

Disability, Race, and the Geography of School Choice: Toward an Intersectional Analytical Framework

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School choice research has provided some initial understandings of how parents choose schools. Parents' school options are bounded to differentiated choice sets—the menu of school options that parents construct when making school selections. The geographical location where families live and schools are located and families' race and class differences appear to play a role shaping the constriction of choice sets. In this article, we describe a theoretical framework to address two limitations of research on school choice sets: limited attention to students with disabilities and dichotomization of space and place. We advance a framework that fuses critical notions of space with critical notions of disability and race. This framework allows theorizing on how the construction of school choice sets is shaped by structural and individual factors related to the interactions of students' race and disability and geographical location.

Keywords: *school choice, disabilities, special education, critical geography, race*

SCHOOL choice has been popular in U.S. educational policy making since the 1990s, particularly for urban areas. Choice reforms such as open enrollment, charter schools, and vouchers promise to equalize opportunity by opening up more quality educational options to families otherwise assigned, by virtue of their residence, to underperforming schools (Chubb & Moe, 1990). Both the underlying logic and the explicit promises of these policies contend that poorer children are trapped in the failing schools to which they are assigned, whereas wealthier families can leverage choice by choosing a private school or by moving to a more desirable area with better public schools. Therefore, according to this logic of rational actors seeking to maximize their advantages, enabling poorer families to exercise such choice will liberate them from failing schools so that they can choose the best options for their children.

Yet, emerging research challenges these promises, suggesting that parents' school options are bounded to differentiated *choice sets*—the menu of school options that parents construct when making school selections (Bell, 2009)—and that these limits might constrain the opportunities for less advantaged families in particular. These are not simply the schools physically located in the surrounding area but are the ones perceived by parents as viable options for a variety of reasons (Bell, 2008). The construction of choice sets is shaped by notions of space and place (Bell, 2008). *Space*

refers to the physical aspects of geography (e.g., distance to a school), whereas *place* refers to the meanings that people assign to such spaces (e.g., perceptions of a neighborhood; Massey, 1994), which may themselves be shaped by one's social position.

Although research on choice sets has contributed to build a complex understanding of how parents engage with school choice, there are two issues that this body of work has not been able to address. First, although there are some geospatial analyses of choice patterns (Lubienski & Dougherty, 2009; e.g., Lubienski, Gordon, & Lee, 2013), critical geographers warn about the limitations of dichotomizing space and place (e.g., Lefebvre, 1991; Soja, 1996). This dichotomized view traps researchers in a “Cartesian philosophical straightjacket” (Merrifield, 1993, p. 516) that cannot account for how these aspects are dialectically related in influencing parents' school decisions.

Second, research on how parents of students with disabilities (SWDs) construct choice sets is virtually nonexistent. SWDs are typically assigned to a school by their individualized education program (IEP) team. The balance of power in this placement decision tends to tilt heavily in the direction of school professionals, particularly when parents come from racial minorities and have less social and cultural capital (Harry & Klingner, 2014; Trainor, 2010). While parents can often move their children to a school of



choice if they do not agree with their children's placement, their options are extremely limited in urban areas where Black and Latinx SWDs live (Waitoller & Super, 2017). Black and Latinx families of SWDs experience compounding forms of inequities, including but not limited to the general disinvestment in their neighborhoods and neighborhood schools (Lipman, 2017) and the lack of capacity of urban schools to serve SWDs. Thus, Black and Latinx SWDs have qualitatively different school choice experiences than do White SWDs and Latinx and Black families of students without disabilities (Waitoller & Super, 2017).

In this article, we outline a theoretical framework to research the construction of school choice sets, addressing the two limitations mentioned so far. We advance a framework that fuses critical notions of space (e.g., Lefebvre, 1991) with critical notions of disability¹ and race (Annamma, Connor, & Ferri, 2013). This framework allows theorizing on how the construction of school choice sets is shaped by structural and individual factors at the intersections of students' race, disability, and geographical location. In the following sections, we summarize and critique the research on school choice and choice sets. Then, we offer an analytical framework to address the current limitations of that body of research. Finally, we offer some methodological implications of our framework as concluding thoughts.

Research on School Choice Sets

While school choice has been a global phenomenon, its growth across a relatively decentralized system—as in the United States, where much of the choice movement originates—has been rather remarkable. While its modern roots can be traced to the 1950s, particularly in the wake of court-ordered desegregation of public schools (Friedman, 1955), choice policies have enjoyed rapid proliferation in the last quarter century or so. Since starting from none in the early 1990s, authorized charters are now in some 42 states (plus the District of Columbia), with almost 7,000 such schools serving >3 million students (National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, 2017). At the same time, well over half of the states have implemented publicly funded voucher or voucher-like programs, such as tuition tax credits and education savings accounts (EdChoice, 2018).

Since the inception of the modern version of school choice, theorists and policy advocates have assumed or explicitly asserted an idealization that rational consumers choosing schools for their children would choose the “best” option—oftentimes articulated as the highest-quality option, the one that best fit the child's learning style or would otherwise add the most value to a student's academic achievement and future earnings prospects. Typically drawing on self-reported indicators of parental preferences, researchers and advocates would highlight parents' proclaimed allegiance to academic quality (Bast & Walberg, 2004).

