Understanding the Importance of School Racial Climate: Implications of the Current Literature and Recommendations for Educators
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Outline
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- My Background, Introduction, Relevance & Theoretical Framework
Part 2: How do race-related experiences in school influence African American youths’ academic achievement?
  - Study 1: School Engagement as a Mediator
  - Study 2: Gender as a Social Context
Part 3: How does this research inform clinical practice?
  - Future Directions, Implications and Recommendations for Educators

Part 1:
African American Youth & Race-Related Experiences in the School Context
My Background

• Graduate training in School Psychology (Univ. of South Carolina)

• Practiced as nationally certified school psychologist in medium-sized, racially diverse school district
  • Over 50% of the student population was comprised of racial/ethnic minorities

School Climate

• Refers to the quality and character of school life based on patterns of students’, parents’ and school personnel’s experience of school life and reflects norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices, and organizational structures

• Includes: Safety, Relationships, Teaching and Learning, External Environment

• A positive school climate is associated with academic achievement, effective risk prevention efforts and positive youth development

(National School Climate Center, 2017)
What is School Racial Climate?

- School Racial Climate (SRC) – perceptions of how race functions within the school environment in regards to school values, practices and norms as experienced by individuals within the environment (Mattison & Aber, 2007)

- Four re-emerging themes:
  - Interpersonal interactions
  - Stereotypes and Race Relations
  - Fair treatment and Racial Equity
  - Support (Byrd, 2010; Byrd & Chavous, 2011; Hope et al., 2015)

SRC: Interpersonal Relations

- SRC may be most salient in the direct interracial interactions between people and the school environment

- African American youth perceive more racial discrimination from teachers, than peers belonging to other ethnic groups (e.g., Rosenbloom & Way, 2004; Wong et al., 2003)

SRC: Stereotypes and Race Relations

- African American students are more likely to contend with negative racial stereotypes from students and staff such as:
  - Being perceived by teachers as less intelligent (e.g., Smalls et al., 2008)
  - Expectations of more problematic behaviors from African American students (Hope et al., 2015)

- Awareness of racial stereotypes can have negative impacts on academic ability beliefs among African American youth (Okeke et al., 2009)

- Additionally, subscription to and awareness of racial stereotypes may impact broader race relations such as intergroup contact:
  - "How often do students of different races sit at the lunch table together?" (Chavous, 2011)
SRC: Fair Treatment and Racial Equity

- Student perception of treatment by teachers and administrators to be fair among students of different races and that students of different races are given equal opportunity for participation and access to resources within the school environment (Byrd, 2015; Haynes et al., 1997).
- Evidence suggests that African American youth may perceive and experience systemic differential treatment in school settings.
  - Example: Disproportionate disciplinary practices based on race (Gregory & Weinstein, 2008; Horner et al., 2010).
  - Differential discipline outcomes has important implications for access to academic curriculum (Skiba et al., 2011).

SRC: Support

- Perception of access to adults and peers in the school setting, to turn to in times of need or crisis.
  - Associated with increased academic values (Brand et al., 2003).
  - Provides a buffer against adverse life events (Ryan & Patrick, 2001).
- Students of color who perceive a lack of social support from teachers and peers, including peer harassment and exclusion due to race, have fewer positive academic outcomes (Roeser, Eccles, & Sameroff, 2000; Wong et al., 2003).

SRC & Psychological/Behavioral Outcomes

Psychological Outcomes:

- Correlates with Negative SRC
  - Increased depressive symptoms (e.g., Cogburn et al., 2011).
  - Lower life satisfaction (Seaton & Yip, 2009).
- Correlates with Positive SRC
  - Increased self-esteem (e.g., Cogburn et al., 2011).
  - Provides a buffer against adverse life events (e.g., Ryan & Patrick, 2001).

Behavioral Outcomes:

- Correlates with Positive SRC
  - Fewer detentions and suspensions (e.g., Mattison & Aber, 2009).
SRC & Academic Achievement Outcomes

Correlates with Negative SRC
- Lower grades (Wong et al., 2003)
- Lower academic self-concept (Eccles, Wong, & Peshlakai, 2006)
- Less academic curiosity and persistence (Butler-Barnes et al., 2013)
- Decreased academic ability beliefs (Cheka et al., 2009)

Correlates with Positive SRC
- Increased academic values and utility (Brand et al., 2003)

Limitations to the Literature
- Few studies explore SRC
- Many studies on SRC conducted with college-age samples
- Comparative frameworks (e.g., experiences of ethnic/racial minority students vs. white students)
- Lack of understanding of the process by which SRC may impact student outcomes

School Engagement as a Mediator?

