

# **Chapter Fourteen**

## **The Congruence between African American Students' Racial Identity Beliefs and Their Academic Climates: Implications for Academic Motivation and Achievement**

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### **Introduction**

Does having a strong connection to their racial identity promote African American students' academic achievement, or does it place them at risk for academic disengagement and underachievement? Is an emphasis on African American identity compatible with the beliefs and orientations that characterize a positive academic identity? Or, does strong African American identification relate to academic dis-identification, e.g., disconnecting one's personal identity from the academic domain, or viewing pro-achievement orientations as "acting white"?

Over the past several decades, social science scholars have been concerned with the above types of questions, leading to explorations of whether particular racial identities lead to adaptive or maladaptive academic outcomes among African American youth. However, in conceptual and empirical treatments of these questions, seldom is the role of context considered explicitly, for instance, the norms and values around race that youth experience in their day-to-day school environments. In this chapter we describe the importance of considering the congruence between African American youths' academic settings and their racial identity

beliefs in studying motivational processes and outcomes among this group. The racial identity-context congruence perspective we present draws on person-environment fit perspectives, organizational theory (e.g., Chrobot-Mason and Thomas, 2002) and self-determination theory (Deci et al., 1991) to highlight processes through which particular racial identity beliefs can impact academic motivation, specifically through individuals' connections to and engagement with their proximal school contexts. We posit that the relationship between racial identity and motivation in school varies based on the experienced racial norms (that is, racial climate) in the school setting. We present two empirical examples, one with a high school sample and one with a college sample, to illustrate our congruence perspective. In taking a congruence perspective, we seek to answer not *whether* racial identity beliefs are adaptive or *which* racial identity beliefs are more adaptive, but *when* and *under what circumstances* they are more or less adaptive.

## Literature Review

### *Racial Identity and Academic Motivation*

The congruence perspective we present is an alternative to two prevalent frameworks for explaining the relationships of African American racial identity with academic motivation and achievement: the "racial-identity-as-promotive" perspective and the "racial-identity-as-risk" perspective. These frameworks most often emphasize aspects of racial identity related to the significance and meanings that individuals place on their racial group membership, including affective beliefs. We will discuss these three aspects of racial identity using constructs outlined in the Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity (MMRI) developed by Sellers and colleagues (1998). These constructs include the extent that the group membership as a central part of individuals' self-concept (centrality), individuals' personal evaluation of or positive affect related their group membership (private regard), and individuals' affective evaluation of the broader society's value and regard for their group (public regard).

First, the racial-identity-as-promotive perspective (Smalls, White, Chavous, and Sellers, 2007) acknowledges the historical value placed on education as a means to overcoming racial barriers in the African American community. According to this perspective, having a strong racial identity (e.g., high centrality and high private regard) will result in identification with these values and a strong academic orientation, which results in higher motivation and achievement. Previous research studies with middle and late adolescents show positive associations of high centrality and high private regard with personal valuing of education and academic aspirations (e.g., Chavous, Bernat, Schmeelk-Cone, Caldwell, and Kohn-Wood, 2003; Chavous, Rivas, Smalls, Griffin, and Cogburn, 2008; O'Connor, 1999; Oyserman, Harrison, and Bybee, 2001; Spencer, Noll, Stoltzfus, and Harpalani, 2001). Additionally, research with emerging adult samples (e.g., college students)

has found positive relationships between students' reported racial centrality and their intrinsic motivation to achieve (Cokley, 2001, 2003). These studies suggest that, across adolescence and young adulthood, a strong connection to being African American and positive feelings about being African American can promote higher achievement motivation and, ultimately, educational success.

A second perspective, however, emphasizes the potential risks of stronger identification. Social identity theory describes how identifying more with a stigmatized group (high centrality) and having higher awareness or consciousness about the group's stigmatized status (conceptually related to low public regard) poses a risk to the self-esteem in domains in which that group has been traditionally stigmatized, such as the domain of education (Crocker and Major, 1989; Steele, 1997). In order to protect the self-esteem from the effects of stigmatization, the individual must choose to disidentify with the group or with the domain. This perspective acknowledges that, in the academic domain, African American youth are likely to receive negative treatment and low expectations and predicts that many will choose to dis-identify with academics, rather than the group (Crocker and Major, 1989; Steele, 1997). With less identification with academics, youth no longer value the behaviors and outcomes associated with that domain, and achievement suffers subsequently. Most empirical research examining connections between racial identity beliefs and achievement motivation does not support the racial-identity-as-risk perspective. A few studies, however, have found negative associations between a strong, positive racial identity and grade achievement (Harper and Tuckman, 2006; Worrell, 2007). Furthermore, studies with college students have linked higher stigma consciousness (conceptually similar to lower public regard) with negative achievement outcomes (e.g., Brown, 2005). Thus, there is some support for the racial-identity-as-risk perspective.