However, even as policy advocates still promote choice largely on the grounds of parents choosing what is “best” for their children (Bavis, 2017; Savitsky, 2017), researchers have been paying more attention to the myriad factors beyond academic quality that parents may be weighing when they choose schools. Indeed, much evidence on parental decision making suggests that parents consider multiple factors or, perhaps more precisely, their socially constructed perceptions of those factors when engaging in the decision-making processes. For instance, research shows that parents take into account the socioracial composition of school options and consider issues such as programmatic offerings, safety, location, and convenience (Gauri, 1998; Hsieh, 2000; Schneider & Buckley, 2002; Weidner, 2005).

At the same time, research examining the organizational behavior of schools in response to choice environments suggests that schools adopt a number of strategies besides focusing on academic quality—often in ways that may, on balance, exclude some groups of children (Gulosino & Lubienski, 2011; Lubienski, 2006, 2007, 2011; Lubienski & Lee, 2016; Lubienski & Weitzel, 2009). For instance, Jabbar (2016) noted how some New Orleans schools of choice adopted marketing strategies that effectively excluded some students, and other researchers cited locational strategies by which schools (or their management entities) offer services that are consistently located at a greater distance for the most disadvantaged students (LaFleur, 2016; Lubienski, Gulosino, & Weitzel, 2009; Lubienski & Lee, 2016). Research indicates that schools engage in locational decisions, “soft” marketing appeals to emotions such as offering a “safe” or “nurturing” space, and other racialized representations, all indicating that they see parents as acting in ways that do not fit the rational academic model (Lubienski, 2005, 2007). Taken together, these problematize the simplistic application of the rational choice model, at least as traditionally and singularly interpreted through the lens of academic quality.

Furthermore, parents report that proximity is an important consideration, and logic tells us that choices must be limited to geographically viable options. Surprisingly, less attention has been given to the question of the role of physical distance in choice making. In a significant contribution to the literature, Bell (2008, 2009) described the role of multiple factors, including geography, in parents' creation of “choice sets.” Although parents do choose among schools, not all choice sets—that is, the menu of options considered by the chooser—are equal. Much of the subsequent research on parents choosing schools, especially those drawing on geospatial approaches, has tended toward conceptualizing access to various schools by examining the crossing of school boundaries or weighing relative distances or routes between home and school options (Cobb & Glass, 1999; Dillon, 2008; Lee & Lubienski, 2017; Parsons, Chalkley, & Jones, 2000; Yoon & Lubienski, 2018). Not only are choice sets shaped by distance, location, transportation, and other

geospatial factors, but they are also shaped by social forces, such as parents' backgrounds, ability/willingness to contact different schools, knowledge of different schools as obtained through social networks ("word of mouth"), and time to investigate options.

Moreover, the ways that these choice sets are shaped are not simply a matter of "objectively" measuring variables and costs—for example, the distance to a school. Instead, these variables are operative as perceived by parents (Lubienski & Lee, 2017; Yoon & Lubienski, 2018). That is, more nuanced approaches will link objective measures to parents' sense of place and their perceived relative costs of choosing schools further away from their "place."

Problematizing the Space-Place Dichotomy in School Choice Research

While geography is an integral aspect in the creation of choice sets, geospatial approaches tend to fall into two camps with little overlap. In these two camps, the notions of space and place are treated as two disconnected concepts.

On one hand, *space* refers to the material and measurable aspects of geography. Researchers using GIS (geographic information system) have offered much illumination from the bird's-eye view on the patterns of choices, obstacles, and availability. Technological advances have allowed them to provide evermore nuanced and precise pictures of routes, transportation flows, realty information, and data on neighborhood characteristics such as crime. For instance, parents can select a school according to its distance from their home. Parents prefer schools that are conveniently located; proximity to a school can trump the level of academic achievement when making schooling decisions (Kleitzi, Weiher, Tedin, & Matland, 2000).

On the other hand, qualitative research has focused on *place*, which refers to the meanings that people assigned to such spaces (e.g., perceptions of a neighborhood; Massey, 1994). Critical geographers and theorists have leveraged ethnographic and other tools to better understand the lived experiences of people "on the ground," getting a sense of their perceptions of the conditions, opportunities, and obstacles that shape their experiences. For instance, parents attach meaning to neighborhoods and schools according to their social and racial makeup (Bell, 2009; Schneider & Buckley, 2002). Research suggests that White parents tend to enroll their children in schools that are predominantly White, as these demographics signal to them higher-achieving schools, even when they did not investigate the test scores associated with those schools (Goyette, Farrie, & Freely, 2012). Parents also may not consider schools located in what they perceive as "bad neighborhoods," while other parents may be committed to sending their children to schools within their community due a sense of belonging and identity (Bell, 2007).

