any decolonial potential that the movement might have. If the law allows for five percent of students in a state to opt out, then the government has already accounted for the potential of dissent, and has already sought to control it within its purview. Throughout my work, I was reminded of Flores' (2016) article about the institutionalization of bilingual programs. Flores lays out how the government successfully reframes and subdues the messages of radical race movements (here, specifically framed around language knowledge and learning). I was also reminded of the ways in which opposition is indeed discursively necessary to a nation-state's promulgation, defining itself always in contrasting relationships of tension (Alarcón, Kaplan, & Moallem, 1999). I question, then, how the federal government, and in turn, state governments, have sought to control the movement preemptively and how they continue to do so as they shift in response to the movement. Importantly, some opt-out participants and activists have found ways around legal constraints. For example, Garfield and Nathan Hale High Schools in Seattle famously had 95% and 100% opt-out rates in 2015 (Seattle Education, 2015a; Todd, 2015), and opt-out rates exceeded 20% across New York in 2016 (Clukey, 2016). And opt-out has indeed impacted policy. While statewide testing is still administered in Washington, for example, it is no longer required to graduate (Washington Office, n.d.).

Of course, changed policy still means policy, and one must question how colonial beliefs will still run through any regulations surrounding education and standards, with the idea of standards itself stemming from colonial control of knowledge. Yet schools are government institutions, designed to promote the state, and to prepare students for operation within the state's agenda (Giroux, 2011). Thus, the tools used within education to measure students' progress and track them across the years serve this purpose. In this way, some might argue that the function of borders within testing is justified and valid. However, it is the marketing of statewide testing (and indeed education more broadly) as a means to assure that all students are given equal opportunity that is problematic, as the tools are designed to erect borders between the proficient and improficient, the literate and illiterate, the modern and pre-modern. In this way, statewide testing becomes a tool for assuring social and economic reproduction of the nation-state. As Laurie (2012) articulates, "as long as colonialism and neocolonialism are cast as problems to be solved from within European social scientific *epistemes*, solutions will always be found in the *renewal* of State power, rather than in the questioning of its geo-political preconditions" (p. 13; emphases in the original). Thus, one must continuously question even those shifts that result from the opt-out movement.

Learning Beyond

How, then, does one break free from this, if not by forming communities of learning outside the government's grip, as groups like the Young Lords (see Enck-Wanzer, 2010; Flores,

2016) and Black Panthers (see Murch, 2010; Robinson, 2020) have modeled? Indeed, decolonization involves both the return of land and a sovereignty that includes political independence from nation-state institutions. Coloniality connives to control lives and restrict movement, in part by conceptualizing humanity and knowledge through static hierarchical categories and ideologies. In pushing against these constraints, then, we must conceptualize learning and learning spaces through movement, continuously proffering new (and also, importantly, ancestral) frames of being and knowing that work toward alternate realities.

I am inspired by the work of decolonial scholars who make these moves every day, and in particular, by the peers whom I have been honored to learn alongside and from—who examine, uplift, and design spaces for other ways of moving, learning, and being. My peers have worked to examine their local communities of practice, to uplift the sacred that thrives despite and within their settler colonial contexts, and to work toward utopian futures. For example, in her work with AfroPuerto Rican mothers, Krista Cortes (2021) has centered communal and maternal epistemologies and how mothers teach Blackness through joy, spirituality, activism, and community. Sophia Sobko (2020) has created a working group with queer and gender-marginalized post-Soviet Jewish immigrant-settlers in the United States and Canada to examine the relationships of their own intersectional (Crenshaw, 1989) identities with the ongoing project of whiteness and their role in the settler colonial project. Sara Chase Merrick (Chase, 2020) works with her Na:tinixwe (Hupa) community to articulate a shared community vision for educating Na:tinixwe youth, situated within the ongoing history of settler colonization and (re)envisioning Na:tinixwe educational praxis that connects, in part, language, land, sovereignty, and intergenerational knowledge.

These are spaces beyond state-sponsored education that foster and uplift communities that learn in movement. Their work embodies what decolonial scholars have called survivance (Vizenor, 1999), disidentification (Tlostanova, Thapar-Björkert, & Koobak, 2016), and re-signification (Sandoval, 2000), amongst other concepts—informed by a historicity and defining being and knowing on their own terms and outside the settler colonial purview. Importantly, this work involves a specificity to their locations within the settler colonial project (Mignolo, 2000), yet each offers ways of knowing that extend far beyond the bordering logic from which statewide testing and learning standards are born.

Designing Future Research in Movement

Notably, the logic undergirding statewide testing was drawn into question in new ways as I conducted this research. In the middle of my data collection in spring 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic shut down schools, and in turn, abruptly stopped statewide testing across the country. What had been obvious to opt-out proponents for some time became starkly obvious: Testing was not crucial. Not only was it not crucial, but it would be a major distraction from already disrupted learning. Statewide tests were not and could not be the main priority of education during the pandemic, when living rooms, kitchens, beds, and bathrooms suddenly became classrooms. Nor would tests be an accurate representation of students' lives, knowledge, and potentials. But isn't this what opt-outers had already been saying for years? That tests do not accurately represent students' lives nor the complex learning that takes place in the everyday? COVID-19 has forcibly restructured education. With testing indefinitely postponed, will more people, including policymakers, begin to see that testing does not need to be a priority at all? Will a broader public begin to question what other constructs confine our students and their education? How will we carry forward the lessons of this moment to reframe what constitutes

learning and knowing, indeed what legitimates a child's way of being as they navigate their lived spaces?