School engagement:
- Posited as an important mechanism for academic achievement
- Multidimensional construct - Behavioral, Emotional & Cognitive

Limitations:
- Studies often espouse one or two dimensional frameworks
- Often conducted with White middle class youth
Theoretical Frameworks

- Phenomenological Variant of Ecological Systems (PVEST) Theory (Spencer et al., 1997)
- Integrative Model of Development (Garcia-Coll et al., 1996)
- Triple Quandary Theory (Boykin, 1996)

Part 2:
How do race-related experiences in school influence African American youths’ academic achievement?

Study 1
**Purpose**

- Examine relationships between school racial climate and African American adolescents’ engagement and academic achievement
- Explore the potentially mediating role of dimensions of school engagement in relationships between school racial climate and achievement outcomes

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**Sample and Procedures**

**Youths’ Experiences in School Project – YES! Project**

**Sample:**
- 139 African American high school students
  - 16.27 average age (SD = 1.55); range 14-19 years
  - 57% female
  - 74% free or reduced lunch
  - 42% school-report GPA of 2.5 or higher

**Procedures:**
- 1 high school in rural setting in southeast U.S.
- Paper-pencil survey administration in small groups at school
- $10.00 gift card incentive for participation
Measures

- SRC
  - Racial Fairness (α = .92; Mattison & Aber, 2007)
  - Racial Discrimination (Wong et al., 2003)
  - Teacher (α = .80)
  - Peer (α = .77)
- School Engagement (Wong et al., 2011)
  - Behavioral (α = .76)
  - Emotional (α = .71)
  - Cognitive (α = .79)
- Academic Achievement
  - Educational Aspirations (Wang & Eccles, 2011)
  - Grade Point Average
  - Standardized Test Scores

Data Analytic Strategy

Mplus Version 7 (Muthén & Muthén, 2012):
- Bootstrapping procedure*
- When the 95% confidence interval (CI) around the parameter did not include zero, the null hypothesis was rejected.
- Model covariates - age, gender & socioeconomic status (SES)

*5,000 samples per recommendation by Preacher et al., 2004
Educational Aspirations

- Racial climate variables were not directly related to educational aspirations
- Racial fairness and peer discrimination were indirectly related to educational aspirations through all dimensions of engagement
- No indirect effects found for teacher discrimination

GPA

- Racial climate variables were not directly related to GPA
- Racial fairness and peer discrimination were indirectly related to GPA by way of behavioral and cognitive engagement only
- No indirect effects found for teacher discrimination
Mediation Analysis: Standardized Test Scores

**Standardized Test Scores**

- Direct relationship between peer discrimination and English scores
- Racial fairness and peer discrimination were indirectly related to English scores through behavioral and cognitive engagement
- Behavioral engagement linked racial fairness and peer discrimination with math scores
- No direct or indirect effects found for teacher discrimination

**Study 1 Conclusions**

Evidence showed:
- Racial climate is associated with academic achievement through process variables
- Engagement may be an important component of school experiences because of its relationship to achievement
- Teacher and peer discrimination experiences may function as distinctive risk factors for academic adjustment
Study 2
Griffin, C (under review). Does Gender Matter Too?: Exploring relationships among perceptions of racial fairness, school engagement, and academic achievement in a sample of African American adolescents.