Separately, each of these approaches has its strength. For instance, the former offers broader insights, while the latter gives us a more nuanced understanding. As an example, a study using GIS to examine schools' self-drawn attendance boundaries gives us insight into the patterns of student sorting but is unable to tell us about the motivation and reasoning of school leaders in drawing those boundaries, much less how parents experience the exclusivity of various schools and neighborhoods. Instead, the study is only suggestive of the interplay between supply and demand (Lubienski et al., 2013). Likewise, a study of parents' sense of place in choosing a school may not be suited for understanding how those perceptions may be misaligned with other measures—perhaps by school marketing, for instance. Thus, each approach is useful but limited.

Critical geographers (e.g., Lefebvre, 1991; Soja, 1996) warn us about the limitations of dichotomizing the material (i.e., space) and ideal (i.e., place) aspects of geography. Based on a Cartesian foundation, the division of place and space portrays them as discrete entities without any relational connectivity. This results in an atomistic view that positions space and place as polar opposites. As we noted, this atomistic view traps researchers in a "Cartesian philosophical straightjacket" (Merrifield, 1993, p. 516) that cannot account for how the ideal and the material are dialectically related to produce space. That is, this dualism does not enable researchers to capture how space and place are molded together in a dialectical unit (Merrifield, 1993).

Merrifield (1993) illustrates this dialectical unit using the example of quantum theory: "quantum theory echoes precisely these notions: all matter, recall, is a particle (a concentrated entity in space) and a wave (a dispersive non-spatially concentrated process) at one and the same time" (p. 521). Thus, to examine matter, one cannot disassociate its condition as both particle and wave. Similarly, both place and space are embodied in the process of producing space, and their analysis needs to focus on how they relate to each other, rather than on reifying their differences. In other words, it is not possible to decipher different parts of a whole without accounting for how the parts relate to one another within the whole.

A dichotomous approach to space/place has at least two analytical consequences. Lefebvre (1991) refers to this problematic as the "double illusion of transparency and the illusion of opacity." First, the illusion of transparency makes space seem "luminous" and transparent to interpretation. This view favors the ideal (i.e., place) and subjective aspects of geography. What is imagined and represented defines the reality of space. That is, the "mental" is elevated as producing and explaining the material space. What is missed from this kind of analysis is how the mental imaginaries of space are socially produced through material and discursive relationships imbued with power struggles. For instance, the economic disinvestment in certain neighborhoods coupled

with the discursive pathologization of their communities and schools contribute to people's perceptions of neighborhoods and their schools as being unsafe (Stovall, 2013). Thus, the illusion of transparency does not account for material and social practices that have shaped how certain spaces are imagined places. Furthermore, in privileging people's perceptions, such research often foregoes positivist approaches and their "objective" measures of access, for instance. Yet in doing so, they focus only on the perceptions of those people experiencing the policies in question, and they neglect questions of shared understandings, efficacy, impact, and other questions of interest to groups, including evaluators, taxpayers, and policy makers.

Second, the illusion of opacity privileges the material space that can be accurately measured and described. The material space is isolated and narrowed to a product rather than a process of production itself. This scholarship tells us little about the all-important issue of how people perceive geographical factors and how their imagination and perception of such spaces play a role shaping urban space. Efforts to examine the impacts of school closures in Chicago, for example, can map out school boundaries, neighborhood demographics, and even crime statistics. But such research is inadequate without getting a sense of parents' perceptions of safety—for example, whether children must cross gang boundaries in traveling to their newly assigned schools. Furthermore, school district officials and board members conceive regulations and parameters to decide what schools should be closed due to underenrollment or poor quality and where new schools should be opened to reconfigure the urban education space. Even in their most rich version, this vein of analysis is unidirectional as it aims to tease out how economic and cultural practices produce certain kinds of spaces. Yet, little of this scholarship has attended to the other direction of causal flow—that is, how material space shapes subjectivity and perception (Soja, 1996).

Where Are SWDs Within School Choice Research?

Despite a growing body of research on school choice, studies on how parents of SWDs select schools are extremely limited, with only a few peer review studies published to date focusing on this population (e.g., Jessen, 2012; Lange & Lehr, 2000; Rhim & McLaughlin, 2007; Waitoller & Super, 2017). This is unfortunate, as the construction of choice sets among parents of SWDs can be constrained by a range of factors that are unique to this group of students and so represent one of the main questions facing choice—whether markets can also be leveraged to enhance opportunity for marginalized populations.

First, the educational choices of SWDs are shaped by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). The IDEA establishes that SWDs' education plans and their placement in a given school or program should be decided

by the IEP team. The IEP team is an interdisciplinary team composed of the parent or guardian of the child, the child (when appropriate), at least one general and special education teacher, a representative of the school district who can provide and supervise the services offered by the district, an interpreter of educational and psychological assessments (e.g., school psychologist), and any other professional or individual who has knowledge or special expertise regarding the child (e.g., speech pathologist). Thus, the school selection of parents of SWDs can be bounded to the IEP team's decision. However, if the IEP team arrives to a placement decision that is not satisfactory to the parent, the parent can request mediation or a due process hearing or initiate a state complaint. Parents can also decide to enroll in a charter school and disregard the placement offered by the IEP team. In this latter case, the SWDs would need to be accepted through a lottery system, and a new IEP team would form if the parent wants to still receive services; some parents move to a charter school to avoid the disability label given in the traditional school (Rhim & McLaughlin, 2007).

