"Getting to where we need to be": (Re)Envisioning Postsecondary Education Through the *Equity X Governance* Paradigm

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Abstract

Governing Boards of postsecondary institutions and systems, the stakeholders with the most legal power and responsibility for institutions, do not have a strong record of contributing to equity work. The reality of Board detachment from the intricacies of equity work is compounded by too few scholars locating Boards in organizational equity research. Consequently, lasting institutional transformation remains elusive and the scholarship on Boards remains largely descriptive, raceless, and power-unaware. Accordingly, built on interrelated reviews of existing research and theory, the authors introduce the *Equity X Governance* (pronounced Equity by Governance) paradigm, which narrates for a shift in praxis toward postsecondary education governance and Boards. This paradigm offers insights for scholars interested in research with Boards or postsecondary governance more generally, from more critical and intersectional stances. We close the chapter with ideas for a research agenda that builds on these conceptual offerings and present emergent examples from practice, research, and teaching that provide insight into operationalizing the *Equity X Governance* paradigm.

Introduction: An Origin Story and the Next Act – Background and Chapter Overview

At the 2015 Association for the Study of Higher Education meeting in Denver, Colorado, Drs. Morgan and Commodore, graduate school friends and colleagues, decided to attend one of the only paper sessions tackling postsecondary education governance issues. Throughout our graduate school experiences, we had found kinship and community in our emerging interest in governance and its role in the pursuit of producing equitable opportunities for people to experience success. As the session began, Dr. Commodore quickly whispered to Dr. Morgan that we were seemingly the only Black people in the room other than one of the paper authors. That author ended up being Dr. Rall, who shared insights into the experiences of student trustees that stemmed from her dissertation work on the socialization of boards of trustees (2014). Following the session, Drs. Morgan and Commodore

approached Dr. Rall to introduce themselves. Dr. Commodore shared that her dissertation sought to advance our understanding of the role of trust among Board members involved in presidential selection at African Methodist Episcopal (AME) affiliated institutions (2015). Dr. Morgan chimed in that he was pursuing his dissertation research to illuminate the influence of policy and governance on students' political identity development (2016). We quickly became enraptured in the similarities in our research interests and agenda. Despite the nuanced takes, we found synergy at the intersection of contemporary governance tensions and the realization of equitable opportunities for success. We exchanged contact information and agreed to stay in touch because we each knew that there were few folks who looked like us, "doing the work" to advance equity in governance spaces.

The following summer, we met virtually to brainstorm ideas and projects in hopes of continuing our moment. The expansive and overwhelming need for empirical research, theory building, convenings with people in the field, and the generation of practical insights related to governance quickly emerged in our strategy session. We came to a consensus that precisely locating Governing Boards (GB[1]) in the broader governance research landscape was critical since our individual lines of research had all landed us at the same conclusion: Boards were immensely consequential to a range of issues but were underresearched relative to equity concerns when compared with students, student affairs educators, faculty, administrators, and other institutional stakeholders. Furthermore, we decided that a multi-prong approach was critical if we wanted to move the needle and conversation about governance, GBs, and equity. At that moment, the Critical Higher Education Governance Collaborative was born, made up of two Black women and one Black man, all in the nascent stages of their faculty careers but united in our ultimate vision of helping realize a more just and equitable postsecondary experience for all stakeholders – which we describe throughout as a concern for "equitable opportunities for stakeholder success." We resigned ourselves to interrupt the norms of governance research even if it Meant we were the lone voice in the literature.

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[1] Throughout the manuscript we use the US-centric terminology of "GB(s)," "governing board(s)," "boards," and "trustees" interchangeably. These terms encapsulate local variations such as Boards of "Curators," "Governors," "Regents," or "Visitors." Most often we are referring to institutional-level boards and state-level governing boards together – with the distinguishing characteristic that the Board has consequential decision-making authority for the entity and is understood as the institution or system's fiduciary (as opposed to a University Foundation Board or an Alumni Board (Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges [AGB], 2021; Kezar, 2004; McGuinness, 2016). Further. we do not parcel out nuances between 2-year and 4-year or for-profit and non-profit institutions unless explicitly stated. In addition, when only referencing state-level governing boards, we make the distinction clear. Finally, our chapter is situated in the history, manifestation, and trajectory of US settler colonialism, patriarchy, white supremacy, ableism, anti-LGBTQ actions, and economic stratification (Nicolazzo, 2021; Patel, 2015; Patton, 2016). Our review is not designed to capture the rich comparative governance context and we point readers to resources of interest that informed our thinking from/about non-US contexts but do not land in our review (e.g., Gornitzka et al., 2017; Hartley & Ruby, 2017; Maassen, 2017; Stensaker & Vabø, 2013).

We intentionally articulate a concern for the somewhat generic "stakeholder success," because we want to avoid describing the pursuit or realization of desired postsecondary education outcomes (i.e., "success") only in terms or metrics connected to students (e.g., graduation, retention) or faculty (research productivity, teaching evaluations). Furthermore, we want to avoid being solely concerned with racial/ethnic identities and realities. Instead, given our macro-concern for the entirety of institutions, our expansive proposition is that all stakeholders need to have meaningful opportunities for success that are sensitive to their backgrounds, goals, roles, and contextual realities.

Therefore, this stakeholder success stance includes GB, students, staff, faculty, administrators, policymakers, and community members in the surrounding locale. By focusing on stakeholder success we also build on Hurtado et al.'s (2012) diverse learning environments model with a focus on the overarching public good to which institutions seek to contribute (Marginson, 2011), and a consciousness of the unrealized promises of a vibrant and functional democracy (Morgan & Davis, 2019; Saltmarsh & Hartley, 2011). We are not naïve or overly idealistic though – we recognize the necessity of contending with the inherent nuances between stakeholder groupings for a variety of reasons. Throughout this chapter we seek to sit in the tension between an intersectional awareness that interlocking systems of oppression manifest (Collins, 2015; Crenshaw, 1989, 1991; Harris & Patton, 2019) and the conviction that White supremacy and colonialization continue to be significant structuring features of postsecondary education organizations (Pasque & Carducci, 2015; Patel, 2015; Ray, 2019) and higher education scholarship (Harper, 2012; Jayakumar et al., 2018; Patton, 2016). Our motivating concern is for all the ways people experience oppression related to their minoritized social identities (Huddy, 2001) on an individual plane and the interlocking systems and structures that maintain those realities (Dache-Gerbino & White, 2016; Garces, 2014; Kimball et al., 2016; Museus, 2014; Nicolazzo, 2021; Renn, 2020b). Throughout, we toggle between a race-centric and intersectional sensibility as just one of many ways to push toward our version of stakeholder success.

Chapter Overview

From the extrajudicial slayings of Black and Brown people (Hill, 2016), to the resurgence of campus activism (Davis III et al., 2022), to an increasingly fraught political landscape (Parker, 2019), as well as persistent concerns about the affordability and value of a postsecondary education credential (Conner & Rabovsky, 2011), and a global pandemic that unmasked deep-seated disparities for people of color in higher education and beyond (Kettl, 2020) – much has happened in the world and in US postsecondary education space since our collaborative's origin story. We have also witnessed and been party to an emergent interest in understanding and enacting the role and potential of GBs in equity work (Commodore, 2018; Commodore et al., 2020, 2022; Commodore & Morgan, 2021; Grummert & Rall, 2020; Morgan et al., 2019; 2021a, b; Owens & Commodore, 2018; Rall, 2020,

2021a, b; Rall et al., 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021a, b, 2022a; Rall & Maxey, 2020; Rall & Orué, 2020; Tierney & Rall, 2018). Yet, many tensions remain as the translation from research and theory to governance practice is ever-evolving (Rall et al., 2021a).

Therefore, our chapter focuses on helping scholars and graduate students grow more familiar with the scholarship of GBs in particular. Consequently, we examined the ontological (i.e., what is the nature of GBs), epistemological (i.e., how do we come to know GBs), axiological (i.e., what GBs value), and praxis Centered (i.e., what GBs do) dimensions of Boards via a review and synthesis of available literature. More plainly, we aimed to thoroughly dissect GBs to their component parts to ready their reconstruction in a new paradigm that (re)envisions Board governance for the future. **Hence, we submit that the primary contribution of this chapter is offering a paradigm and conceptual model focused on organizational change that has both descriptive and practical utility for scholars and those that directly or indirectly interact with GBs.**

This chapter is divided into seven additional sections. In the following section, we outline our case for a paradigm shift in the postsecondary education governance context toward the *Equity X Governance paradigm* – pronounced Equity by Governance (section "Making the Case for a Paradigm Shift: From Equity & Governance → *Equity X Governance*"). We then review research highlighting how relationally oriented GBs are in equity work by identifying and mapping a range of institutional actors (section "Relevant Stakeholders: An Ecosystem Perspective on *Equity X Governance*") that make up what we describe as the Governance Ecosystem. Section "Readying the Theoretical Frameworks" overviews our theoretical frameworks leading to a review that uses Critical Race Theory to examine the study of governance (section "Governance to What End?: A CRT Analysis") and Standpoint Theory to examine the practices of GBs (section "Equity as the Fulcrum of Governance, But Where and How do we Apply it: Core Challenges and Opportunities for Boards"). The final sections detail a conceptual model for change within the *Equity X Governance* paradigm and then offer research implications that advance equitable opportunities for stakeholder success.

Making the Case for a Paradigm Shift: From Equity and Governance → *Equity X Governance*

The introduction of the *Equity X Governance* paradigm at this moment is especially critical to help institutions navigate intensifying uncertainty (e.g., COVID-19 pandemic, political dysfunction) in ways that efficiently combat and transform institutions rather than slowly reform or placate, which traditionally has kept institutions in the status quo (Morgan & López, 2022; Patton et al., 2019). Said differently, a paradigm shift is needed because current governance paradigms and the research and practice that emanates from those paradigms are inadequate to address the multifaceted nature of postsecondary education's challenges while also locating and implicating the role of the GB.

While sustained agreement on what constitutes the "best" theories or paradigms within any given sub-field is challenging to realize (Nicolazzo, 2021; Renn, 2020a), we make an initial assertion that the time is ripe to advance the intersection of equity and governance along multiple fronts. Prior to building our argument for the need for a new paradigm to understand governance, it is important to operationalize some key terms to set a foundation for our discussion. We operationalize "governance" as power and agency wielded by Governing Boards via decision-making exercises to preserve an organization (American Association of University Professors [AAUP], 1966; Bess & Dee, 2014; Kezar, 2004; Kezar & Eckel, 2004). Governance processes then become contested as internal and external actors vie for influence, at times described as "shared governance," illuminating different actors' animating values that come together in ways that shape a range of organizational outcomes and change processes (Castagno & Hausman, 2017; Eckel, 2000; Minor, 2006; Taylor, 2013). However, we mark governance and, by extension, trustees, as neither neutral nor inherently benevolent, taking a decided step away from traditional renderings of governance and Boards as generally altruistic lay leaders/volunteers (AGB, 2021; Barringer & Riffe, 2018; Chait et al., 2005; Dominguez, 1971). This more power-conscious and critical rendering of governance (Gonzales et al., 2018; Pasque & Carducci, 2015; Patton, 2016) elevates the need to provisionally answer the question, governance to what end? For us, the answer is that governance should always be oriented toward pursuing and realizing equitable opportunities for stakeholder success. Which begs the follow-up question, how do we operationalize equity?

We favor a definition of "equity" that is concerned with structures, policies, and systems that constrain opportunities for success and mindful of the unique realities of different campus stakeholders (e.g., students, faculty, staff, community members), as our use of Standpoint Theory (Kokushkin, 2014) will accentuate. This dual consideration allows for a unifying organizational direction (i.e., equity is the pursuit and outcome of dismantling barriers, policies, and structures, that moderate opportunities for success based on an awareness of how context and systems impact people with minoritized identities (Garces, 2014; Jordan, 2010; McNair et al., 2019) and specificity in the role different constituents must play in that pursuit (i.e., casting equity as a fiduciary duty of GBs (Commodore et al., 2022)). This multifaceted approach to defining equity makes GBs active rather than passive and central rather than ancillary in advancing equity work.

With these definitions in mind, bringing the two concepts together then, quite literally (*Equity X Governance*), tentatively forms the foundation of a new paradigm (Kuhn, 1962) within the broader leadership, governance, and organizational change literature (Dee & Leišytė, 2016; Gonzales et al., 2018; Kezar, 2004; Kezar & Eckel, 2004). Explained simply, we aim to position the *Equity X Governance* paradigm as **a philosophical approach to viewing, understanding, and interacting within an organizational transformation process that (re)centers the GB and seeks to realize equitable opportunities for stakeholder success through institution/system-level governance processes**. To be clear, we firmly believe that everyone has a role to play in advancing equity in higher education and that there are actors with more experience with, proximity to, and skill at governing higher education than

governing boards. This reality does not negate the prominence, power, purview, privilege, and potential GBs have in this arena. Our contention is that because GBs have been ignored so long in pivotal conversations of both equity and governance, they require our attention. So, while in the end, the empirical literature and history at many institutions demonstrate that there are plenty of ways to improve equity and governance, without GBs, we do not believe that approach can maximize outcomes. Further, because we call for more attention to boards, it does not mean we can forget about or neglect the other key actors on campus (see section "Relevant Stakeholders: An Ecosystem Perspective on *Equity X Governance*"). The other conversations must endure, but we cannot continue to act like Boards cannot and do not impact policies, practices, people, and outcomes – especially when it comes to stakeholders with minoritized identities. For example, we highlight in earlier work how boards often fall into one or a combination of five roles: initiator, catalyzer, bystander, inhibitor, or barrier to equity (Rall et al., 2020; Rall, 2021a, b) so we center boards here because they have not been included and because they are a necessary, but insufficient player in *Equity X Governance*. When an "and" is interspliced between governance and equity, it conveys that the concepts could be understood jointly. Yet, as our review will show, this grammatical framing often keeps the concepts siloed in practice and research. In contrast, the *Equity X Governance* paradigm necessarily denotes an additive and positive relationship between each concept, forming the basis for a new reality and approach to organizational transformation altogether.