While the promotive and risk perspectives may seem at odds with one another, we do not view them as such. Each perspective is informative about different ways that youth might process and manage racial barriers and stigma and the implications for motivation. Both frameworks provide insights into particular motivational processes, specifically those related to how youth develop values around the importance/utility of education, as well as their self-concepts around the academic domain. Each perspective emphasizes the role of the broader societal context of race where many African Americans encounter racial barriers, discrimination, and stereotyped treatment; although each perspective proposes differing responses to perceiving barriers or stigma. The promotive perspective posits that a strong and positive group identification relates to adaptive responses to racial barriers and stigma that enhance or maintain motivational beliefs about the value of schooling and academic self-concept, while the risk perspective views stronger identification and stigma awareness as exacerbating negative effects of experienced racial barriers and stigma on those motivational outcomes. Taken together, the scholarship representing and supporting both perspectives raise the possibility of variation in ways that racial identity influences African American youths' academic achievement.

### ***The Racial Identity-Context Congruence Perspective Defined***

One factor in the seeming contradictions between the racial identity-as-promotive and racial identity-as-risk perspectives is that neither perspective explicitly considers motivational processes related to students' proximal environments, for instance, how students connect their personal identities and self-concepts to their day-to-day school settings. As such, we present a racial-identity context congruence perspective (Byrd and Chavous, 2011), which adds to and complements the aforementioned literatures on African American achievement motivation by describing mechanisms linking youths' racial identity to their motivation through their connections with the school context. Instead of a focus on motivational beliefs such as educational values or academic self-concept, our congruence approach emphasizes youths' motivational beliefs and orientations related to their everyday school contexts and draws from theoretical perspectives emphasizing the role of person-environment fit in successful adaptation.

With regard to the relationship between racial identity and motivation, we make explicit the idea that no one set of racial identity beliefs is in itself positive or negative with regard to academic outcomes (Cross, 1991; Sellers et al., 1998). Instead, how racial identity functions to influence youths' adjustment outcomes differs according to the extent that contextual norms and values support youths' own values and affective beliefs. In other words, from a congruence perspective, the effect of a strong and positive sense of racial identity on motivation for school would vary as a function of the specific academic contexts youth experience. In a school setting with norms and values that are congruent with individuals' strong and positive racial identity beliefs, individuals would feel greater connection to the setting and valued outcomes within that setting. However, when individuals' racial identity beliefs and their perception of norms within their environment are incongruent, individuals are less likely to feel less connected to the environment and, subsequently, are less likely to develop motivational orientations where they connect their personal values and self-concepts to the environment.

A contribution of the congruence perspective is that it accounts for variation in ways students might experience race at school. In some cases, African American youth may find themselves in school contexts where they experience many racial barriers, racially stigmatizing experiences, and low expectations, while in other settings they may experience relatively fewer racial barriers, and members of their group may be held to similarly high expectations as other students. As such, students with similar beliefs around the significance and meaning of their racial group membership may fare differently when experiencing academic contexts that vary in the degree that they support or counter those beliefs.

### ***School Racial Climate as Context***

In our consideration of academic context, we focus on students' perceptions of their school racial climate, defined in this chapter as perceived norms and values around race and interracial interactions (Chavous, 2005), or "how race works" in a particular school. Because of the heightened salience of race for many ethnic minority groups in the United States, the racial climate of school settings is a particularly important construct to consider in psychological examinations of African American students' achievement processes (Booker, 2006; Mattison and Aber, 2007). Conceptualizations of racial climate in psychological literatures focus on individuals' perceptions of interpersonal, social, and institutional norms related to race, most often emphasizing norms related to intergroup relations (Green et al., 1988). In the current chapter, we highlight dimensions of school racial climate based in intergroup contact theory (Allport, 1954), a theory describing the conditions necessary for successful racial integration in a setting. For instance, a commonly studied dimension of school racial climate drawing from intergroup contact theory is the frequency of interactions between people of different races within the school. Other dimensions tap into the qualitative nature of those intergroup interactions, for instance, whether intergroup interactions are based in equal status, or the degree to which students of different races in the setting hold similar social status and are treated equitably. This dimension also relates to the beliefs and attitudes individuals in the schools hold about particular racial groups, for instance, negative stereotypes. Another indicator of the quality of intergroup contact involves interdependence, for instance, the extent that racial groups function harmoniously toward common goals, rather than in adversarial ways that would increase intergroup tensions. A fourth dimension considers institutional level supports (e.g., from teachers, administrators) for positive intergroup relationships. This dimension also might involve whether a setting values and celebrates racial differences as a beneficial aspect of the school community (Plaut, 2010), that is, a multicultural ideology, rather than a color-blind or assimilation ideology that de-emphasize or devalues race or cultural difference (Bell, 2002).