The IEP team's decision-making process can be particularly problematic for Black and Latinx students. Recommendations during IEP meetings from school professionals and district representatives about student placement weigh heavier than do parents' preferences—particularly when parents come from racial minorities who tend to not have the social and cultural capitals privileged in schools or the knowledge about special education laws and related legal rights (Harry & Klingner, 2014; Rogers, 2002; Ong-Dean, 2009; Trainor, 2010). Furthermore, IEP team members can have negative beliefs about Black families living in poverty, even when knowing little about the families and students (Roey, Fergus, & Noguera, 2011). As Harry, Klingner, and Hart (2005) wrote, "lacking first hand knowledge, many teachers simply assumed that features such as single motherhood, large family size, drug abuse, or incarceration were all they needed to know about the ways families functioned" (p. 110). In addition, IEP team members can be limited by school district resources and capacity to serve SWDs. Resources and schools' capacity to serve SWDs tend to be unequally distributed according to the racially segregated geographies of urban centers, which could shape the development of choice sets. Thus, the negotiations between the IEP team and parents of SWDs can constrain how the latter construct choice sets, and these constraints can vary across parents' race, socioeconomic status, and geographical location.

Second, selecting a school for parents of SWDs may be not as much about as the qualities of such a school but prior poor experiences with and perceptions of other schools of special education services. Waitoller and Super (2017) found that parents were unsatisfied with the special education services provided in traditional schools. Parents mentioned that the school in which they were placed through the IEP team

process did not have the services that their children needed (e.g., speech pathologist, occupational therapist, school counselor). In contrast, charter schools were perceived as new, well-resourced, and better-funded spaces, which gave parents the perception that better services could be obtained in such schools.

The perceptions of schools among parents of SWDs can be shaped by their access to information about the services provided in such educational settings. Jessen (2012) found that small schools in New York City did not offer a full range of special education services, which limited the school options available for SWDs. In other cases, parents had limited or incorrect information about the services provided in small schools, which also constrained their choice sets.

Opportunities to have their children with a disability included in the general education classroom are another unique factor that parents consider when selecting a school. For instance, Waitoller and Super (2017) examined how Black and Latinx parents of SWDs selected a charter school. Four of the 24 parents interviewed had moved to a charter school because they could not place their children in an inclusive setting through the IEP team process. This is not unique to these parents, as SWDs in large urban districts are more likely to be placed in segregated environments than in other smaller urban and rural districts (Brock & Schaefer, 2015). Racial disparities also exist in placement patterns in the least restrictive environment. In Chicago, for instance, Black SWDs are disproportionately placed in more segregated environments as compared with their White peers (Waitoller & Maggin, 2018). Even in districts that have high rates of inclusion, Black and Latinx students from low-income families are less likely than their White peers to be included in the general education classroom (LeRoy & Kulik, 2004). In this context, parents perceived schools of choice such as charter schools as being more inclusive due to their low student:teacher ratios, their lack of separated classrooms for SWDs, and what parents saw as a more motivated and young staff (Waitoller & Super, 2017).

Third, perceptions of safety in the neighborhood and the neighborhood school can uniquely affect the decisions of parents of SWDs. Parents of students with autism mentioned that the lack of safety in their neighborhood and neighborhood schools was especially problematic for their children, who did not fully understand social cues and were more likely to be bullied than other students (Waitoller & Super, 2017). Indeed, SWDs are 1.5 times more likely than other students to be victims of bullying (Blake, Lund, Zhou, Kwok, & Benz, 2012). Thus, perceptions of safety in neighborhoods and schools can uniquely affect how parents of SWDs construct choice sets. In contrast, charter schools' strict disciplinary policies with zero-tolerance codes of conduct can shape the perception of parents of SWDs of such schools as safe places (Waitoller & Super, 2017).

Fourth, parents of SWDs are sometimes steered away from a school before applying to a school of choice. There is some evidence indicating that charter school administrators sometimes try to steer SWDs away by communicating to parents during open houses or school fairs that the school does not have the services that the child requires and that the school is not a good fit for their child (Jennings, 2010; Jessen, 2012; Welner & Howe, 2005). For instance, in a mixed methods study by Estes (2004) that included analysis of enrollment and interview data with administrators from charter schools in Texas, the author found that administrators admitted that they were "honest with parents, explaining what they offer and how and relaying some advantages and disadvantages of their instructional model" (p. 262). After explaining what they could offer to their child, rather than what their child was entitled to under IDEA, administrators leave parents to decide whether to enroll their child in the school. These steering-away practices can discourage parents of SWDs from applying and so limit their construction of choice sets.