To explain this shift further we adapt the co-branding collaborations strategy that has permeated most industries in the last decade (Uggla & Åsberg, 2010). Starting with clothing, cross-brand collaborations take one company's strengths, style, and consumer base and merge it with an entirely different company with non-overlapping strengths, style, and audiences. For instance, the *Versace X H&M* collaboration creates a new set of customers for Versace while driving traffic to H&M stores. The *Starbucks X Spotify* collaboration saw baristas create specific playlists for coffee shops driving customer engagement with the stores and introducing Spotify to a wider array of potential consumers. The inspiration for us as we conceive a novel paradigm is that the result of these collaborations is a never-before-seen product or relationship that is mutually beneficial in financial, functional, emotional, and self-expressive ways (Uggla & Åsberg, 2010).

Given the noted challenges associated with neoliberalism and academic capitalism in the academy, some might fairly question the use of market strategies for an equity endeavor (Cantwell, 2016; McClure, 2016; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004). In response, we follow la paperson's creative reimagining of the scyborg in *A third university is possible*, where it was stated, "Scyborg—composed of s + cyborg—is a queer turn of word . . . to name the structural agency of persons who have picked up colonial technologies and reassembled them to decolonizing purposes" (Paperson, 2017, Chapter Introduction), hence the scyborg is a "sculptor of assemblages" made up of individuals plugged into but intentionally remaking the colonial university machine, in essence teetering between a colonizing and decolonizing logic and practice (Paperson, 2017, Chapter You, a Scyborg). Similarly, we expansively (re) envision the *Equity X Governance* paradigm as an approach that takes what can be

viewed as neoliberal logic and reorients it toward an endeavor that is focused on dismantling inequities and promoting stakeholder success. la paperson goes on to state:

> Decolonization is, put bluntly, the rematriation of land, the regeneration of relations, and the forwarding of Indigenous and Black and queer futures—*a process that requires countering what power seems to be up to*. To take effective decolonizing action, *we must then have a theory of action* that accounts for the permeability of the apparatuses of power and the fact that neocolonial systems inadvertently support decolonizing agendas. [emphasis added] (Paperson, 2017, Chapter Introduction)

In agreement, we expound on the *Equity X Governance* paradigm in this chapter to counter what one of the most powerful entities is often up to (i.e., the GB) and provide a complementary theory of action for scholars. Consequently, we view the *Equity X Governance* paradigm approach to organizational transformation as not quite structural, political, relational, or symbolic (Bolman & Deal, 2017; Gonzales et al., 2018; Kezar & Eckel, 2004) – while encompassing all of those frames depending on how the "collaboration" between institutional actors comes together within the postsecondary education context. Accordingly, the *Equity X Governance* paradigm seeks to span multiple ways of understanding and analyzing organizations, from a theoretical standpoint (Gonzales et al., 2018; Kezar & Dee, 2011), in service of leveraging whatever theory is most conducive to the pursuit of equitable opportunities for stakeholder success. Neither is *Equity X Governance* just focused on addressing issues of access, diversity, inclusion, belonging, or any of the myriad student or faculty-centric concerns (Garces, 2014; Hurtado et al., 2012; Museus, 2014; Patton et al., 2019; Renn, 2020b) – while necessarily attending to each of those challenges, in intersectional and holistic ways (Crenshaw, 1989, 1991; Harris & Patton, 2019). In healthy partnership, operating within the *Equity X Governance* paradigm allows institutions to be: (a) high-functioning in an operational sense, (b) spaces for liberation and success of its stakeholders, and (c) ultimately advancing the broader public good (Freire, 1970; Hooks, 1994; Marginson, 2011). The paradigm's north star is the extent to which decision-making of the GB and their wielding of power, as well as the related research on these endeavors, synergistically serves these three aims.

Let us use a brief example to substantiate our claim. In a recent study, Morgan and Commodore, along with LePeau (2021), documented GBs as passive recipients of equity-related information and interventions from other more agentic institutional actors (e.g., chief diversity officers, students, and faculty). Furthermore, we described sharing equity-related information with GB as "performative" GB work because it did not seem to lead to substantive changes to GB processes or institutional outcomes (Morgan et al., 2021a). These documented tensions bolster our initial thesis that there is no shared consensus or robust line of research on the role GBs should have in equity work amid institutional change processes. So, we need a new paradigm for governing boards and governance more broadly.

To (re)envision a future where GBs advance equity work within institutions, the *Equity X Governance* paradigm is designed to center the role of GBs and conduct research or engage in practice with trustees that focuses on transforming organizations to better serve their constituents, especially those with minoritized identities. With a tentative outline of the need for the *Equity X Governance* paradigm in mind, our next task is to identify how non-GB postsecondary education actors engage in the *Equity X Governance* paradigm relative to GBs.

Relevant Stakeholders: An Ecosystem Perspective on *Equity X Governance*

A critical component of the *Equity X Governance* paradigm is its conceptualization of any given organizational frame (e.g., structural or symbolic (Bolman & Deal, 2017)) through a consideration of how it advances an organization toward or away from equitable stakeholder success. This section aims to situate the array of stakeholders for an institution within the *Equity X Governance* paradigm and map their connection to GBs through a review of related literature. Our purpose is to demonstrate the relative absence of GBs in existing equity focused research to underscore how the *Equity X Governance* paradigm can help us differently understand and map actors involved in helping realize stakeholder success within the Governance Ecosystem (see Fig. 1).

Mapping the Governance Ecosystem to Non-GB Actor's Equity Work

Adner (2017) describes elements of an ecosystem in the management literature as: (1) **activities** which are discrete actions that can be taken to advance a value proposition and (2) **actors**, or people who undertake activities. In alignment with Kapoor (2018), we collapse Adner's original positions and links into the "**architecture**" of an ecosystem. Architecture refers to the coupling of actors amid activities relative to one another in the ecosystem. To operationalize the Governance Ecosystem within the *Equity X Governance* paradigm, we conceive activities as transactions between postsecondary education actors amid their equity work. Further, we position the architecture of the ecosystem as the linkages between actors and activities, which is how and why actors come together to produce value. In Table 1, we synthesized literature that focuses on non-GB actors' equity work and how they connect to GBs in a relational sense.

We draw two conclusions from our review of postsecondary education actors. First, to locate the positioning of stakeholders relative to GB, we constructed a matrix of direct to indirect on the *Y*-axis and internal to external on the *X*-axis. Direct to indirect refers to the degree of coupling (Weick, 1976) between the stakeholder and the GB. We understand more tightly coupled stakeholders as direct reports to the GB. This means that they have access to trustees via committee work, full board meetings, or as a result of their policymaking authority. Directly positioned
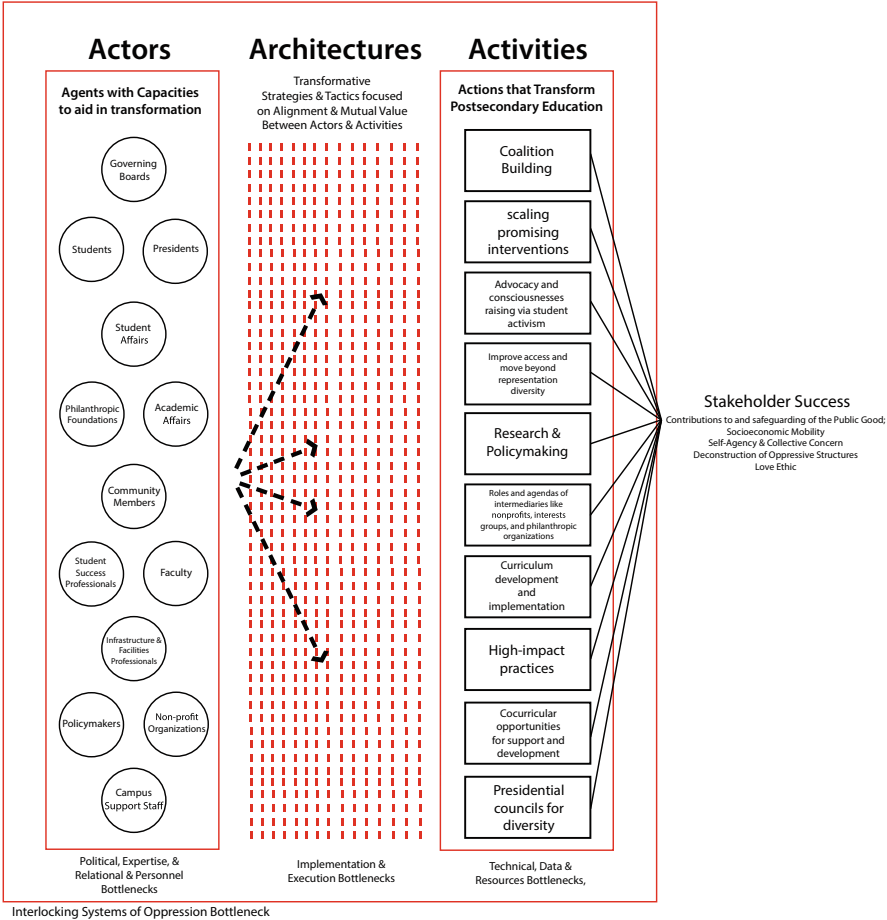
Fig. 1 "Equity X Governance" Ecosystem View

stakeholders are likely to be well aquatinted with individual trustees and understand the GB's norms, activities, and processes and vice versa. On the other hand, indirect stakeholders are likely to have greater responsibility for day-to-day equity work but are more loosely coupled to the GB (LePeau, 2015; Patton et al., 2019; Taylor, 2021).

The internal/external dimension refers to insider and outsider status in day-to-day activity with a particular institution. We depict this arrangement visually in Fig. 2. The connection to the *Equity X Governance* paradigm here is the reiteration of the range and complexity of relationship types and activities within equity and success work. The reality of this breadth and complexity foreshadows the need to effectively organize and layer in a model of change that brings coherency to GB-centered equity work.

Table 1 Governance Ecosystem Stakeholders

Ecosystem Positioning	Stakeholder	Definition of Stakeholder	Link to Governing Boards	Example Role in Equity Work
External to institutions	Policymakers	Individual or groups that contribute to the creation of policies at the federal, state, municipal, or organizational level (Gándara, 2020; Rodriguez et al., 2021)	Direct external	Baker (2019) and Rodriguez et al. (2021)
	Interest groups	"Any association of individuals, whether formally organized or not, that attempts to influence public policy" (Opfer et al., 2008, p. 2008)	Indirect external	Gándara et al. (2017)
	Communities	Physical communities that the university or college is located in or near (Jacoby, 2009)	Indirect external	Saltmarsh and Hartley (2011)
	Philanthropies	An advocacy focused organization that funds events, initiatives, projects that align with the organization's mission (Miller & Morphew, 2017)	Indirect external	Hess and Henig (2015)
	Non-profits	Organized group that operates for collective benefit, increasingly addressing what were once considered public services (Renz & Anderson, 2014)	Indirect external	Bernstein et al. (2019)
	Other industries (e.g., Business sector)	Ecosystems, made up of firms, individuals, and activities that shape the external environment that impacts postsecondary institutions (Hendrickson et al., 2012)	Indirect external	Jongbloed et al. (2008)

Table 1 (continued)

Ecosystem Positioning	Stakeholder	Definition of Stakeholder	Link to Governing Boards	Example Role in Equity Work
Periphery of institutions	State level governing boards	"Although there are variations among states about how public higher education governing boards are structured, they maintain the same role-to supervise higher education institutions for the public good-and have similar responsibilities, such as hiring and evaluating the president, establishing and terminating programs, maintaining fiduciary responsibility, and ensuring the institution fulfills its mission" (Kezar, 2006, p. 969)	Direct external	Rall et al. (2022b)
	Governing boards	In the United States Governing Boards typically identify and evaluate their institutions' leaders; maintain and communicate their institutions' mission statements; safeguard their institutions' financial health; interact with outside stakeholders; and assess their own performance (Hendrickson et al., 2012)	n/a	Rall et al. (2022a)

Table 1 (continued)

Ecosystem Positioning	Stakeholder	Definition of Stakeholder	Link to Governing Boards	Example Role in Equity Work
Internal to institutions	Presidents	Head of a university or college, chief executive officer (Freedman, 2004)	Direct internal	Kezar and Eckel (2008), LePeau et al. (2019)
	Academic leaders	Institutional leaders whose role focuses on promoting academic success and attainment efforts (Hendrickson et al., 2012)	Direct internal	LePeau (2018)
	Student affairs leaders	Institutional leaders whose role is focused on student success inside and outside the defined classroom space (McClellan & Stringer, 2016)	(In)Direct internal	Patton et al. (2019), Rhoads and Black (1995)
	Diversity leaders	Institutional leaders whose role is focused and centered on cultivating, implementing, and supporting equity efforts (Leon, 2014)	(In)Direct internal	Stanley et al. (2019)
	University operations leaders	Leaders responsible an institution's planning, programming, information, facilities, and budgeting systems and personnel	Indirect internal	Clauson and McKnight (2018), Kutch and Kutch (2022)
	Academic and student affairs staff & administrators (i.e., student success workers)	"...while staff are individuals who have non-instructional responsibilities such as student affairs, admissions, alumni affairs, fund-raising or business affairs (often termed administrative staff internationally). However, staff are not administrators in	Indirect internal	Kezar et al. (2011, p. 130, 2021), LePeau et al. (2018), McNair et al. (2019), Museus and Neville (2012), Taylor (2021)

Table 1 (continued)

Ecosystem Positioning	Stakeholder	Definition of Stakeholder	Link to Governing Boards	Example Role in Equity Work
		the United States, as administrators have formal positions where they are delegated authority from the board of trustees and work more directly with the president and top-level leadership" (Kezar et al., 2011, p. 130)		
	Faculty	Individuals whose role is centered around research and scholarship, teaching, service, and funding (Bess & Dee, 2014)	Indirect internal	Croom and Patton Davis (2012), López and Morgan (2021), Wilkinson (2019)
	Student activists	Students collectively engaged in political projects (Morgan & Davis, 2019)	Indirect internal	Davis et al. (2022), Wheatle and Commodore (2019)

The second overarching conclusion in Table 1 is an enhanced focus on activities that advance equity work for stakeholders (i.e., joint-value creation) that lay outside the practices and responsibilities of GB – but still permeate the *Equity X Governance* paradigm. These value-added activities include: advocacy and consciousnesses raising via student activism (Davis III et al., 2022; Wheatle & Commodore, 2019), efforts to improve access and move beyond representational diversity (Garces & Jayakumar, 2014), the role of research in equity-focused policymaking (Baker, 2019; Felix & Trinidad, 2019; Gándara, 2020; Rodriguez et al., 2021), the various functions and agendas of intermediaries like nonprofits, interests groups, and philanthropic organizations (Gándara et al., 2017; Ness et al., 2015), co/curriculum development and implementation (Hurtado et al., 2012), high-impact practices (Kuh et al., 2010; Stewart & Nicolazzo, 2018), and scaling promising interventions (Kezar, 2011b; Kezar & Holcombe, 2020).