Social Context of Gender
Significant gender disparities in education:

African American Boys:
- ↓ GPAs (e.g., Williams et al., 2002)
- ↓ educational aspirations (e.g., Wood et al., 2007)
- ↑ suspensions (e.g., Williams et al., 2002)
- ↑ race discrimination experiences (e.g., Wood et al., 2007)

African American Girls:
- Higher achievement (Garfield, 2007)
- Viewed as loud and challenging (Morris, 2007)

Purpose
To explore whether the mediating role of school engagement in the relationship between youths’ perceptions of racial fairness and classroom grades varies as a function of gender.
African American Boys

![Diagram of relationships between Race Fairness, Emotional Engagement, Behavioral Engagement, Cognitive Engagement, and Classroom Grades for African American Boys]

- Emotional Engagement: 95% CI [-.42, .16]; indirect effect = -.01
- Behavioral Engagement: 95% CI [.02, .30]; indirect effect = .08
- Cognitive Engagement: 95% CI [.00, .27]; indirect effect = .09

Note: ns = not significant; *p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001; Covariates – age and SES

African American Girls

![Diagram of relationships between Race Fairness, Emotional Engagement, Behavioral Engagement, Cognitive Engagement, and Classroom Grades for African American Girls]

- Emotional Engagement: 95% CI [.02, .16]; indirect effect = .06
- Behavioral Engagement: 95% CI [.03, .15]; indirect effect = .08
- Cognitive Engagement: 95% CI [.01, .27]; indirect effect = .09

Note: ns = not significant; *p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001; Covariates – age and SES

What does all of this mean?
Take Home Points

- School environment is associated with achievement through process variables (Study 1 and 2)
- Engagement dimensions may be associated with achievement outcomes in differing ways (Study 1)
- Gender may be an important social context (Study 2)

Part 3:
How does this research inform clinical practice?

Future Directions
Questions to ask:
- Do these associations exist in other schooling contexts?
- How does SRC and race-related stress in schools impact mental health outcomes?
- Are there unique strategies and styles adolescents use to cope with race-related stress at school that we can identify?
- Which of these strategies or styles, if any, can mitigate the negative effects associated with poor SRC and promote educational and psychological outcomes?
Practical Implications

Prevention/Intervention:
- Teacher pedagogy and school curriculum
- Inclusive and culturally sensitive school environments
- Actively safeguarding against racial biases in key elements of practice – e.g., course placements & discipline practices
- Social skills training for students
- Address factors in the broader community

Recommendations for Educators

- Measuring School Racial Climate
  - These student surveys can help clarify the social boundaries that exist in school.
  - Early Grades: http://www.tolerance.org/sites/default/files/files/pdf/mixitup_online_survey_06.pdf
  - Middle and Upper Grades: http://www.tolerance.org/sites/default/files/files/pdf/mixitup_online_survey_05.pdf
  - Comprehensive School Climate Inventory (CSCI) - is a nationally recognized school climate survey measuring 13 school climate dimensions. Although it does not specifically assess racial climate, the Respect for Diversity items on the Interpersonal Relationships dimension can clarify how students, faculty and staff perceive overall norms for tolerance and mutual respect for individual differences including race and culture.

- How to Respond to Everyday Prejudice, Bias and Stereotypes
  - This guide aims to help teachers and students in school settings handle moments of everyday bias including when and how to speak up. http://www.tolerance.org/implement-speak-up
  - Diversity Responsive Schools. These white papers provide a set of school policies and practices that can maximize learning outcomes for students of color: http://www.tolerance.org/sites/default/files/files/pdf/DiversityResponsiveSchool_TT%20white%20paper%20Hawley.pdf

Additional Resources

- Measuring School Racial Climate
  - Student surveys can help clarify the social boundaries that exist in school.
  - Early Grades: http://www.tolerance.org/sites/default/files/files/pdf/mixitup_online_survey_06.pdf
  - Middle and Upper Grades: http://www.tolerance.org/sites/default/files/files/pdf/mixitup_online_survey_05.pdf

- How to Respond to Everyday Prejudice, Bias and Stereotypes
  - Guide aiming to help teachers and students in school settings handle moments of everyday bias including when and how to speak up: http://www.tolerance.org/implement-speak-up

- Diversity Responsive Schools. White papers providing a set of school policies and practices that can maximize learning outcomes for students of color: http://www.tolerance.org/sites/default/files/files/pdf/DiversityResponsiveSchool_TT%20white%20paper%20Hawley.pdf
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Presentation Objectives

1. Provide an overview of the existing research literature on school racial climate and associations with academic achievement and mental health outcomes among African American youth.

2. Provide specific strategies for educators about how to improve school racial climate as related to outcomes among African American youth discussed in the literature review.