Finally, geographical arrangements within the city can contribute to parents' school decisions. For instance, in Chicago, Black and Latinx students were affected by the closing of neighborhood schools and the opening of charter schools to a greater extent than their Black and Latinx peers without dis/abilities and more than White students with dis/abilities (Waitoller & Super, 2017). On one hand, Chicago Public Schools (CPS) closed >100 schools between 2000 and 2014. The majority of the schools closed were located in segregated neighborhoods where Black and Latinx students lived, with 49 elementary schools closed in the 2013–2014 year alone. While the average of students with IEPs in CPS is 13%, the average of students with IEPs in the closed schools was 17% (de la Torre, Gordon, Moore, & Cowhy, 2015). One-third of the 50 schools closed in CPS in the 2013–2014 school year had special programs for SWDs serving Black students with extensive support needs (i.e., autism, intellectual dis/abilities, multiple dis/abilities, sensory impairments). On the other hand, charter schools have proliferated in the same areas where schools have been closed. However, these schools enroll significantly lower proportions of students with extensive support needs (Waitoller, Maggin, & Trzaska, 2017). Thus, the geographical location of SWDs can limit the construction of choice sets. This disproportionately affects Black and Latinx SWDs who live in areas of the city in which the schools where they tend to enroll are closed (i.e., neighborhood schools) and the schools that present lower enrollment of student with disabilities tend to open (i.e., charter schools).

Thus, when selecting schools, families of SWDs may accordingly have different experiences with their race and class as they experience different intersecting forms of privilege and oppression. This also interacts with their geographical location; educational and other social services are

unevenly distributed across areas of the city—that is, areas that are hypersegregated along racial lines. These interactions shape not only the factors that parents may consider when selecting a school but also their perceptions of schools and neighborhoods. Waitoller and Super (2017) explained, “White parents of students with dis/abilities may experience the austerity measures and the segregationist practices of the district” (p. 34). But these parents, the authors continue, “tend to be unaffected by the closing of neighborhood schools and the expansion of charter schools.” Black and Latinx parents of students with dis/abilities are affected by intersecting structures that marginalized them at the intersections of race and disability. For instance, they are affected by the interactions of safety issues in their neighborhoods and schools, as students with disability are more vulnerable to bullying, but also by the lack of quality inclusive education in the areas where they live.

In conclusion, to generate a complex understanding of how space shapes the perceptions of schools among parents of SWDs and their engagement with school choice, research needs to overcome the space-place dualism and attend to the intersections of disability and race. Otherwise, partial explanations will continue to provide partial solutions to complex social issues. School choice research about and for SWDs is a fertile area of inquiry that can generate nuanced understandings of how disability, race, and space interact and contribute to different experiences with school choice. What is lacking is an analytical approach that can be sensitive to these interactions. In the next section, we offer such an analytical approach.

An Intersectional and Spatial Lens to Research School Choice

To study how parents of SWDs engage in school choice, we propose an interdisciplinary lens that merges critical notions of space (e.g., Lefebvre, 1991; Soja, 1996) with theorizing at the intersections of disability and race (e.g., Annamma et al., 2013; Artiles, 2011). Such an approach can have useful implications beyond research on SWDs. In the next sections, we begin describing intersectionality theory (Crenshaw, 1991) as it applies to disability and school choice; then, we add a layer of complexity that provides a spatial analysis of the experiences of parents of SWDs.

Intersectionality: Disability, Race, and Class

To understand the experiences of SWDs and their families in the education marketplace, we draw from intersectionality theory (Collins, 2000). Crenshaw (1991) introduced intersectionality to examine how Black women’s experiences living at the intersection of minoritized race and gender were hidden by treating race and gender injustices as separate issues. *Intersectionality* refers to a theoretical stand

and an approach to conducting empirical research that foregrounds the interactions of categories of social difference, such as disability, race, class, and gender. Forms of social difference constitute each other; what makes an analysis intersectional is its attention to social categories not as distinct and static but as fluid across space and time. The interactions among these categories organize societal structures that afford and constrain access to equitable opportunities, the recognition of various forms of being, and access to political influence. These intersections of social difference are the source of rich research questions. For instance, how does experiencing disability, poverty, and being Black interact in people’s lives to result in unique ways to experience school choice policies? Or how do structural factors associated with disability, class, and race interact affect the ways that parents of SWDs perceived schools and construct choice sets?

Scholars in education have increasingly drawn from intersectionality theory to understand the interactions of disability and race (e.g., Annamma, Ferri, & Connor, 2018; Artiles, 2011). Now known under the name *disability critical race studies*, this emerging line of inquiry merges critical race theory and disability studies to offer theoretical and analytical tools to examine the experiences of students who experience intersecting forms of privilege and oppression. From this analytical stand, neither an analysis of race or one of disability alone can provide a rich understanding of the experiences of SWDs and their parents in the education marketplace. Not only are disability and race analogous, but they have a “constitutive relationship” (Erevelles, 2014, p. 86). Notions of race and ability are co-constructed: “race, racism, dis/ability and ableism are built into the interactions, procedures, discourses, and institutions of education, which affect students of color with dis/abilities qualitatively differently than white students with dis/abilities” (Annamma et al., 2013, p. 7). For instance, racial inequities for SWDs have been documented for decades. As compared with their White peers, Black SWDs are disproportionately identified for special education and spend less time in the general education classroom (e.g., Voulgarides, Fergus, & King Thorius, 2017; Waitoller & Maggin, 2018). We also discuss in this article how Black and Latinx parents of SWDs experience school choice differently than do their White counterparts.