However, other than a few prominent examples (e.g., grassroots leadership (Kezar, 2011a), shared equity leadership (Kezar et al., 2021), equity-minded practitioners (McNair et al., 2019), or presidential councils for diversity (LePeau et al., 2019), most times in related scholarship, equity actors are depicted in relative isolation from one another. In addition, GBs' involvement in any of these activities is seldom, if ever, illuminated. Scholars rarely directly connect leadership, decision-
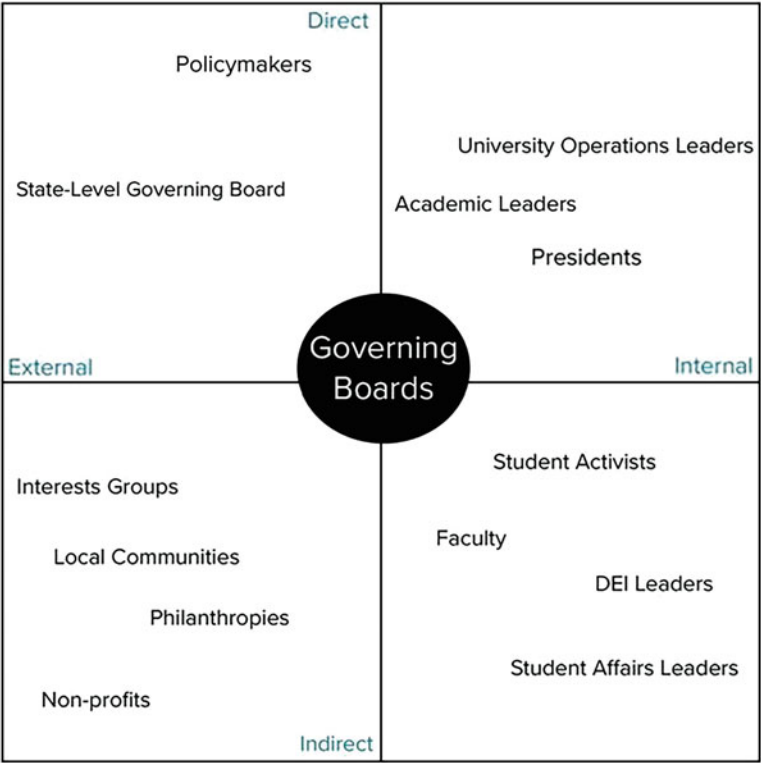
Fig. 2 Institutional stakeholder positioning relative to the governing board

making, and other related topics inherently to governing boards. At most, we see work that tinkers around the edges and generally speaks to leaders without specifically naming governing boards or ambiguously framing governance without giving specific attention to the role and influence of governing boards on higher education. Hence, we maintain this necessary shift to the *Equity X Governance* paradigm, synergizes with existing equity activities and allows the work to be more sustainable and transformative (Morgan et al., 2021a; Rall et al., 2020).

The *Equity X Governance* Paradigm's Nemeses: Naming Ecosystem Bottlenecks

In this section we conceptualized the connections to the *Equity X Governance* paradigm among various actors that make up the postsecondary education Governance Ecosystem. Our review concludes that there is little scholarly consensus on how actors should relate to each other in the pursuit of stakeholder success. Nevertheless, consistent with our recent research, we assert that GB can serve as potential

energy sources (i.e., electrical sockets) (Morgan et al., 2021a), through the generous delegation of their power when stakeholders "plug-in" to the Board. This connection spurs and permits a more intense, efficacious, and sustainable activity within institutions that can help actualize stakeholder success.

However, the aforementioned prevalence of isolation amid equity work manifests as actors within an ecosystem become competitors for resources and claims to success rather than form mutually beneficial and sustained collaborative relationships (Cho, 2018; Leon, 2014; Patton et al., 2019). The business literature describes this isolation or competition as a misalignment (i.e., "a bottleneck") in the architecture of an ecosystem that prevents the realization of value (Adner, 2017; Kapoor, 2018). Figure 1 depicts various bottlenecks as red lines in the Governance Ecosystem that interfere with the flow of relationships and the execution of activities. We identified and summarized these bottlenecks based on recurring challenges in the non-GB actor literature review. These bottlenecks undermine the *Equity X Governance* paradigm and disrupt the Governance Ecosystem in four ways that operate both independently and together:

- **Entire Ecosystem Bottleneck**: Interlocking Systems of Oppression refers to the various ways settler colonialism, white supremacy, patriarchy, ableism, cis-normativity, economic stratification, and various other systems interact with one another to complicate in multiple ways how actors experience the governance ecosystem, how activities are designed and implemented, and the resources necessary to sustain activities.
- **Actor Bottleneck**: The political, attitudinal expertise, relational, and personnel conflicts that isolate actors in the ecosystem from one another in attempts to advance equity work.
- **Activities Bottleneck**: The technical, data, and resource constraints that impede activities that seek to advance equity. An example of this bottleneck is when student or faculty data are not disaggregated by race, gender, and other relevant identities and then decisions are made that purport to advance racial or gender equity.
- **Architecture Bottleneck**: The implementation and execution challenges that inhibit the links between the right actors and the optimal activities. A prevalent example of this bottleneck are the notorious layers of idiosyncratic bureaucracy and incompatible internal systems within an institution. For instance, a faculty member may follow up about a concern of a student's academic struggles in one fashion, an academic advisor may follow another set of activities, and another campus partner might not be aware of any issues related to the student. The actors may be well meaning and the activities might be available to help, but if there are obstacles that impede how actors and activities come together, then the potential of optimal synergistic outcomes for stakeholders is narrowed.

Additionally, the isolated and competitive reality of the Governance Ecosystem brought on by the bottlenecks listed above and the inability of actors within institutions to materially address these concerns operates as an under-identified

"organizational truce" (Adner, 2017), among many actors – including the GB. An organizational truce occurs when change efforts remain at the level of actors or activities but leaves the underlying architecture of an organization in place (Adner, 2017). In the postsecondary education context, this truce perpetuates the status quo of oppression and disrupts opportunities for the success of minoritized stakeholders, while also appearing to engage in equity related work (Ahmed, 2012; Patton et al., 2019; Squire et al., 2019). We seek to entirely disrupt this complacency through our subsequent literature synthesis that focuses on the study of governance. Then we turn our attention to GBs via a review of their function, role, and practices to search for ways of (re)envisioning how actors identified in this section might partner with GBs in equity work. Finally, we conclude with an agenda for research and practice inspired by the *Equity X Governance* paradigm.

Readying the Theoretical Frameworks

Thus far we have argued that the goal of governance and governance research should be to help realize equitable opportunities for stakeholders' success in postsecondary education contexts (i.e., shifting to the *Equity X Governance* paradigm). Additionally, we have mapped most of the personnel that make up the Governance Ecosystem relative to their equity work and the GB and the bottlenecks within the ecosystem that allow for inequities to persist. We now turn our attention squarely to the fulcrum of the governance ecosystem, the GB.

Stanley (2007) argues that a "master narrative is a script that specifies and controls how some social processes are carried out" (p. 14). The master narrative about "principled" trustees and as an extension GBs, is that they are "engaged in the most important issues, at the right time, in the right way" (AGB, 2021, p. 4). Yet, an undergirding premise of the *Equity X Governance* paradigm is that GBs remain decidedly absent from the equity landscape. We posit that they have been absent from the landscape because they do not have a comprehensive understanding of equity challenges/issues, there is a disconnect between who serves on governing boards and those who they govern for, and finally because definitive engagement with power-conscious and critical frameworks have been minimally leveraged in the governance space (Gonzales et al., 2018; Pasque & Carducci, 2015). Said differently, GB do not know how to engage in this important work (which is not surprising given the literature that shows that GBs seldom know how and are prepared for their roles) and they are often oblivious to the impact of issues of power, exclusion on their role. These dynamics allow the master narrative that trustees just need to be engaged in the right way to persist unquestioned. Hence, we wonder when it comes to equity, what frameworks examine how GBs should be engaged? What is the right time for GB involvement in equity? And even more fraught in the equity landscape is a consideration for what would be agreed upon as the right way?

At the same time, the study of governance in postsecondary education is undertheorized on its own terms. Researchers tend to rely on adapting frameworks from other fields and disciplines (e.g., management, sociology, anthropology,

political science, psychology (Eckel, 2019; Kezar & Dee, 2011; Kezar & Eckel, 2004; Rall et al., 2021a)). At times, there is great utility in this researcher norm. Frameworks both create new ideas for inquiry and new areas of inquiry can require new frameworks. In this case, we have a new focus (GBs with equity) which requires new framing. Our premise with the *Equity X Governance* paradigm calls for tailoring all related concepts to the overarching thesis of the paradigm (i.e., foregrounding approaches to governance that center the GB and help transform institutions and realize equitable stakeholder success) and moving away from master narratives about Boards. Therefore, we want to cautiously augment the theories we utilized for our reviews and articulate how they connect to the *Equity X Governance* paradigm.

In particular, Critical Race Theory (hereafter CRT) as a theoretical framework is interested in "studying and transforming the relationship between race, racism, and power" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017, p. 3). Given the history of GBs and post-secondary education, as well as the current demographic make-up and prevailing hegemony of whiteness on modern-day Boards (Rall et al., 2018), CRT provides a slate of useful analytical tools that focuses on the role of race in the operation of power and oppression. This is the starting point of our deconstruction of GBs, unraveling how whiteness has been a consistent feature in the study of GBs in higher education and how that has limited our understanding of how boards operate in the Governance Ecosystem. Second, Standpoint Theory (Kokushkin, 2014) complements CRT, focusing on structure but with a more nuanced and intersectional approach that seeks to elevate those rendered invisible or powerless because of multiple interlocking systems of domination (Collins, 2015; Crenshaw, 1991; Harris & Patton, 2019).

Critical Race Theory Overview

We point readers to the rich and vast literature that serves as an introduction, primer, and catalog of CRT from its genesis in legal studies to perhaps the most (in)famous theory in all of education (Bell, 1995; Crenshaw, 2010; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Gillborn, 1995, 2005; López et al., 2022; Yosso, 2005). Our purpose here is to, as precisely as possible, augment one rendering of CRT into the postsecondary education governance space for our review (section "Governance to What End?: A CRT Analysis"). To that end, we leveraged Lori Patton's (2016) CRT of Higher Education.

The premise of Patton's (2016) CRT of Higher Education is to "disrupt racelessness in education, but focus specifically on higher education and the challenges associated with moving the academy forward in a way that explicitly names racism/White supremacy in areas such as college access, curriculum, and policy" (p. 316). Accordingly, Patton (2016) puts forth three foundational propositions and a corollary statement to operationalize a CRT of Higher Education:

- "The establishment of U.S. higher education is deeply rooted in racism/White supremacy, the vestiges of which remain palatable" (p. 317).
- "The functioning of U.S. higher education is intricately linked to imperialistic and capitalistic efforts that fuel the intersections of race, property, and oppression" (p. 317).
- "U.S. higher education institutions serve as venues through which formal knowledge production rooted in racism/White supremacy is generated" (p. 317).
- "Higher education serves as a space for transformative knowledge production that challenges dominant discourses and ways of operating in and beyond the academy" (p. 335).

In summation, looking at higher education through the lens of CRT causes us to ask whether institutions might be governed differently if viewed from the outset of their establishment from a research and practice posture that takes seriously the points raised in each of the three propositions and corollary statement. Neither equity nor governance challenges "just happened." The challenges we face in both areas (and most importantly, at the intersection of the two) stem from years of explicit and implicit exclusion due to racism, capitalism, and a host of other "isms" as suggested by the propositions. At the same time, however, we cannot lose hope because just as higher education has been a source of marginalization, it is also an environment ripe for and with the capacity for change that will spill out into society. In using these propositions as a foundation, our review of how GBs are studied demonstrates how raceless and oppressive realities manifest in current scholarship and theory about GBs – strengthening the Governance Ecosystem's organizational truce. At present governance literature is mostly void of equity conversations and the literature that centers equity often fails to grapple with governance. While both topics are important alone, it is the research and practice intersection of the two that has the potential to inform and transform pivotal institutional decision-making going forward. Therefore, continuing the tradition of counter-storytelling, we do not leave the analysis there. Instead, engaging Patton's (2016) corollary, we conclude our synthesis by reimaging the "governance to what end" question.

Standpoint Theory Overview

With just a CRT lens, we risk understanding GBs as isolated actors (i.e., the architecture issue from our Governance Ecosystem). We have maintained that GBs must be understood within an ecosystem of actors, power relationships, and shared activities. Therefore, we supplement a view of higher education via CRT with Standpoint Theory. Standpoint theorists emphasize that understanding and objectivity are enhanced with more knowledge and clarity of epistemological and political baggage (Adler & Jermier, 2005, 2016). Standpoint theory is a "set of theoretical and epistemological propositions designed to produce alternative knowledge" (Kokushkin, 2014, p. 10). It starts with the notion that the less powerful individuals experience a different reality in society due to their oppression (Swigonski, 1994).

Hill Collins (1997) put forth that "Standpoint theory argues that groups who share common placement in hierarchical power relations also share common experiences in such power relations" (p. 377). Put succinctly, Standpoint Theory takes seriously the perspective of people with relatively less power and elevates their insights as a form of knowledge.

Standpoint Theory in Equity X Governance

Kronsell (2005) explains that "Institutions largely governed by men have produced and recreated norms and practices associated with masculinity and heterosexuality" (p. 281). Power relations present a challenge for social science methodology (Patel, 2015). Fields that only or overwhelmingly depend on elite standpoints are susceptible to overlooking viewpoints. There is, therefore, a rationale to encourage scholarship that leverages different standpoints, especially those of disadvantaged communities, racial, ethnic, and sexual minorities, and women (Adler & Jermier, 2005). It is imperative that research that seeks to be transformational start with the lived experiences of the "systematically oppressed, exploited and dominated, those who have fewer interests in ignorance about how the social order actually works" (Harding, 2004, p. 150). Minoritized groups such as women and people of color are often underrepresented in decision-making positions like higher education trustees (Lynall et al., 2003), which means their concerns are often ignored or considered deviations from the norm (Henwood & Pidgeon, 1995). The resulting dynamic is identifying how "dominant institutions and their conceptual frameworks create and maintain oppressive social relations" becomes essential to enhancing knowledge of the trusteeship (Harding, 2004, p. 33).