In the scope of this research, I focused on social media posts that centered certain themes of race, inequity, and epistemology—those that had clear relationships to the ways that coloniality defines being and knowing. These posts were from a specific subgroup of opt-out participants, and indeed did not represent the majority of opt-out posts in my dataset. Future research would fruitfully compare the goals of different opt-out subgroups and further break down the subgroup represented here based on certain demographics, and in particular race. The opt-out movement has often been critiqued as a white movement ("#OptOutIsSoWhite"; Quinlan, 2016). Although the participation numbers might say this (Pizmony-Levy & Saraisky, 2016), such a discourse erases the hard work and motives of many activists and families of color, along with their co-conspirators (Packnett-Cunningham, 2020), and in this way, colonizes the movement itself. Yet it is important to also examine the intentions of white participants who did not center race or inequity in their work but had other goals that might bridge with the subgroup represented here—not to further center their work but rather to understand where there are spaces to deepen the movement's work and people's knowledge of epistemic colonization. For example, many white opt-out participants posted about how standards are imposed, how tests do not capture full or true knowledge, or how they are against "#FedEd" (i.e., big government). These concerns should be further investigated. Ideally, I would work with white people (as a white person myself) to better understand what they are rejecting when they reject what counts as knowledge on statewide tests. Are they rejecting the tests only or the foundations of how we conceptualize and define knowledge? How far does their critique go, and does coloniality come into play? For example, I envision creating working groups with white people to examine entrenched beliefs about knowledge, how it is defined, and who can embody it. Many participants have some form of understanding that knowledge cannot be captured by a standardized test. This concept can be a starting point to further interrogate how we define knowledge, what should count in schools, and importantly, who benefits from these definitions. As Patel (2016) asks, "how might [ ] research help different populations locate their social advantage and act responsibly from those places?" (p. 68). The opt-out movement might be an entry for white people to examine knowledge production, delving into this highly theoretical yet everyday lived concept that has benefited them in the United States, and that importantly has nevertheless also erased their own local knowledges (Mignolo, 2000). Many opt-outers have begun the work of critiquing how knowledge is institutionalized. There is opportunity to create spaces for deeper interrogation. I believe that deeper interrogation can fuel the kind of energy needed to prompt any truly decolonial shift in the system and work towards a utopian otherwise.

Additional social design-based work (Gutiérrez & Jurow, 2016; Gutiérrez, Jurow, & Vakil, 2020) might involve working with the opt-out community represented in Paper 2 to think about (1) the role of social media in their movement and how to frame their message more decolonially to the broader public, and (2) how to design learning ecologies that offer an alternative to learning standards and the testing culture. It was clear that decoloniality surfaced in certain opt-out spaces, like the 2016 United Opt Out Conference, yet this message was somewhat obscured on public social media posts. To be clear, these activists have been majorly successful in certain spaces across the country—perhaps public social media wasn't integral to their work, and who am I to say they should do it differently? Yet social media is increasingly important to organizing nationwide. It could be fruitful to better understand how their messages are making it to an increasingly digital national audience. Along with a focus on changing the present policy

landscape, however, it is necessary to keep a hopeful eye on the future. If movement participants are motivated by decolonial intents, what does their vision of the future look like? Taking a "desire-based" approach (Tuck & Yang, 2014a), what do opt-outers desire from schooling, "working inside a more complex and dynamic understanding of what one, or a community, comes to know" (p. 231)? Organizing spaces should themselves be designed around a learning as movement framework, lifting up the common goal of epistemic shift toward utopian learning ecologies for youth. Indeed, as de Sousa Santos (2018) suggests, I believe educators (and policymakers) have much to learn from activists on the ground who work every day on *movements*. This term is not accidental. Such organizing spaces allow activists to foster their visions of an alternate future and move toward that future. How can activists use their organizing to imagine learning spaces that operate beyond the constraints of the education system? By doing social design-based work with opt-out activists, we might design learning ecologies that offer an alternative beyond testing and its perpetual reiterations of learning standards that can only ever remain, inherently, standards. By centering learning as movement, we might work beyond testing to create the spaces where alternate and multiple epistemologies are valued in everyday learning contexts.

Yet, in a country obsessed with accountability, what does accountability in a post- (or shall I say, de-) testing world look like? This depends on our idea of whom we are accountable to. Are we accountable to the nation-state? To our communities? To our ancestors? To the land? To our families' futures? To ourselves? Are we accountable to breaking down racist structures? Are we accountable to change? As it stands now, the notion of accountability is marketed as holding the education system accountable to the students, but it's a thinly veiled and highly profitable facade for holding schools accountable to the continued narrative and prosperity of the nation-state. Thus, the notion of needing a form of accountability at all is imbued with a certain epistemology and ideology—one that must be shifted toward the vision of an alternate future, an otherwise, a necessarily hopeful possibility of utopia. To opt out must therefore represent not only an opting *out* from certain ways of knowing and being, but also an opting *into* and *toward*, a movement toward an epistemic otherwise.

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