Crenshaw (1991) used the term *structural intersectionality* to refer to interacting social structures that organize the experiences of social groups (e.g., race, disability, class, and gender), producing unintended outcomes. The interactions of structural factors and parents’ and students’ perceptions of them provide a fertile unit of analysis. For instance, the emergence of market models of education as a way to provide school options for students of color, who historically had poor ones and too few, can backfire against students of color with disabilities. Specifically, such models can create market incentives for schools to avoid enrolling students of

color with disabilities, as these students can make schools look less competitive and therefore less attractive for other students to enroll. Furthermore, market models of education can create incentives for specialized schools (e.g., a school for students with autism), which in turn incentivizes further segregation of SWDs (Dudley-Marling & Baker, 2012; Waitoller & Thorius, 2015). Furthermore, in the case of vouchers, market models of education can erode the provisions and legal rights of parents provided through the IDEA; if a parent of an SWD uses a voucher to attend a private school, she or he may need to forgo IDEA's entitlements (Anastasiou & Kaufman, 2009).

Structural intersectionality also focuses on the interactions of legal and material barriers that impede access to significant services to improve well-being, such as education. It recognizes that whiteness and ability as property are jointly deployed to claim educational benefits (Annamma et al., 2013). While whiteness serves to sustain "the structured advantages that accrue to whites because of past and present discrimination" (e.g., Lipsitz, 2007, p. 13), ability as property, for instance, serves to claim membership in educational spaces that are designed for those students who can perform in the general education classroom without significantly altering the social arrangements of such educational space. For instance, students of color with disabilities may experience the interactions of lack of funding for special and general education services, schools designed in ways that segregate them in separate settings, the lack of quality trained teachers, and safety issues in their segregated neighborhoods, as they are unable to claim whiteness and ability as property and their related privileges. In turn, the interactions of these legal and material barriers can shape the way that parents of SWDs perceive schools and thus their construction of choice sets. Furthermore, the distribution of educational opportunities is unevenly distributed through the racially and economically segregated geographies of the city. Unfortunately, analysis of racial inequities for SWDs has given limited attention to conceptualizations of space (Artiles, 2003; Tefera, Rios Aguilar, Artiles, Voulgarides, & Vélez, 2017). Thus, an intersectional analysis needs to account for the role of urban space in shaping the experiences of parents of SWDs.

Beyond Space-Place Dichotomy: Toward a Critical Geography of School Choice

To further understand the experiences of parents of SWDs with school choice, we draw from the work of critical geographers (e.g., Lefebvre, 1991; Soja, 1996). Researchers investigating the intersections of disability, race, and education have argued for the importance of critical geography in understanding such intersections (e.g., Tefera et al., 2017; Waitoller & Annamma, 2017). Contributing to this work, we conceptualize space as a dialectical unit that encompasses

traditional material views of space and ideal views of place. From this conceptual stand, space is socially produced—an active ecology that mediates and is mediated by human activity (Soja, 1989). For instance, the movement of capital through economic investment in gentrified areas of a city produced new spaces, developing new business and renewing recreation areas such as parks. It also can change the cultural ethos of an urban space as middle-class families move to the gentrified areas that were occupied by working-class and low-income families. In turn, these changes shape how people experience and perceive those spaces and the schools enclosed by them, as well as their engagement with school choice (Waitoller & Super, 2017). Thus, space is as much a process as a product.

Lefebvre (1991) resolved the illusion of transparency and opacity by proposing three dialectically interrelated moments in the production of space: spatial practice (i.e., the perceived space), representations of space (i.e., the conceived space), and spaces of representation (i.e., the lived space). *Spatial practice* is the materialized space open to description and measurement that is appropriated, dominated, and used. It is the traditional focus of attention of most geographical analysis, and Soja (1996) called it *first space*. First space analyses privilege the physical space that can be comprehended in empirically measurable ways. It "embraces production and reproduction, and the particular locations and spatial sets characteristic of each formation" (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 33). The following are all examples of first spaces: the actual material structure of a school building organized in different kinds of classrooms, the distance to a school or the physical barrier between a school and someone's home (e.g. a highway), a stairway without an elevator that keeps a wheelchair user from access the building, and the material and human resources of school. As we discuss in the prior section, access to this material reality is shaped by students' racial and ability differences. Research on racial inequities for SWDs, for instance, tends to focus first spaces, as particular school resources (e.g., funding, student-teacher ratio) can predict disproportionate representation of students of color in special education (Artiles, 2003).