Specifically, within the *Equity X Governance* paradigm, Standpoint Theory allows us to examine the habits and practices of GBs more deeply as they intersect with the realities of other actors. This deeper review builds on the review from section "Relevant Stakeholders: An Ecosystem Perspective on *Equity X Governance*", keeping the actors and relationships (e.g., the architecture) the same and swapping the activities under examination to illuminate how the bottlenecks in the Governance Ecosystem manifest for GBs.

Governance to What End?: A CRT Analysis

Taking a Step Back to Take a Leap Forward

To understand current conversations regarding GBs, it is essential to understand the foundational work in the area. This effort to historicize GBs is consistent with the CRT notion of disrupting ahistorical narratives of history on a topic that tends to blot the prevalence and structuring reality of White supremacy (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). This is especially essential in understanding how GBs have been studied.

Much of the seminal work regarding higher education boards provided insight into the formal function of the Board (AAUP, 1966; Baldridge, 1971, 1980; Birnbaum, 1988; Corbally, 1970; Dominguez, 1971). As higher education began

to go through various eras and transitions, the research on boards would mirror. As business and industry became more intertwined with the higher education enterprise, research would explore what this meant for boards (Kezar & Dee, 2011; Kezar & Eckel, 2004). This research still focused heavily on the function of boards within this new paradigm. The studies also highlight how board composition, foci, and responsibilities also began to shift (Knott & Payne, 2004; Payette, 2001; Toma, 1990). Research would also focus on providing practical insights for boards and institutions (Corbally, 1970; Holland et al., 1989; Taylor et al., 1991). From a CRT of higher education vantage point (Patton, 2016), these foundational works rarely and explicitly grappled with interlocking systems of oppression. Most scholars (most of whom appear to be White men) took the necessity of GBs as self-evident and not worthy of troubling, choosing rather to grapple with the structure and relational dimensions and not the undergirding ontological considerations.

Consequently, we see that from the inception of GB research, there has been an unstated truce between GBs and most scholars do not critically name or interrogate ways power or inequities play out on campus (Gonzales et al., 2018; Pasque & Carducci, 2015; Ray, 2019). Our contention here connects to Eckel and Trower's (2018) concern that GBs do not make their cultural norms visible and actionable for transformation. Accordingly, they note the need to increase curiosity in the boardroom so that boards break routines. Moreover, a renewed and refined focus on GBs means that other important related topics such as accountability may also be explored.

The next wave of Board research would begin to bring the importance of context into conversation (Carpenter & Westphal, 2001; Dalton et al., 1998; Lynall et al., 2003; Thornton & Ocasio, 1999). Higher education governance scholars nuanced the board discussion by exploring the impact of institutional context on not only the work of the board but also its composition (Ehrenberg et al., 2012; Kezar, 2006; Pusser et al., 2006). The unique challenges and political considerations that impact public institution boards and SLGBs highlight the complex intersections of state interests, politics, state economics, public interests, and institutional mission (Knott & Payne, 2004; McLendon, 2003; Pusser, 2003). Though context would be introduced into understanding higher education governance and boards, much of this literature would still fall short of offering critical approaches related to race, power, and class (Gonzales et al., 2018; Pasque & Carducci, 2015). Unsurprisingly then, scholars did not explore GBs or board members as perpetrators of White supremacy via how they operate within their context and GB composition (Patton, 2016).

During this era, some scholars would attempt to discuss race, institutional identity, and governance through the discussion of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) (Hughes, 1992; Pope & Miller, 1998). Minor (2004, 2005) explicitly explores the unique characteristics of shared governance at HBCUs. Minor's exploration of HBCU shared governance highlights the absence of race, culture, and criticality in the broader discussion of higher education governance. The challenge of marrying criticality and business informed governance literature was not shocking for Dr. Commodore, often being told in her undergraduate career that her Marketing major with a Sociology minor was evidence of her clearly confused

state and identity. However, it was while reading James Minor's work as a master's student that would open her eyes to how to bring higher education governance, race, culture, and context into conversation with each other. However, as she began to engage in HBCU governance scholarship, she began to realize that there was a lack of critical scholarship and scholars in this area. This reality made her engage in HBCU board research differently because many of the colorblind and culture blind models seemed inappropriate to employ. In order to properly understand the nature of governance at HBCUs and similar institutions, governance scholarship had to be generated that wrestled with the intersections of organizational culture, context, and race.

Intersections of culture, race, ethnicity, institutional behaviors, and decision-making practices within higher education governance literature would be used to inform practice, policy, and emerging governance scholars. Neglecting to see such intersections in this literature often fell short when applied to or used to assess institutions with unique contexts and strong cultures, racial and otherwise, that overlapped with institutional identity. This "raceless" or identity unaware approach is another reason why GBs and governance scholarship have struggled to help bring about stakeholder success for individuals with minoritized identities (Harper, 2012; Patton, 2016).

Scholars would build upon understanding higher education boards through a contextual lens to examine how power flowed within and through GB. As higher education began to experience mission creep and corporatization, the research literature explored how these shifts affected Board composition, priorities, and decision-making. The underlying theoretical frameworks rely on the concept of resource dependence. The corporate governance literature suggests that Boards that can tap into the various resources of their directors have enhanced firm success (Hillman et al., 2009; Nienhüser, 2008; Pfeffer & Salancik, 2006). Within the postsecondary education context, scholars found strong ties between major areas of industry and some of the most prominent and resourced institutions (Barringer et al., 2019, 2020; Pusser et al., 2006; Slaughter et al., 2014). These findings raised further questions about how such strong ties influenced Board composition, decisions made, and investments processed. These critiques expose the nexus of power and governance. These critiques would extend to discuss who had access to said nexus in such areas as gender, race, class, and students (Piscopo & Clark Muntean, 2018; van der Walt & Ingley, 2003). Or, in other words, whose capital or what type of capital matters most in the context of the GB (Yosso, 2005)?

Furthermore, as society and legislators began to call for higher accountability for higher education institutions, in areas such as equity, it became more apparent that boards were being left out, or some might say, excused from the conversation (Rall et al., 2022b). Rall et al. (2018) would push the discussion forward by highlighting how the lack of Board diversity and equity-centered Board practices reinforce inequitable higher education institutions and, ultimately, an inequitable higher education system. Building upon this work, we posit the necessity for a more critical understanding of how researchers come to understand GBs.

Governance as Raceless and Unaware of Power Dynamics

Higher education governance research has been approached in various ways to fully understand the phenomenon (Kezar & Dee, 2011; Rall et al., 2021a). Often these methodological approaches and research designs were employed to explore and expound upon the functional understandings of governance, governance structures, policy and decision-making practices, and governing boards. Due to the challenges regarding access to some of the most pertinent bodies and spaces within higher education governance (e.g., boards of trustees, coordinating boards, legislative bodies) unearthing complex, nuanced, layered understandings of governance and governance process is not always in reach of higher education researchers (Kezar, 2003; McClure & McNaughtan, 2021; Rall et al., 2021a). This difficulty in attaining a nuanced understanding contributes to the often-narrow understandings and conceptions of higher education governance that do not serve the diverse sector well.

In addition to these restrictions present in conducting higher education governance research, when taking a more focused eye to the literature, it becomes apparent that it is not simply these restrictions that exacerbate this narrow understanding. The methodological approaches of higher education governance have provided rich and compelling work in the field. These approaches include qualitative, quantitative, archival, and policy analysis methodological research designs (Rall et al., 2021a). Though this is the case, a sizable gap exists in the area of critical lenses, specifically the CRT lens, when employing these methodological approaches in governance research. Continuing our use of Patton's (2016) CRT of Higher Education as a framework of analysis, we conclude that the higher education governance literature does and does not set itself up to engage with a critical understanding of higher education governance, further perpetuating a lack of knowledge of the relationship between governance and equity. The lack of understanding ultimately results in a resolve to practice governance separate from the work of advancing equity within higher education. This dynamic also presents the uncomfortable reality that the higher education research community is complicit in this fracturing by virtue of the implications of research design choices in terms of impact when viewed in a particular light rather than researcher intention (Patel, 2015). We provide some deep-dive examples from oft-cited postsecondary education governance studies as support. Importantly, our commentary is not meant to cast these scholars (many of whom we consider mentors, friends, or supportive colleagues) in a negative light or detract from their essential contributions to building a body of knowledge about higher education governance. Further, we own that we make informed assumptions that may be inconsistent with the authors intentions. Additionally, we do not consider ourselves to be CRT scholars per se as we have not always used CRT in our prior studies. Our point is that we see the potential and necessity of a more decided engagement with power conscious frameworks like CRT in higher education governance research and practice (e.g., Rall et al., 2022a). To highlight what that means, we think it is helpful to engage the persistent ambiguity in some governance studies that prompts us to reflect on our own work and levy a CRT critique of the field – since research can inform practice. In so doing, we hope that future studies

leave no room for potential misinterpretation in terms of how the study conceptualizes GB relative to equity considerations. These are the essential elements of fully ensuring our *Equity X Governance* paradigm is divested from colonizing and neoliberal dynamics (Paperson, 2017; Patel, 2015).

For instance, Tandberg (2010, 2013) rigorously explores higher education governance structures as boundary-spanning organizations. Providing an empirical assessment of the conditioning effect of consolidated state governing boards, Tandberg focuses on the patterns and trends of state higher education policy over a period of nearly 30 years. The study establishes that the type of governance structure a state employs matters and that the structure plays a critical role as a boundary spanner. Ultimately this positioning gives state higher education governance structures the capacity to buffer and magnify the effect other actors and influences have on state higher education funding decisions. Taking a quantitative approach, Tandberg engages in a multivariate analysis using a fixed-effects model. Though appropriate for the research question, when engaging in a CRT of higher education analysis of the work, where the work falls short in approaching the inquiry is in a way that would unearth issues of inequity. Tandberg attempts to understand more about the relationship between the political state and higher education institutions but does so in a very color evasive and non-critical manner, given what subsequent research has illuminated about racialized policymaking (Baker, 2019; Rodriguez et al., 2021).

By engaging in this raceless approach, Patton's (2016) second proposition that the functioning of US higher education is intricately linked to the imperialistic and capitalist efforts that fuel the intersections of race, property, and oppression is ignored. Furthermore, the absence of Patton's (2016) second proposition is coupled with the absence of acknowledging Patton's first proposition that the establishment of US higher education is deeply rooted in racism and White supremacy, and such vestiges are still palatable. The multivariate approach and quantitative approaches to understanding governance can lend themselves to ignoring critical lenses, such as CRT, in the name of objectivity. However, the argument can be made that the quest for ultimate objectivity within itself is a tool to aid in supporting Patton's (2016) third proposition, that US higher education institutions serve as venues through which formal knowledge production rooted in racism/White supremacy is generated (p. 317). In essence, approaching governance research in this manner reproduces whiteness through knowledge production and by choosing not to challenge dominant methodological ideologies in the area of governance. There have been increased discussions regarding the necessity for critical quantitative work (e.g., Garvey, 2019; Sablan, 2019). This discussion must find its way to the area of higher education governance research, especially within quantitative approaches to studying postsecondary education governance.

Another example comes from Bastedo (2009a, b), who takes an institutional approach to studying educational policy. The studies examine trends in activist governance and unearth four core logics for higher education policymaking, specifically in the state of Massachusetts. To engage in these studies, Bastedo engages in a qualitative approach, coding for emic concepts, constant comparative method, and a

policy review. This approach provides a useful conceptual contrast to the predominant political science theories (McLendon et al., 2007; McLendon & Ness, 2003; Pusser, 2003). However, analysis through the lens of Patton's (2016) framework highlights some challenges in the criticality of the work. Bastedo's study highlights and focuses on Boards and their role in forming and establishing educational policy. By virtue, policies generated from Boards, activist or otherwise, that have not uncoupled from what Patton (2016) presents in her second proposition as inextricably linked imperialistic and capitalistic efforts are bound to produce policies that aid in the maintenance and perpetuation of both policy and governance practices that "fuel the intersections of race, property, and oppression" (Patton, 2016, p. 317). By not acknowledging this in the approach to this inquiry, this work also allows for a lack of knowledge of how Boards and policies they influence to aid in supporting Patton's (2016) third statement of US higher education institutions that serve as venues through which formal knowledge production is rooted in racism/White supremacy.

Barringer et al. (2019) begin to explore power and control issues by analyzing the patterns of ties between governing boards and industry and how they have or have not changed over time. Putting forth trustees traversing these boundaries between higher education and other industries creates a network that draws together universities, government agencies, non-profit organizations, and business firms (Barringer et al., 2019). Using the methodological approach of social network analysis (SNA) and latent profile analysis (LPA), through descriptive statistics, the authors can establish connectedness and patterns of connectedness through social networks that were identified. To note, this continues a conversation on the role of social networks and power in university governance practices, particularly within the public higher education sector (Barringer et al., 2019; Pusser et al., 2006; Slaughter et al., 2014).

Yet, though SNA and LPA may be appropriate methodological choices for the question explored, the lack of a CRT lens leaves a colorblind understanding and evaluation of networks. The practice of colorblindness, intentionally or unintentionally, is a practice and rhetoric that often reinforces ideals of a post-racial society and works to "sanitize patterns of institutional exclusion" (Crenshaw, 2010, p. 1319). Engaging in colorblindness in an attempt to analyze social networks downplays how race plays a role in the establishment and maintaining of social networks and ties within the Governance Ecosystem (Bonilla-Silva, 2010; Ray & Purifoy, 2019). In turn, this colorblind methodological approach fails to recognize higher education institutions as racialized (Gonzales et al., 2018; Ray, 2019).

Furthermore, though the counterargument may be that it was outside the scope of this study, this methodological approach sans a CRT lens lacks acknowledgment of the experiential knowledge that CRT deems necessary in understanding the experiences of the racially oppressed stakeholder, which is an essential component in the quest for liberation and liberatory practice in higher education (Crenshaw, 2010; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Hooks, 1994; Patton, 2016). Therefore, when applying Patton's (2016) framework as a tool of analysis, this methodological approach fails to acknowledge Patton's second and third propositions pointing to the imperialistic

and capitalist nature of US higher education and its contribution to the intersections of race, property, and oppression and how these institutions are vehicles of knowledge (re)production that is rooted in racism and White supremacy.

Minor (2004) attempts to push against the colorblindness present in several methodological approaches to higher education governance research in his qualitative case study examining governance and decision-making at HBCUs. In his case study approach, Minor (2004) makes sure to engage in and highlight the need for a culturally sensitive approach when studying governance due to how institutional culture is often intertwined with racial culture, especially at institutions such as HBCUs and Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs). Minor unapologetically acknowledges the differences between governance practices at HBCUs and predominantly white institutions, without falling into the ahistorical trap of using Whiteness as the normative measure by explaining why they cannot be compared. Culturally sensitive methods were central to the research paradigms that consider African Americans' historical, cultural, and contemporary experiences. In essence, Minor (2004), unlike many of his early to mid-2000 contemporaries, centers CRT and culturally sensitive methods in his methodological approaches to understand higher education governance. In doing this, Minor does well, through this approach, to acknowledge Patton's (2016) first proposition and positions his study to add to a critical understanding of higher education governance.

Kezar (2005) attempts to speak to the necessity of institutional change but, more importantly, lasting and effective institutional change. Through case study and grounded theory approaches, Kezar (2005) addresses the literature gap regarding engaging in radical change governance processes and its possible consequences. The study's findings establish that radical change has many adverse effects, and though no governance system or model is ideal and should be examined and altered on an ongoing basis, gradual change and innovation appears to be more promising change approach to enhancing governance in higher education (Kezar, 2005). Like Barringer et al. (2019), Kezar (2005) begins to explore the tensions between power and politics and how they play out in the institutional change process. Yet, there is a lack of identifying these institutions as racialized organizations and how that impacts what may be perceived as disruption or "radical change." The approach free of this CRT lens lacks in challenging dominant ideologies and inadvertently presents incrementalism as a form of upholding structures, processes, and practices supported by inequitable structures. This points to Patton's (2016) first proposition that the establishment of US higher education is deeply rooted in racism and White supremacy and that its vestiges remain palatable. The palatable nature of higher education's racist roots lays the foundation for the resistance to radical change, especially if that radical change is connected to the liberation of oppressed persons within the system (Hooks, 1994). Consequently, moving toward this reality requires minoritized people to have access to and the ability to attain power or engage in power redistribution within said system – what critical theory and epistemologies seek to make possible (Gonzales et al., 2018; Nicolazzo, 2021; Pasque & Carducci, 2015; Patton, 2016).

Though some higher education governance scholars engage in critical approaches and are sensitive to the concerns of CRT, they/we are seemingly the minority within the larger body of research. Our representative review of some of the higher education governance "cannon" is that studies do not center equity concerns in the questions explored, the methodological choices made, and approaches taken to "get to know governance." Consequently, and unsurprisingly, what we find or do not find as a research community is influenced by how we attempt to unearth those findings. By not centering equity or critical models and lenses such as CRT in the methodological approaches and research design, and by not acknowledging the deep-rooted racism and inequitable foundations of higher education, inequity becomes embedded in the study of governance regardless of methodological underpinnings. This reality accentuates our call for shifting to the *Equity X Governance* paradigm.

Summary and Conclusions

Our use of CRT of Higher Education (Patton, 2016) demonstrates the relatively limited and uncritical ways governance and, by extension, GBs have been operationalized in the literature across their history and the methods used to study them. We draw two conclusions to aid us in operationalizing GBs within the *Equity X Governance* paradigm. First, although there is much written about governance in general, because so few of the animating features of the studies are focused on equity, we feel encouraged to disregard the traditional approach of citational practices and building upon prior work when it was never meant to pursue or do the work of equity (Mott & Cockayne, 2017). The oft-quoted refrain from Audre Lorde (1983) comes to mind "for the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house."

We draw inspiration from the fact that this chapter, moving forward, frees us and more critically oriented scholars from having to use raceless and power-unaware theories or governance reviews to situate postsecondary education GB research. Additionally, it invites reflection from those who might feel threatened, dissatisfied, or hostile toward a competing paradigm in the postsecondary education governance space, especially a paradigm that seeks equitable opportunities for stakeholder success.

Our second conclusion reiterates a key finding from our traditional literature review (Rall et al., 2021a) and those before it (Kezar & Dee, 2011; Kezar & Eckel, 2004). The methods and frameworks used in studying higher education governance are not expansive and have not mirrored the uptake of equity-oriented approaches to methods in higher education research (e.g., Garvey, 2019; Rodriguez et al., 2021; Sablan, 2019). These methodological limitations are exacerbated by the predominance of available methods that tend to be power-unaware unless explicitly rooted in a race-conscious or critical paradigm (Gonzales et al., 2018; Pasque & Carducci, 2015; Patton, 2016). As a result, a vital feature of the *Equity X Governance* paradigm is the iterative and co-generative inquiry process, whose antecedence comes from versions of participatory action research (Brydon-Miller & Maguire, 2009; Santos, 2015). We describe our methodological adaptation as "Governance

Participatory Action Research" or G-PAR. We overview this promising avenue of localized inquiry in our implications for future research section and share some early reflections on its implementation.

Equity as the Fulcrum of Governance, But Where and How Do We Apply It: Core Challenges and Opportunities for Boards

Having reviewed the history of literature, shown it wanting and needing a new perspective, our goal now is to apply CRT and standpoint to re-examine and explore GBs anew, starting with core GB practices. To advance this goal we explored what existing literature puts forth to inform what GBs do (i.e., their practice) from a different vantage point. Our contention is that by raising the core challenges and opportunities for Boards as unearthed by the perspective of others, we can enhance the Equity X Governance paradigm in terms of its relevance to inform practice as well as research and theory.

What Do We Mean by Core Governance Practices?

GBs are most commonly associated with the following roles: (1) selecting and appointing a college president or university chancellor, (2) upholding and supporting the mission, values, and purpose of the institution, (3) oversight of academic programs, (4) growing tangible assets of the university, whether they be relationships to key stakeholders or donors, and (5) nurturing intangible assets such as academic freedom, commitment to the impartiality of opinions, and ethical standards (Dominguez, 1971; Freedman, 2004). What follows is a representative but not exhaustive series of considerations for Boards and researchers to (re)envision core governance practices based on views from different actors in the Governance Ecosystem.

Budget Maintenance

Boards are tasked with prudent use of institutional funds and being good stewards. Tuition setting, endowment and investment management, procuring financing for new buildings, and more all fall within their purview (Bastedo, 2006; Bird-Pollan, 2021). Optimally, Boards review the budget to ensure it reflects and advances the institution's mission. What if the budget also reflected the stakeholders on our campuses? By that, are fiscal resources being allocated based on the diverse needs at an institution? If an institution has a large population of first-generation students, for example, are resources for access and retention of these students equitable with their demographic representation? Further, if there are inequities across metrics, is the budget being purposed to try to address those gaps? Is the Board complicating tasks like raising tuition to not only think about the bottom line but also which student groups may be priced out or adversely impacted by the change?

Presidential Selection

The selection of presidents and chancellors of institutions and systems is the most influential role boards play in higher education (Commodore, 2018). The selection of the face of the institution carries rippling effects for campus culture, hiring of the provost and faculty, and overall direction (Cole, 2020; Odle, 2022; Rutherford & Lozano, 2018). Therefore, it is important for GBs to not merely rely on search firms (that often struggle with issues of equity themselves) to bring them "good" candidates. Boards must be actively involved in diversifying and expanding the pool of candidates to move beyond "fit" with their campus (Posselt et al., 2020) and instead center on how the selection helps align with the pursuit of equity. Moreover, while GBs ensure candidates are asked questions about fundraising, leadership styles, and vision, ways to ascertain commitment to and opportunities for equity and justice are also essential. However, boards themselves must be trained and equipped with the knowledge to have these conversations. In Dr. Commodore's experiences with discussing the presidential selection process and engaging in the work of the board with GB members, it was not uncommon for boards to struggle with identifying issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion that were present. This was especially true if seemingly representational diversity existed (i.e., 1 woman or 2 Black people) or a critical mass of a marginalized group was present (i.e., an HBCU). In these instances, figuring out if the presidential candidate was "one of us" seemed to take priority over trying to negotiate commitments to equity.

Changes to presidential selection may require more intentionality with the selection of the search firm and the search committee (Bensimon & Associates, 2022). It may also mean that GBs allow for more interaction with the candidates before selection so that such an important post is not selected with one visit to the campus or interactions with a small subset of actors. While we are sensitive to challenges with "open searches" (McLendon & Hearn, 2006), a middle ground is needed because the secrecy in which most searches are done, we assert, allows for too many problematic norms to be reified (Commodore, 2018), especially when history is compelling that presidents can help institutions better serve minoritized students (Cole, 2020).

Upholding and Supporting the Mission, Values, and Purpose

What exactly is the institution's stance on equity? What is the Board's approach to equity? Better-articulated structures like clearly defined charges and roles can shape effectiveness (Mortimer & McConnell, 1978; Schuster et al., 1994). The Board is responsible for setting the institution's direction through mission articulation (Hill et al., 2001). At present, approaches to equity-related issues have been broad and ambiguous. More than ever, there is potential for GBs to hold higher education accountable; no other university stakeholder has the same degree of responsibility to evaluate the progress of a university (Corbally, 1970). Boards must ensure that the campus aligns with the established and communicated mission, values, and purpose. If the campus deviates from these, the Board's responsibility is to help the institution

course correct. Moreover, if the institution has outgrown or needs to revamp its mission, the Board needs to lead this process.

It is also crucial to center introspection at the Board level via an embrace of accountability in its myriad forms (mission alignment, public opinion, internal Board levers, accreditation, etc.). Birnbaum (1989) makes it plain that "Clarity and agreement on organizational mission are usually considered a fundamental principle for establishing systems of accountability," yet, most boards are unclear as to the mission, especially in light of the recent push for equity (p. 11). GBs have a track record of underperformance (Eckel, 2019). Even answers to the classification of governance effectiveness "depends" (Birnbaum, 1991; Kezar, 2004). Effective governance is contingent upon the willingness of individuals to share their insights and ideas (Chait et al., 2005; Kezar, 2004; Kezar & Dee, 2011; Morgan et al., 2021a). Indeed, how GBs or others subtly describe their work is crucial, ". . .but it is up to higher education and society to ensure their role is defined correctly and executed (Taylor & de Lourdes Machado, 2008, p. 253). Unfortunately, GB's efforts to improve and transmute colleges and universities fall flat in the absence of clarity around equity. The next portion of our review grapples with the challenges GBs navigate in trying to carry out their core practices.

Save the World on Your Own Time: Navigating "Unchartered" Territory in Governance

When Dr. Rall was in her Ph.D. program, she read Stanley Fish's (2008) book, *Save the World on Your Time.* The three major takeaways apply to today's higher education Boards: Do your job, don't do somebody else's job, and don't let someone else do your job" (Fish, 2008, p. 8). The first task is "Do Your Job." It seems straightforward enough, but this is actually highly complicated in the case of boards. Historically, GBs have been warned to stay in their lane; that they need to think about the big picture and avoid the weeds. As a result, GBs are expected to defer the lion's share of their responsibilities to the president or chancellor of their institutions.

Accordingly, GBs have typically taken two approaches to action in higher education – pro forma action or noninvolvement; boards either weigh in on decisions already committed and would not be changed considerably by the time they acted or they did not act at all (Dominguez, 1971; Morgan et al., 2021a). For example, there are activist boards and trustees on one end of the spectrum, ". . .those who take an independent and aggressive role in the policy-making process, resulting in organizational characteristics that are appreciably distinct from traditional boards" (Bastedo, 2005, p. 552). In the past, it has been activist trustees alone who acted against the consistent rhetoric to be both unseen and unheard. However, challenges before our nation's institutions have forced all GBs into the realm of visibility.

So from a different standpoint, these moves into more visible roles for GB have often been involuntary; they have been prompted to respond to presidential misconduct (Rutherford & Lozano, 2018), racial injustice (Commodore & Morgan, 2021), crises of safety (Tierney & Rall, 2018), etc. At the same time, boards have also

brought critique upon themselves via decision-making errors at institutions like the University of Virginia, University of Maryland, and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Instead of being pushed to act, however, the literature supports that a more proactive Board role may be required (Chait et al., 2005; Eckel & Trower, 2018). Staying clear of the pejorative connotation of activist, boards must undoubtedly be active in their Board roles. That said, while some voices have argued that boards have and exercise too much power, our collective voice is arguing that boards have only dabbled with power and have failed in general to enunciate and act upon the major stewardship responsibilities which... "must be assigned to them" (Corbally, 1970, p. 243). We also add that authentically operating within the *Equity X Governance* paradigm serves as a check on "activist trustees" since the undergirding logic of the paradigm calls for all actors to pursue equity in healthy consensual partnership (Commodore et al., 2022; Morgan et al., 2021a; Rall et al., 2020).

Another complication with boards "doing their job" is rooted in the problem of information. Boards must remain detached enough to remain impartial but this distance obfuscates their role in oversight because they often do not have access to information integral to do their job (Dominguez, 1971). Think about the ramifications at Penn State when boards did not have access to the information or only had to rely on what key decision-makers decided to tell them (Tierney & Rall, 2018). In addition, their lack of familiarity with higher education and lack of time on campus limits their awareness of campus issues (Eckel & Trower, 2018). Despite the limitations, "The Board must ensure that goals are set, that processes are in place for the institution to monitor its progress, and that the president and key leaders are held accountable for results" (Hill et al., 2001). Oversight and public accountability are essential roles of boards (Woodward, 2009). Reviewing institutional purposes, evaluating how the institution hits those marks, and insisting upon changes when the purpose is not being met are requisite (Corbally, 1970). Boards must do their job, but it is also imperative that they do this job well, a feat we fear is impossible without strategic integration of equity via organizational transformation.

All Eyes on Boards: Opportunities Before Boards of Higher Education

Kokushkin (2014) delineates two versions of Standpoint Theory – "Standpoint Theory is" ("a set of theoretical and epistemological propositions designed to produce alternative knowledge," p. 10) and "Standpoint Theory can." As our chapter transitions to (re)envisioning governance and equity for the future, we leave you with the notion that "Standpoint Theory can" help us better examine and anticipate key governance practices. Though trustees serve and leave (Corbally, 1970), during their terms they can make intentional changes that can impact the future of the higher education enterprise. Governance meaningfully shapes the institutional environment (Chait et al., 2005; Kezar & Dee, 2011; Kezar & Eckel, 2004). So just like we go a step further than most governance literature to question why do we not know enough about GBs (Rall et al., 2021a), here we encourage key postsecondary stakeholders to

not simply put forth "best practices" but interrogate how these practices might be achieved with the *Equity X Governance* paradigm as the fulcrum. We offer a concrete example of what we mean next.