The *representations of space* refers to the conceptualized and mental space. Soja (1996) called this space *second space*: the space that is represented, planned, designed, and manifested in maps, blueprints, and other guiding documents that aim to dominate and regulate space through discourse and panning. Second space analyses assume that spatial understanding is primarily produced through discourse and representations of space; it is ideational and symbolic in that it is made up of mental projections of the physical space. Examining city maps in which parents express their perceptions of and locate the schools they are considering or examining how school district officials decide how to close some schools and open others is each an example of second space analysis.

Finally, *spaces of representation* (or *lived space*) refers to the spaces directly lived in and experienced by their users. Soja (1996) called them the *third space*: the space of subjectivity and people's sense making. This space is distinct from the other two and yet encompasses them. It is the bodily experience of perceived and conceived spaces. It is where the physical and symbolic spaces are made sense of and acted on. This is the dominated space that the conceived spaces aim to appropriate and change, and yet it is also the space for resistance to the dominant order and social struggle. It is the most embracing space and is, according to Soja, the "strategic location" from where to understand all other spaces. The lived experiences of parents of SWDs searching for schools that can service their children and their "lived" experiences with interacting forms of marginalization at the intersections of race and disability are examples of spaces of representation.

Lefebvre's (1991) trialectic allows us to move beyond the space-place dualism toward understanding how the physical, mental, and lived domains interact and are dialectically related. It moves us to think of parents of SWDs as spatial beings, actively participating, individually and collectively, in shaping urban space. None of the three spaces is privileged in the analysis, but the third space serves as strategic starting point to understand the dynamics of the trialectics.

In addition, an understanding of how the urban education space is produced and, in turn, how it affects parents' perceptions and experiences cannot be complete without examining the profound impact of the *uneven geographical development* (Harvey, 2005) taking place in large urban centers. Harvey (2006) explained that in urban centers, capital investment is asymmetrically distributed within an urban space, creating both centers and peripheries. So, the production of space becomes uneven (Brenner & Theodore, 2002), building on preexisting structures of inequities and racial segregation, leaving the city with areas of under- and overdevelopment (Harvey, 2006) and disproportionately affecting working-class and poor families and families of color. For instance, urban centers such as Chicago aim to become *global cities*, which concentrate financial institutions and corporate interests (Sassen, 2005). In these cities, the juxtaposition of wealth and poverty is inscribed in the segregated geographies of their urban landscapes. While some areas of the city are revamped to attract corporate headquarters and highly educated labor force, areas inhabited by communities of color have experienced multigenerational poverty and economic decline. Furthermore, in other areas of the city, low-income and working-class communities are displaced due to gentrification.

The distribution of educational options in Chicago is related to this uneven economic development in the last decades (Lipman, 2017). Areas of the city that are mostly Black and Latinx and remained in poverty or suffered economic decline since the 1970s contain 77% of all charter

schools in Chicago and 74% of closed schools since 2000 but only 37% of magnet and selective enrollment schools (Nathalie P. Voorhees Center,² 2014; Waitoller & Super, 2017). Areas that have been gentrified contain 18% of all charter schools, 23% of closed schools, but 42% of selective enrollment and magnet schools. Finally, areas that have remained upper or middle class since the 1970s contain only 5% of charter schools, 4% of closed schools, and 20% of selective enrollment and magnet schools (Nathalie P. Voorhees Center, 2014; Waitoller & Super, 2017).

The perceptions of parents of SWDs about schools and neighborhoods can be shaped by uneven urban development, and these perceptions vary across parents' race and class characteristics (Waitoller & Super, 2017). For instance, for Black and Latinx parents of SWDs living in areas of significant poverty or economic decline, their children's safety walking to or inside school can be a primary factor when making school selections (Waitoller & Super, 2017). For Black and Latinx parents of SWDs living in middle-class areas, factors such as segregation due to disability or academic quality can be more important than safety. In this case, parents' school decisions are shaped by space as a dialectical unit that encompasses the lived experiences of families in certain areas of the city, the physical space perceived by parents, and the conceived space that aims to shape the urban environment (e.g., city decisions on what schools to invest).

Concluding Methodological Implications

As we have noted, critiques of the dichotomization of place and space highlight the limitations of current approaches to understanding people's lived realities in engaging in social behavior, such as choosing schools for their children, as the case in point. While we believe that the methodological tools are available, the critiques discussed here suggest their limitations as currently wielded. Here, our goal is not only to better understand how families of SWDs conceptualize and make choices in and across a school choice marketplace but also to contribute to a growing effort to develop, expand, and extend the integration of geospatial approaches in social science research. Thus, we offer a framework based on critical notions of disability, race, and space to examine the construction of choice sets. We conclude with some methodological implications of this framework. These implications do not aim to be exhaustive but rather to provide the initial considerations as researchers embark on this important line of inquiry.

A broad methodological implication of our framework is the application of a longitudinal mixed-methods approach that merges geographical analysis and in-depth interviews. The aim is to fuse euclidean conceptions of space with socially constructed perceptions of place to understand the development of choice sets. As we point out earlier, focusing on an analysis of space *or* place can be useful but limited.