Diversify Board Demographics as a Genesis Not Completion

Board decisions impact all aspects of students' lives (Siqueiros, 2020). However, its composition remains one of higher education's most inequitable decision-making entities (AGB, 2020; Bustillos & Siqueiros, 2018; Rall et al., 2018). Organizations often fail to keep pace with growing societal demographic complexity (Operario & Fiske, 2001); boards are no exception. There are few women or people of color on many boards and even fewer women of color. Increasing the number of marginalized voices represented on boards can reveal otherwise left-out perspectives (Allen, 1996; Torchia et al., 2011). Regardless of the selection method, the personal backgrounds of Board members are overly narrow and students and faculty have been abjured from direct representation on boards (Dominguez, 1971; Rall et al., 2022a; Rall & Orué, 2020). Older trustees, wealthy trustees, and trustees from certain professional backgrounds like business and politics are overrepresented on boards (AGB, 2020).

Marginalized groups often cannot hit a critical mass in representation on the Board. Yet, boards often focus only on composition alone without doing the necessary work to address and combat the systematic reasons for such inequity. Further, boards often lack innovative ways to initiate and sustain actionable change beyond developing diversity statements, committees, and positions. According to AGB Senior Fellow Alvin Schexnider, "There is a general understanding that if we are diverse and inclusive it helps to better inform policy, it helps to better inform decisions, it helps to raise the level of awareness about issues that sometimes boards, while well-intentioned, may not be aware of" (as cited in Elletson, 2017). When a Board is homogenous, there is a higher tendency to minimize conflict by not considering alternative ideas or perspectives that could prevent consensus from being reached as quickly (Minor & Tierney, 2005). Dynamic tension, which does not stifle internal disagreement, is preferred over an integrationist approach (Tierney & Rall, 2018). And while the call for more (and more intentional) diversification is not new, it cannot be overstated enough because in the past few decades there has been movement (albeit marginal) but noticeably not on par with the changing student demographics (AGB, 2020). Until governing boards are more diverse, we need to reiterate the message and innovate the approaches to bringing Board diversity to fruition.

We also contend that groups like boards need to be able to change their structures and processes to respond to circumstances (Dee & Leišytė, 2016; Kezar, 2004; Rall et al., 2022a). It is necessary but insufficient to diversify a GB across identities of race, gender, SES, etc.; these groups must also feel included. Different types of trustees have different attitudes and some research has shown that diversity in attitudinal orientations may be even more critical than biographical characteristics (Dominguez, 1971; Ford-Eickhoff et al., 2011; Johnson et al., 2013; Lynall et al., 2003). Along both axes, however, it is not enough to change the people and not also change the policies, procedures, and practices that prompted the disparities in the

first place. Accordingly, Critical Race Feminism combats dominant narratives that continue to rule our public and private sector, despite social beliefs that we are a nation of "equal opportunity." Boards should represent the populations they serve, but diversifying boards will not fix all governance issues.

Wrap Up: The Future of Governance Practice

In this section, we have considered how knowledge resulting from varying standpoints can maintain or change unjust power practices that create challenges and opportunities for GB (Collins, 1997). Nearly 20 years ago, Kezar (2004) noted that governance issues are pervasive yet, ". . .few solutions have been proposed and, of those, few have been successful" (p. 35). Here is where we hope Boards can transition into the next gear and move from understanding the value of equity and identifying inequity to transforming institutions in ways that better serve all stakeholders (Rall et al., 2020). While GBs do not choose the issues that go before them per se (Eckel & Trower, 2018), how they address pivotal issues, such as equity, matters. The Board can set the tone for the entire institution (Hill et al., 2001). Knowing that Boards are not diverse is not enough. Knowing that Boards can play an integral role in improving inequity is insufficient. Boards cannot escape the forces (i.e., the bottlenecks) that will test their duty to provide strategic direction for the future of higher education (Taylor & de Lourdes Machado, 2008). With the help of the research community and advocates, Boards have to start to bridge the equity talk with the equity walk (McNair et al., 2019). Note that this is not an invitation.

Boards and researchers have already assumed their role in advancing equity, whether a barrier, inhibitor, bystander, Catalyst, or initiator (Rall, 2021b; Rall et al. 2020). Our contribution here is elevating that standpoint considerations are essential. Hence, as we (re)envision governance and equity for the future, the effort requires decision-making actors and researchers to check their standpoint within the *Equity X Governance* paradigm. This standpoint view combined with our CRT lens fully prepares us to focus on the connectivity of actors and activities and the GBs roles in the Governance Ecosystem, which we seek to fully detail in the next section.

(Re)Envisioning Governance and Equity for the Future

The preceding literature reviews lead us to the following summarized conclusions that inform the components of the *Equity X Governance* paradigm:

The key concepts utilized in the study and practice of governance and equity in higher education are not sufficiently aligned with the pursuit of equitable opportunities for stakeholder success. This conclusion calls for a clear and accessible term or phrase that reorients people's understanding of the study of governance and the pursuit of educational equity.

The Governance Ecosystem is vast and not often optimally organized to both locate the role of the GB and detail the relationships between GB and other

ecosystem actors. These dynamics allow ecosystem bottlenecks to wreak havoc on governance processes and consequential outcomes. This conclusion calls for a (re) commitment to organizational transformation.

Most studies about GBs have traditionally been done in raceless or power-unaware ways. Unfortunately, this trend leaves the study and practices of GBs decidedly impotent to tackle the ever-evolving interlocking systems of oppression embedded within organizational realities. This conclusion calls for a recommitment to centering GBs in change processes but in ways that are mindful of their histories and underlying logics.

The standpoint view of GBs reveals that their practices and habits, wielded by trustees and entire Boards, are important contributors to the challenging dynamics GBs must navigate. This means GBs must attend to the realities of those they interact with (directly and indirectly) in ways that contend with their unique cultural, experiential, and identity contexts. This conclusion calls for a reimagining of how GBs are positioned with others in the Governance Ecosystem.

The totality of these conclusions help us conceptualize the *Equity X Governance* paradigm's theory of change illustrated in Fig. 3. This model is our (re)envisioned response to the bottlenecks in the Governance Ecosystem (i.e., the red dotted borders in Fig. 1) that impede the optimal functioning of the system, necessitating transformation.

Although arranged linearly in the initial figure, these bottlenecks are dynamic. They often co-mingle depending on the institutional actor, presenting an additional layer of complexity. Likewise, the positioning and linkages between actors and activities (i.e., the ecosystem's architecture) are also fluid, contextual, and highly idiosyncratic. Here, adapting from Kapoor (2018), we raise the consideration of using a "multisided platform approach" to transform the Governance Ecosystem.

As opposed to models that focus on siloed aspects of an economic market, management scholars have identified the ways an organizational platform captures a more complex rendering of dynamics within a context (Helfat & Raubitschek, 2018). At a high level, a platform operates within an ecosystem and arranges the context and norms that facilitate **alignment** among actors and between actors and activities that work together to **overcome** bottlenecks **and create value for all the participants of the platform**. Platform logic is about transforming organizations toward joint-value creation facilitated by a third party (or platform owner). This is in contrast to traditional economic models that focus on one to one (e.g., producer to consumer) interactions in a marketplace. Although platform logic may seem unfamiliar to most, many people interact daily with the fruits of the logic. Take many of the apps likely on a smartphone (e.g., TikTok, Uber, Airbnb). These platforms (Helfat & Raubitschek, 2018) connect users to content creators or producers where value (i.e., entertainment or financial) is realized for all involved, including the companies that create, own, and manage the platforms.

This belated shift to a platform view in the process of organizational transformation is a crucial advancement in the postsecondary education governance literature, given the conclusions of our literature synthesis. In essence, we have argued that the current paradigms that undergird approaches to governance and equity reify GBs as
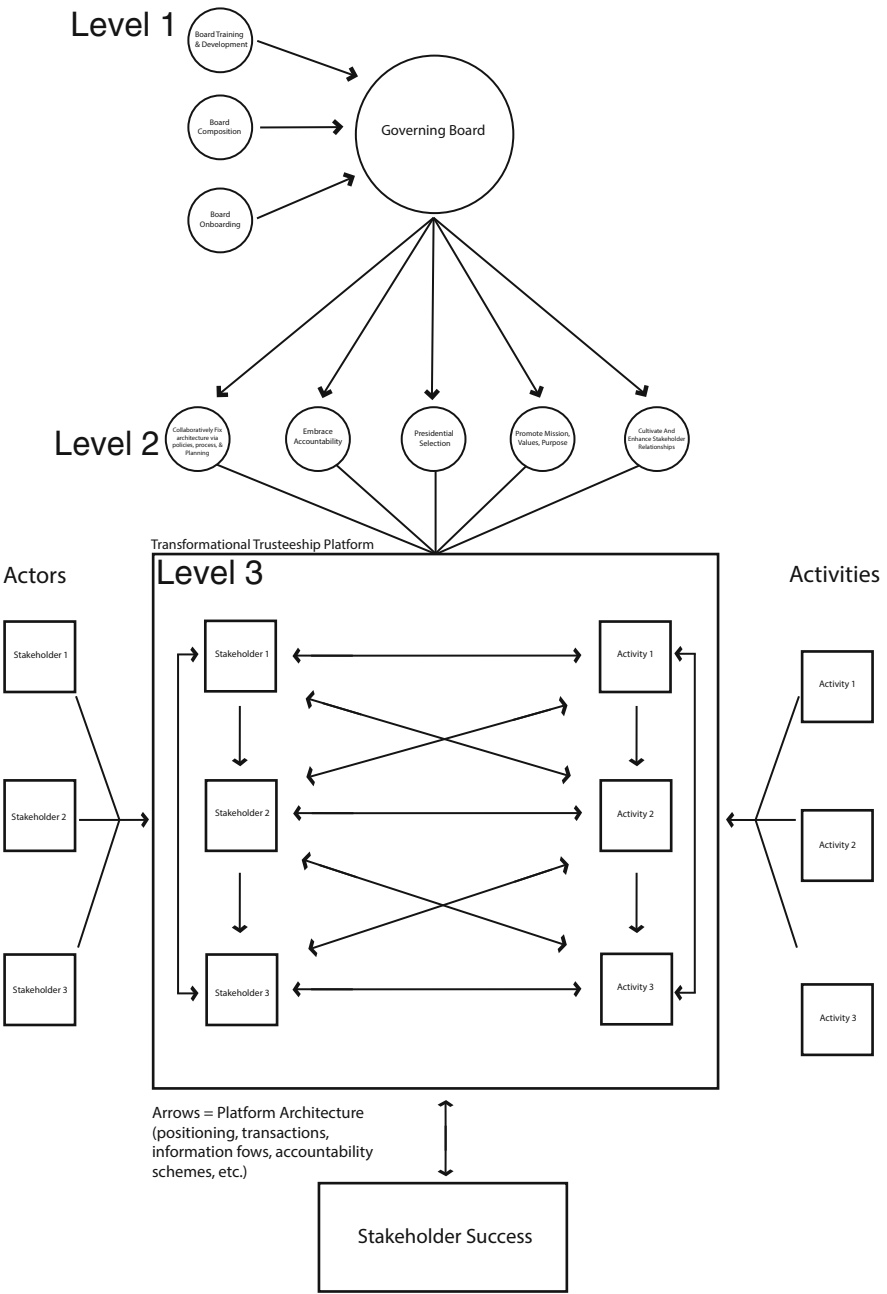
Fig. 3 Equity X Governance Theory of Change

siloed entities and disconnected from comprehensive and interdependent efforts to advance equity. Common efforts to change this dynamic rely on a focus on a particular non-GB actor and are often focused on improving outcomes for a limited array of stakeholders or single social identity. In contrast, our *Equity X Governance* paradigm alerts us to the need to tackle interrelated issues that derail value creation (i.e., success) for multiple actors (i.e., bottlenecks in the Governance Ecosystem) as a critical component in organizational transformation.

Let us use an example to help translate this platform logic for organizational change into our *Equity X Governance* paradigm (see Fig. 3). Efforts concerning equity in postsecondary education tend to be heavily focused on the experiences and outcomes of students (Hurtado et al., 2012; Kuh et al., 2010; Mayhew et al., 2016; Museus, 2014; Renn, 2020b). However, the literature is clear and compelling that improving the experiences of staff and faculty (Gonzales & Griffin, 2020; Kezar et al., 2019; López & Morgan, 2021; O'Meara & Stromquist, 2015; Rhoades, 2017) can positively impact students' experiences. However, these efforts to support and research actors are often done in silos as pointed out in section "Relevant Stakeholders: An Ecosystem Perspective on *Equity X Governance*".

In contrast, a platform approach to transformation within the *Equity X Governance* paradigm works to understand not only the interdependencies of how these various actors interact, but in order to keep the system running optimally, GBs must determine how to overcome ecosystem bottlenecks and align structures to create value for all actors as they engage in their activities and pursue desired outcomes. Said differently, a decision or action is preferred if it is demonstrable how it helps (or at least does not harm) the entire platform (i.e., all stakeholders).

Fundamental changes are already afoot in the postsecondary education context, meaning GBs must transform their governance approaches to realize a different set of outcomes. We believe scholars' and advocates' ability to aid GBs in this shift is a critical responsibility to take up. Therefore, in the tradition of counterstory telling, in this section, we first imagine and conceptualize, informed by our synthesis, how the *Equity X Governance* paradigm allows us to understand the presented ecosystem (Fig. 1) differently (see Fig. 3). Specifically, we outline the points where GBs can be effectual in addressing the bottlenecks through architectural design (i.e., the arrangement of the arrows in Fig. 3) and help to orient institutions toward the pursuit of equity. From there, we outline a research agenda that can help build knowledge and postsecondary education organizational transformation. We conclude with additional practical implications.

The *Equity X Governance* Model: A (Re)Envisioned Approach for Transformation

The *Equity X Governance* Transformation model is set upon four logics (which we frame as questions) that provide insights, from a more equity focused starting point, into why GBs exist, what they are supposed to do, who they are accountable for, and the practices and tools at their disposal to engage in governance.

Why Do GBs Exist?

In the current paradigm, the existence and necessity of GBs are self-evident and untroubled as an effective intervention to curtail faculty overreach and self-interest within postsecondary institutions (Bess & Dee, 2014; Dominguez, 1971). In the *Equity X Governance* paradigm, the GB earns its keep at the institution through more than a "give or get" ethos of fundraising and rubber stamps, characteristic of many nonprofit GBs (Renz & Anderson, 2014). To transform institutions, GBs should be able to periodically demonstrate to the campus community how they as a collective have been value-add to the enterprise over and above a model of governance where the GB did not exist or only existed to raise money. This prove your value philosophy is not intended to make trustees employees who wade into everyday realities. However, the current positioning and relationships between GB and institutions are not consistently yielding results enough for equitable stakeholder success. Therefore, doubling down on failed(ing) practices/paradigms of effectiveness, oversight, and detachment also cannot be the answer. Instead, *Equity X Governance* calls for systematic inquiry, experimentation, and transparency as GBs seek to find a more optimal alignment in their platform approach to institutions.

What Are GBs For?

In existing paradigms, GBs exist for organizational preservation. In the *Equity X Governance* paradigm, GBs exist to lead and support institutions toward stakeholder success, concretely operationalized as:

- Contributions to and safeguarding of the public good
- Stakeholder socioeconomic mobility
- The realization of self-agency, balanced by a concern for the collective
- Always in the process of deconstruction of oppressive structures
- Rooted in a love ethic (Hooks, 2000)

Critically these markers of stakeholder success focus on both individual and communal outcomes – including the broader public good, which includes care for the earth and one's surrounding community that is (in)directly connected to any particular institution (Crumley-Effinger & Torres-Olave, 2021). Further, hook's (2000) love ethic is what is required to navigate otherwise contentious and intractable problems without GBs reinscribing the bottlenecks of the ecosystem. We ponder how different things might be if a love for one another, emanating from a deep concern for the liberation and experience of fullness for groups and the earth, were the underlying norms as GBs go to make difficult decisions or engage in the process of hiring a president?

Who Are GBs Accountable To?

In current paradigms, GBs are accountable to sovereigns via the accountability regime, including taxes and accreditation. In *the Equity X Governance* paradigm, GBs are first and foremost accountable to the stakeholders' standpoint (Kokushkin,

2014), who make up the ecosystem generally. The contextualized quality of care standard as one manifestation of equity (Jordan, 2010) asks to what extent is the institution that the GB is responsible for able to meet the unique needs of different stakeholders and ensure they have opportunities for success not bound by circumstances outside of their control but in the domain of influence of the GB (Garces, 2014). However, the components driving decision-making at the GB level are often navigated toward compliance, risk aversion, and image management (Renz & Anderson, 2014). While those things are important, to the extent that they supersede the pursuit of equitable stakeholder success, they must be re-examined, reimagined, and redeployed when necessary.

What Practices and Tools Should GBs Use to Accomplish Their Purpose?

A question we are frequently asked is if there are any "best practices" or exemplar GBs "doing the work" that the GB might look to for inspirations? It is always awkward as we shy away from providing direct answers because there are very few GBs doing this work well and over a sustained amount of time. Conversely, there have not been sustained efforts to compel GBs to pursue pushes for ranking increases (Gonzales, 2013; Pusser & Marginson, 2013; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004) or more recently to attain Hispanic Serving Institution status (Garcia, 2017). Yet, examples of institutions engaging in these practices abound and other interested institutions figure out how to mimic these pursuits. Hence, we know isomorphic pressures (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983) are real and documented. So, this either bears our point out that there are too few examples of GBs to mimic or there are GBs out there exemplifying GB engagement in equity work well and other GBs are choosing not to emulate their pursuits. Based on potential responses to those prompts, there is no way to get around the reality that the current landscape of Board practices and tools is bleak, hence, the need to (re)envision.

When it comes to enacting the practices and tools within the *Equity X Governance* paradigm, GBs should seek to operate within one of the following options to: (a) find ways to permanently dismantle the bottlenecks (ideal but unachievable); (b) partner with non-GB actors in an iterative inquiry-driven process to determine how to pursue equity in a contextually informed way (best) (Morgan et al., 2021a; Rall, 2021b); (c) generously allocate expertise and resources (better) (Commodore et al., 2022; Rall et al., 2020), or (d) stay out of the way and do no harm (sub-optimal but better than unhelpful interference (see Jones, Nikole Hannah (Commodore & Morgan, 2021)).

Bringing It All Together

Our proposed model seeks to operationalize the *Equity X Governance* paradigm as a mechanism that can inform a research agenda and provides levers for how GBs might transform institutions toward stakeholder success. The top part of the model focuses on individual trustees and the GB as a unit. There are a set of practices that feed into the GB (Fig. 3, Level 1): Board training and development, Board

composition, and Board onboarding. These practices merge to create the operating norms for trustees within the context of the GB. Flowing out from the GB context toward the institutional environment are the five core tactics (Fig. 3, Level 2) that GBs can leverage to facilitate stakeholder success in the process of organizational transformation. These include:

1. Working to collaboratively fix dynamics between actors through policies, processes, and planning
2. Embracing efforts to be held accountable as a GB and individual trustees
3. The process of presidential selection and evaluation
4. Actively promoting the mission, values, and purpose of an institution and the broader postsecondary education sector
5. Enhancing their relationships with various stakeholders

We argue that GBs, via their typical habits (e.g., Board meetings, passing resolutions, selection and evaluation of institutional leaders, strategic planning), must engage in both patchwork efforts across those five listed tactics and longer-term transformational work that helps to realize equitable opportunities for stakeholder success.

Within the institutional context (Fig. 3, Level 3) is where various non-GB actors come together and engage in different activities that have the potential to be oriented toward the critical outcome of equitable opportunities for stakeholder success. The arrows between stakeholders and activities represent a differently organized architecture of the ecosystem. This conveys how stakeholders are positioned relative to each other, the transactions they engage in over the course of their activities, how information flows between stakeholders amid the activity, and the accountability schemes embedded within the relationship to help lead the activity toward equitable opportunities. The usefulness of the *Equity X Governance* Transformation model is that it encourages both a structural and relational understanding of GBs relative to the actors and activities of the institution.

For instance, in the model, we might understand "Stakeholder 1" as students and "Stakeholder 2" as faculty engaging in "Activity 1," which is a classroom teaching and learning experience. Relatedly, "Activity 2" on the platform is faculty research and "Activity 3" is community engagement with the surrounding locality. In an effort to operate within the *Equity X Governance* paradigm, the resulting model, as a theory of change, illuminates and examines the architectures between these actors and activities for their ability to create equitable opportunities for stakeholder success and meaningfully reward community-engaged scholarship that involves students in reviews of faculty (Gonzales, 2013; O'Meara et al., 2014). Joint-value is created in expanding what counts as scholarship (O'Meara & Niehaus, 2009) and opens up avenues for students to have enhanced learning experiences (Saltmarsh & Hartley, 2011).

Or a GB might review reports from the institutional research office to examine who has access to high-impact practices (Stewart & Nicolazzo, 2018) and whether the experiences are resourced appropriately to yield desirable outcomes across

disaggregated stakeholder identities (Zilvinskis et al., 2021). Better resourcing supports both student access to these critical experiences and enhances the capabilities of the facilitator of the experience, another example of joint-value creation. Finally, in congruence with a chorus of scholars – the *Equity X Governance* model and the directional flows helps to highlight how GB working with the chief financial officer, the faculty representative body, and the president to improve the working conditions of contingent faculty can produce a range of outcomes for the faculty in these roles and for the greater campus community (Kezar et al., 2019; Rhoades, 2017). Again – our point of emphasis and contribution is locating the GB as differently agentic and collaborative when it comes to equity considerations.

An *Equity X Governance* Model Counternarrative: The "Case" of Justice University

To ensure our model is as concrete as possible, we want present a short allegorical story of a GB of the fictitious Justice University (JU):

> *In search of a new way to support the Governing Board of Justice University, Chair Salazar came across a tweet overviewing the Equity X Governance model. Given her own background as a first-generation, low-income student who had become a successful business owner, she instantly connected with the unflinching commitment to equity. At that moment she figured she would use the model at an upcoming Board retreat to see if her fellow trustees would be willing to approach some of their persistent challenges if framed in a different way. In particular, Chair Salazar has been hearing for months now from the president of JU that the institution does not have enough financial or human resources to move some equity initiative forward. In addition competition for student enrollment and tuition discounting trends were straining any efforts to move past these considerations* [i.e., systematically identifying bottlenecks].
>
> *In response, during the retreat Chair Salazar set up an activity that started with the prompt, "how can the Justice University Governing Board become more engaged and supportive of the institution's equity work?". She asked trustees and the institutional leadership that attended the retreat to separately list the actors and activities involved in the institution's equity work that directly and indirectly contribute to advancing the success of stakeholders with minoritized identities at JU. She also asked that the trustees list what the JU Board had done in the last year to differently position themselves to support and engage with JU's equity* efforts [i.e., Contextually mapping the Governance Ecosystem].
>
> *Chair Salazar then asked the attendees to pick a bottleneck to consider and then flow through each level of the Equity X Governance Model, to consider how an action plan for the GB might be arrived at differently. The GB quickly settled on insufficient human resources to support equity focused work and what transpired next was a robust conversation and determination on what the GB could do about JU not having enough people to support its equity initiatives. Here were the key takeaways of how the Equity X Governance model was enacted by JU in the succeeding months: At Level 1 – focused on the GB, the JU Board agreed that they needed to engage in a particular type of Board training and development to learn about the implications of the "great resignation." This strategy went beyond reading some literature or hearing a generalized report from the vice president for human resources. They requested data about who was leaving disaggregated by race, gender, and length of service* [i.e., a CRT *and Standpoint consideration], they did a policy audit of their retention and recruitment practices to ensure they were devoid of implicit biases* [i.e., a CRT

consideration]*, and they charted a plan to invite people who have recently left the institution or were considering doing so to hear directly from people navigating the realities of an evolving labor market* [i.e., a standpoint consideration].

At Level 2, the Board engaged in negotiations with the president to update the President's accountability structure for the upcoming year to include measures and considerations for the recruitment and retention of faculty and administrators who make demonstrable contributions to the institution's equity initiatives. The GB agreed to redouble and support fundraising efforts to support staffing the equity initiatives and the president agreed to create a specific strategy that would focus on recruiting and retaining faculty and staff.

The activity at the first two levels signaled an important shift for the institution. Institutional units began to have discussions about areas of synergy where equity initiatives could be supported in multiple ways. For instance, at Level 3, the residence life department [stakeholder 1] *and the faculty council* [stakeholder 2] *agreed to evolve the faculty in residence program to a faculty fellows program. Faculty with research interest in areas connected to equity would now spend a certain amount of hours at different residence halls to meet with students and share about ongoing research to make connections to current events* [i.e., an activity]. *Special emphasis was placed on recruiting tenured faculty from under-enrolled majors in an effort to help serve as another mechanism to bolster course enrollments. In exchange, faculty were provided a monthly meal allotment that they could use in the campus dining service.*

Prior to this collaboration residence life could not afford to hire new staff to explicitly focus on advancing equity initiatives in its residential curriculum and its core staff were already at capacity. Given concerns shared with the GB about why people were leaving the institution, the Residence Life leadership did not want to make the issues worst by adding to existing duties. However with a change in how two stakeholders collaborate with each other [i.e., a change in the architecture of the ecosystem] *they were able to create an outcome that creates joint-value for all involved. Residence Life does not add to the burden of its staff, under-utilized faculty are able to meet with students and share their equity related research, and students get supported by interfacing with potential faculty mentors and learning about equity related research and how it connects to current events.*

Eventually the success of this new program was reported back to the GB. Chair Salazar connected the dots between the GBs early work and all the additional labor and ideas and execution that went into the successful establishment of a project that serves so many purposes. One trustee was particularly inspired and ended up sharing the program with a business partner. The business partner was also impressed and decided to work with the trustee to endow the fellows program with a sizable gift.

Admittedly, this counternarrative may seem far-fetched – but we wonder if GBs were involved in equity work in systematic and expansive ways, if these sorts of stories might become more commonplace. Nevertheless, the contribution of the *Equity X Governance* model is within the unpacking of the complexities and interconnected nature of the actors and activities that GBs, through the five core tactics, can help to unravel the bottlenecks that infringe on functioning of the Governance Ecosystem. In addition, the multifaceted nature of this model and the ecosystem it exists within presents numerous implications for future research and practice, which we address in the next section.

Implications for Future Research: Defining a Praxis Agenda

Overview

Thus far, this chapter has sought to: articulate the utility of shifting to the *Equity X Governance* paradigm, illuminate the bottlenecks in the Governance Ecosystem that impede the realization of *Equity X Governance*, and introduce a model of transformation as a way to conceptually center the GB's role in organizational change efforts to enact stakeholder success. This section focuses on braiding these tentative contributions together into a coherent praxis agenda. Paulo Freire (1970) operationalized praxis as both "reflection and action directed at the structures to be transformed" (p. 126). This definition comports with the structural and relational nature of the *Equity X Governance* paradigm and our emphasis on the need for organizational transformation rather than episodic change, captured in our rendering of the transformation model. We open up our recommendations with more philosophical and reflective questions that guide researchers to interrogate their readiness to operate within the *Equity X Governance* paradigm. We then provide a series of potential research questions that emanate from the illustrations conveyed in the Governance Ecosystem (Fig. 1) and the transformation model (Fig. 3). To close, we highlight examples from our emerging and ongoing research, practice, and teaching to provide insight and encouragement that progress is possible in this space, albeit slow. We hope these examples stimulate more significant attention to this work to foster a more rapid pace of transformation in the governance space and with GBs in particular, given existing realities for far too many stakeholders with minoritized identities.

Strengthening the *Equity X Governance* Paradigm Through Reflective Inquiry

The call for a shift to *Equity X Governance* invokes Thomas Kuhn's (1962) seminal work on scientific revolutions. In summation, Kuhn (1962) argues that scientific advancement occurs between dynamic periods of normal science and scientific revolutions. Kuhn (1962) suggests that normal science comprises an agreed-upon set of theories, instruments, values, and assumptions that a field uses to solve puzzles. However, a crisis in a field happens when the normal way of pursuing scientific work is insufficient to handle increasingly complex and problematic puzzles. In this way, our chapter's premise has been that the "normal" way of approaching the study of governance and GBs is no longer sufficient for the evolving realities faced by postsecondary institutions and their stakeholders regarding the pace and realization of equitable opportunities for stakeholder success.