However, by integrating bird's-eye and on-the-ground perspectives, researchers could make significant advances in understanding complex social phenomena with geographical aspects, such as how parents of SWDs construct choice sets.

How would such integrated methods manifest themselves in research? The interactions of structural factors at the intersections of disability, race, and class and parents' and students' perceptions of them should be the unit of analysis and the source of research questions. These interactions can be found in what Soja (1996) called *third spaces*. This is where space is experienced, made sense of, and acted on and is shaped by the perceived and conceived space. In this sense, participant selection deserves critical consideration. Research should include participants who experience structural factors at the intersections of disability and race. Recruiting parents and SWDs from various races representative of the demographics of a given city can afford comparative analysis about the differential experience of families of SWDs in a school choice market. Furthermore, as noted in our framework, the sampling should include various areas of a city that represent different histories and economic developments as schools' options offered in a given area are tied to such changes.

Through in-depth interviews and ethnographic fieldwork, researchers can tap into the experiences of parents of SWDs. While researchers are only starting to make substantial advances in this respect, some of the advances suggest methodological approaches that could be leveraged when different traditions are integrated into a mixed-methods geospatial research agenda. For instance, including the geolocation of interviews or marketing artifacts can help to integrate place and space. In a more participatory approach, some researchers gave people geographical devices to help trace the movements of their daily lives and then seek their senses of being at various places; others asked informants to create their own maps to reflect their senses of space (Yoon & Lubienski, 2017, 2018). Researchers could also conduct "mobile interviews" where such data collection takes place across a community to better capture an interviewee's location-based perceptions of the space. Researchers alongside participants could attend school open houses, school fairs, and IEP meetings to understand participants' lived (third) spaces.

Instruments for data collection and data sources need to be sensitive to the interactions of parents' and students' race and disability and their related structural and geographical factors. Researchers can help participants develop a list of schools for which they are considering applying (i.e., choice sets). Interview protocols should ask participants about school factors that tap into their intersecting experiences and that are considered when developing choice sets such as special education services, inclusion in the general education, schools' perpetuation of including SWDs, and transportation issues. Instruments should be sensitive to participants' perceptions of their communities and the schools located in them.

Information drawn from participants' third spaces can be used to devise a series of maps to use as stimulus during conversations with participants. These maps should offer participants a visual representation of the factors that they mentioned and other relevant factors that they did not but are relevant to examine the interactions of race and disability in participants' formation of choice sets. These factors represent what we refer to in our analytical framework as *first spaces* or *spatial practices*. For instance, secondary quantitative data represented in maps could include school variables such as number of qualified special education teachers, speech pathologists, social workers, and nurses; school and neighborhood demographics; the amount of time that SWDs spend in the general education classroom in a given school; school climate; and distances to different schools—those included and not in the participants' choice sets.

An important aspect of this methodological approach is to examine the history of the communities and schools relevant to the participants' choice sets and those close to participants' homes but that were not included in the choice set. The purpose of this inquiry is to understand how the school and neighborhood spaces relevant to the participants' choice sets have been conceived by school district and city officials through school and municipal policy. For instance, decisions about investing or not in schools in certain areas, the history of decisions about school closings, and opening charter schools can provide insight to connect participants' lived spaces with first spaces (e.g., material practices) and second spaces (e.g., conceived spaces).

Using participants' third spaces as a starting point, data analysis should thread the connections with first and second spaces, attending closely to how structural factors related to participants' race and disability intersect. Coding should capture the interactions of factors and the variations in how and when first, second, and third spaces interact and matter in relation to parents' construction of choice sets. Comparing and contrasting cases of parents with different social and geographical location can serve to draw distinctions in how space, race, and disability interact in different ways, resulting in parents' qualitatively distinct experiences of school choice. This will involve going back and forward in the interview data, field notes, and maps created, allowing researchers to move from coding to an explanatory model of choice set formation.

In conclusion, in this article, we provide an analytical lens that utilizes critical notions of disability, race, and space to expand our understanding of how parents engage with school choice. Future research should attend closely at intersecting markets of social difference and how these interact with participants' lived spaces. Educational policies that do not account for these complexities could result in unintended negative consequences that uniquely affect students of color with disabilities.

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Notes

1. We refer to *disability* as the “product of cultural, political, and economic practices” (Davis, 1995). This understanding does not deny biological and psychological differences, but it emphasizes that such differences gain meaning, often with severe negative consequences (e.g., segregation), through human activities informed by norms (Davis, 2013). *Disability* is also an “identity marker that includes ways notions of ability are “relied on and constructed in tandem with other identity markers (e.g., gender, race, language)” (Waitoller & Thorius, 2016, p. 367)

2. *The Socioeconomic Change of Chicago’s Community Areas* (Nathalie P. Voorhees Center, 2014) identified demographic and economic changes in Chicago’s community areas from 1970 to 2010. The index was generated “from a set of thirteen empirically tested socioeconomic variables related specifically to gentrification. These variables measure shifts in poverty and wealth using five decades of U.S. Census data” (p. 2).

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