The tension between "normal" and "revolution" is complicated by Renn's (2020a) argument, which we agree with in part, that higher education studies is a low-consensus field. However, as we have demonstrated via our engagement with existing literature, there are identifiable patterns in the study of postsecondary

governance and GBs in particular, that have constituted a "normal" – way of practicing governance and doing GB research. Within this normal approach to the study and practice of governance and GB, we have identified that the pursuit of equity is not foregrounded as a central concern. Therefore, within this broader moment in postsecondary education, where many are attuned to the importance of equity (McNair et al., 2019; Patton et al., 2019; Perna, 2018), the *Equity X Governance* paradigm names this shift in the postsecondary education governance space for GBs.

To further realize this shift, we loosely adapt Kuhn's (1962) criteria for paradigms to roadmap how future research can take up the *Equity X Governance* paradigm and evolve. First, a new paradigm should suggest different puzzles for the research community to solve. In an overarching sense, the new puzzles we are arguing for, take up how to realize equitable opportunities for stakeholder success and effective GB stewardship of an institution as a starting point. This is different than traditional research concerns that foreground "sound financial management," "operational excellence," or "guardianship" as the most desirable ways to be fiduciary stewards of institutions (AGB, 2021; Chait et al., 2005; Eckel & Trower, 2018). Consequently, we create a short checklist of questions that could help future scholars enact an *Equity X Governance* paradigm in their studies:

- What are my underlying assumptions about how governance operates in the postsecondary education sector? What steps can I take to unearth how interlocking systems of oppression shape these assumptions?
- How do my identities and experiences inform my understanding of governance and governing boards? Where are my assets and where are my biases in this work? How do I wrestle with the tensions brought forth in this reflection in my effort to conduct research in this area?
- What am I hoping comes out of my study of governance and governing boards? Is that rationale oriented toward the realization of equity for multiple stakeholders of an institution? How and where am I locating stakeholders with minoritized identities in this scholarship?
- How does conceptualizing Boards or Trustees within the *Equity X Governance* paradigm differ from an alternative approach to studying Boards? What does the *Equity X Governance* paradigm allow me to do uniquely that other approaches do not?
- How might *Equity X Governance* be paired with complementary or supplemental theories or paradigms? How do I narrate the overlaps and the places where they diverge and then leverage those insights to set up studies?

The second criterion for a paradigm is whether the paradigm suggests novel approaches to solving the new puzzles that the paradigm shift brings into focus. We highlight one of our emerging attempts to craft the *Equity X* Governance paradigm in section "Methodological Advancement: Governance Participatory Action Research". Finally, a paradigm should convey a standard of quality for which solutions to puzzles in the paradigm can be measured against (Kuhn, 1962). On

the one hand, the measure of quality for puzzle solutions in the *Equity X Governance* paradigm is straightforward: As a result of GB involvement, are institutions being transformed in intentional and demonstrable ways that help facilitate opportunities for all stakeholders to be successful. Yet it is the complexity and detail inherent in any measure of quality (Jones et al., 2014; Patel, 2015) that has perplexed scholars before us and will continue to do so. Rather than try to provide a sweeping answer, we focus on questions for future research rooted in the paradigm that we believe, if taken up and answered in the coming years, will help foment more clarity into whether the puzzles of the *Equity X Governance* paradigm are being solved in ways that bring us closer to the ideal outcomes.

Questions for Future Research Rooted in the *Equity X Governance* Paradigm

The Governance Ecosystem (see Fig. 1) presents numerous considerations for future scholars to take up. We defined Actors as "agents with capacities to aid in transformation," which raises questions about the competence of each actor in this work. As our review in section "Relevant Stakeholders: An Ecosystem Perspective on *Equity X Governance*" highlights, there is already a good deal of work that understands postsecondary actor's capacity and some that seeks to look at the capacity in relation to other actors. However, we concluded that only a handful of studies seek a coalitional understanding of capacity. Therefore, we encourage future researchers to continue to understand the capacity of individual actors to engage in equity transformation but to do say in ways that map their capacity to those of other actors, similar to the recent work on shared equity leadership (Kezar et al., 2021) or president's councils for diversity (LePeau et al., 2019). In addition, there is an opportunity to examine Actor's capacity and do it relationally and focus on how the Ecosystem bottlenecks constrain capacity (e.g., political, expertise, relational, personnel). Yet, we also implore researchers to take the next critical step in this line of inquiry and precisely locate and implicate what GBs can do to help alleviate the Actor bottlenecks. Example research questions include:

- What is the relationship dynamic between student success units with irregular access to GBs (e.g., student affairs, faculty development, community relations) and how does distance inform their capacity to aid in organizational transformation?
- What Actor bottlenecks are governing boards better situated to address for Actors in the Governance Ecosystem?
- In what ways do GBs receive and partake in shared equity leadership (Kezar et al., 2021) or coalition (Morgan et al., 2021a) approaches to organizational transformation?

We define Activities in the Governance Ecosystem as the actions, carried out by Actors that transform postsecondary education. Here continued research is needed

that grapples with the bottlenecks (e.g., technical, data, and resources) and locates the GBs' responsibilities to address and work alongside others to curtail the bottlenecks. Similar to the Actors, there is an immense amount of research on the different activities that institutions wield to try to move toward equitable opportunities for stakeholder success. Our suggestion for future study is to continue these efforts but do so in ways that weave in the role and realities of the GB. Some lines of "activity" inquiry, such as policymaking (Baker, 2019; Gándara, 2019; Rall et al., 2022b; Rodriguez et al., 2021), do this more readily than other areas of activity. Hence the opportunity is for all research on activities in the Governance Ecosystem, when thinking about organizational transformation, to consider how the GB is implicated in both a structural and relational sense.

Questions could include:

- What are the roles GBs can play to maximize the effectiveness of empirically informed interventions for student success such as high-impact practices?
- In what ways can GBs help scale and sustain promising interventions?
- How can GBs diagnose the optimal level of involvement in activities designed to advance equity?
- What are effective accountability checks on GBs that help to prevent overreach while encouraging engagement?
- Can GBs develop their awareness of the technical and data bottlenecks that impede the success of activities designed to advance equity?

Finally, and most novel, is a concern for the Architectures of the Governance Ecosystem. These are the strategies and tactics that effectively bring Actors and Activities together. So often these connecting points remain underexplored because so many of the dynamics are concealed by organizational culture norms and systems of oppression that impact working relationships and the execution of activities. The *Equity X Governance* model (Fig. 3) seeks to illuminate these relationships conceptually.

The circles in the model are all focused on the GB. Each circle, we argued in sections "Governance to What End?: A CRT Analysis" and "Equity as the Fulcrum of Governance, but Where and How do we Apply it: Core Challenges and Opportunities for Boards", remains under-investigated due to the previous studies that engage in power-unaware methodological choices and standpoint challenges that do not consistently illuminate the perspectives of those that GBs interact with. Therefore, future research in the circles of the model must engage in power-conscious approaches to theory and research. We offer the *Equity X Governance* paradigm as an alternative starting point that roots questions in an awareness of interlocking systems of oppression and the various standpoints in the governance space. For instance, future studies focused on dynamics that flow into the GB (Fig. 3, Level 1) could take up:

- What aspects of Board training and development have the strongest relationship to enhancing trustees' understanding of diversity, equity, and inclusion?

- What strategies, rooted in equity, are most effective at diversifying postsecondary education governing boards?
- How do interlocking systems of oppression manifest in the trustee selection and onboarding process?
- In what ways can the onboarding process for new trustees help a Board enhance its commitment to equity?
- What are successful strategies for Board accountability for espoused commitments to stakeholder success?

Concerning tactics and strategies that flow from the GB into the institutional context (Fig. 3, Level 2), questions might include:

- How might the presidential selection process, led by a GB, embed an *Equity X Governance* paradigm?
- What aspects of policies, processes, and planning, that the GB is most responsible, position institutions for equitable opportunities for stakeholder success?
- What are the characteristics of effective relationships between stakeholders and governing boards that promote equity?
- Under the scope of the governing board, which accountability mechanisms are most optimal for facilitating institutional transformation toward the pursuit of equity?

In the third level of the model (Fig. 3) – the actual platform (i.e., the institutional context), additional questions emerge that focus on the arrows in the model. Recall that the arrows represent the platform architecture and focus on how GBs and, as an extension, institutions, navigate around the bottlenecks that manifest in the Governance Ecosystem. Consequently, questions here focus on how actors and activities are positioned, the transactions between actors, how information flows within the platform, and what accountability schemes are optimal for the healthy functioning of the platform. This is where the idea of a platform approach to organizations is critical, as any effort to address one actor or activity must be understood for how it affects the entire platform. Future scholarship in this area could help to highlight the utility of understanding this unique platform dynamic. For instance:

- How does supporting community-based research and training of faculty impact the classroom experiences of minoritized students? What are the implications for institutional governance?
- From the vantage point of community members, how does student activism on campuses impact an institution's relationship with its surrounding community and how the Board engages its resource dependence roles?
- Which aspects of an institution's budgeting process connect most optimally with an institution's ability to allocate money toward scaling and sustaining initiatives that facilitate stakeholder success?
- What information shared from the Board level is most likely to inform the practices of institutional leaders around efforts to advance equity?

We turn finally to one example of how we have already sought to operationalize the *Equity X Governance* paradigm to help institutions be transformed.

Methodological Advancement: Governance Participatory Action Research

In the last couple of years, we have engaged collectively and individually with various boards in a traditional researcher as expert or advocate approach (Perna, 2018). These efforts often entail one-off workshops or speaking engagements where we introduce GBs to much of the content shared in this chapter. However, we have recently grown somewhat disillusioned with this approach because it allows for GBs to appear as though they are embracing transformative efforts toward equity, without doing anything differently in a sustained way. Consequently, in one project, in collaboration with Lucy LePeau, we have sought to leverage participatory action research (PAR) in the context of Boards. PAR's use in education is widespread (Brydon-Miller & Maguire, 2009) and has been an emergent research approach in higher education (Santos, 2015). While no agreed-upon consensus exists for what makes a study appropriately PAR, recurring considerations include: (a) starting with a problem of practice that originates within a community or bounded context; (b) the researcher dynamic is nonhierarchical; (c) reflexivity among the researchers is woven into each stage of the research process to move through iterative cycles between reflection and action; (d) power and politics dealt with throughout the research process; and (e) the research process creates knowledge and understanding to address the problem of practice (Brydon-Miller & Maguire, 2009; Freire, 1982; Lewin, 1946; Santos, 2015). Critically, if the research "does not make a difference in a specific way for the participants, then it has failed to achieve its objectives" (Savin-Baden & Wimpenny, 2007, p. 333). Building on these considerations, we initiated a new project in collaboration with a system-level governing board.

The participatory part of the project started by the board chair reaching out to us after the media publication of a research project summary (Zamudio-Suarez, 2021). We shared the idea of engaging with the Board in alignment with the spirit of the PAR consideration, to which they responded favorably. In a subsequent proposal, we ended up describing this emergent approach as "G-PAR" with the "G" as a stand-in for "governance." This iteration of PAR is analogous to youth participatory action research (YPAR) (Caraballo et al., 2017) but focused on the unique realities that the governance dimension entails (i.e., dynamics of the Governance Ecosystem).

The early stages of the project have shown that there are distinctive tenets, methodological underpinnings, and practical considerations that make this approach novel from other research projects we have engaged in or seen in the literature. In particular, we have had to grapple with the power and political dimension of the governing board and their hyper-focus on some issues (e.g., the legislative season) in their purview and not others (engaging in equity work). We have identified the challenge of getting momentum in G-PAR tied to tasking GBs with multiple complex actions when they are not structured to be overly active and engaged.

This is especially tricky for a research approach that purports to be necessarily iterative, collaborative, and requires reflection and an awkward phase of navigating the newness of the method to non-academics. This is all on top of any potential hostility from trustees who are not aligned with the focus on equity.

In addition, we have begun evolving particular data collection efforts into the GB space such as "elite interviews" (Kezar, 2003; McClure & McNaughtan, 2021), organizational ethnography (Posselt & Nuñez, 2022), and aspects of forming a community of practice (McNair et al., 2019; Patel, 2015). Future areas of inquiry could help flesh out G-PAR via contextualizing the method for different institutional types based on mission (Morphew & Hartley, 2006) and GB dynamics (McGuinness, 2016). Furthermore, given the early stages of the project, how the GB moves from reflection to action in iterative cycles remains to be seen. We suspect that there will be important insights and additional areas of analysis that also stem from that process. At this stage, we know that securing a GB willing to engage in G-PAR is a huge hurdle in itself; it was years in the making for us. We encourage other scholars interested in this work to cultivate relationships early and often and make intentions clear about the type of research and relationship that is hoped for and how it can be a value-add to the espoused commitments many GBs make about student success and closing equity gaps.

Concluding Thoughts

Our chapter set out to make three contributions: (1) naming and defining a more critical and power-conscious paradigm within the governance literature (i.e., *Equity X Governance*); (2) mapping the Governance Ecosystem which is made up of actors, activities, and architectures that various types of bottlenecks derail in efforts to organize the ecosystem for the pursuit of equity; and (3) presenting a theory of organizational transformation to address ecosystem bottlenecks, which conceptualizes how GBs can be located and more synergistic to institutional efforts to realize equity sustainably.

This integrative literature review aimed to conceive a paradigm that is up to handling the immense challenges postsecondary education institutions are navigating and will continue to navigate in the future. It is not lost on us the audacity it takes to call a subsection of a well-established field of study into a new era of research. But, who are we to make such a bold declaration – some may wonder (and transparently, we wonder ourselves at times)? Yet – our shared conviction to operate within the *Equity X Governance* paradigm helps us to reframe this question to ask who are we to not call for and argue for an immediate shift in research, practice, and teaching? Our shared conviction emanates from our standpoint that postsecondary education institutions must ultimately be designed to better and more sustainably serve the communities and peoples we care about and reflect and those who suffer under the hegemonic weight of oppressions we do not readily encounter. This reality, this yet to be realized counternarrative, is only possible if the next generation of governance research and practice, consistently locates the import of GBs and orients

those energies toward advancing the equity. Time is of the essence and the conceptual tools presented herein can help us and others sustain this pursuit, so that governing boards can get to where they need to be to recognize that governance work is equity work too.

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