The literature on school racial climate suggests that experiencing a positive racial climate can be beneficial for youth of all races (e.g., Green et al., 1988). However, studies indicate that African American students (at secondary and post secondary levels) consistently report more negative perceptions of their school racial climate (e.g., more intergroup tension, unequal treatment relative to other groups, racially biased treatment) than do students from other groups (e.g., Chavous, 2005). That said, in contexts where African American youth experience fewer racial barriers, fairer treatment, and positive norms around race and intergroup relations in their day-to-day experiences, they show more positive motivation attitudes (e.g., Brand, Felner, Shim, Seitsinger, and Dumas, 2003; Ryan and Patrick, 2001) and achievement (e.g., Green et al., 1988). However, school climate research generally has not addressed within-racial group differences in

African American students' perceptions of and responses to their perceived school racial climate. Furthermore, fewer studies consider how students' own race-related beliefs relate to their perceptions of and responses to their schools' racial climates. Thus, our congruence approach contributes to the school climate literature by presenting racial identity as an individual difference factor that can help explain variation in effects of racial climate on achievement outcomes among African American students. In fact, we suggest that experiencing a positive racial climate can be particularly beneficial for African American youth with a strong and positive sense of their racial identity.

### *Motivational Processes Related to Identity-Context Congruence*

The congruence perspective proposes that the match between individuals' personal identity beliefs and the perceived norms and values in their contexts is essential for promoting autonomous motivation, that is, motivation in which an activity is inherently valuable and is experienced as self-determined (Deci and Ryan, 2008). The most autonomous form of motivation is intrinsic motivation, in which an activity is inherently enjoyable. Although school achievement is contingent on a number of individual activities and student attributes, intrinsic motivation for school in general can be seen as an overall experience of positive affect connected to the school, and also includes interest and curiosity around tasks and activities at school, all of which have been linked to academic achievement and attainment outcomes (Deci et al., 1991).

We focus on two domains around which racial climate may be congruent or incongruent with racial identity beliefs in ways that influence motivation: significance and affect. Congruence in significance would be represented, for instance, if individuals feel that their race is a defining characteristic (high centrality) and perceive that those in their school also see racial group membership as an important personal characteristic (e.g., a racial climate that promotes multiculturalism, acknowledging and celebrating difference rather than minimizing difference or encouraging a "color-blind" views of students). It is important to note that racial identity attitudes about the importance of race are different from attitudes about the meaning of racial group membership (i.e., ideologies; Sellers et al., 1998). A "multicultural" or "color-blind" ideology can indicate to youth how important or worthy of attention racial group membership is, which is different from conveying values about the meaning of one's racial group. Youth can also perceive congruence on the meaning of racial group membership.

In the affective domain, students' private regard or public regard also might be congruent or incongruent with perceived school norms. An example of congruence in affect would be individuals having high private regard and high public regard and perceiving a school racial climate in which positive intergroup interactions are normative and where teachers and students like and have positive feelings toward their racial group. In contrast, experiencing a school racial climate in which African

Americans are lower in status or disrespected, receive unequal treatment relative to others, or are segregated in undesirable ways can send the message that being African American is a negative trait in that context (and would be incongruent with high private regard) and signal that out-group members feel negatively about their group (incongruent with high public regard).

A primary mechanism through which congruence between racial identity beliefs and school racial climate impacts intrinsic motivation for school is through youths' connectedness, or sense of belonging with their school contexts. Belonging is a basic human need for acceptance and support from others in an environment (Goodenow, 1993). Achievement motivation theories, e.g., self-determination theory, highlight the role of belonging in promoting autonomous motivation in a setting (Deci et al., 1991), and researchers have found links between students' reported sense of belonging at school and various academic motivation outcomes (e.g., Booker, 2006). Experiencing congruence between students' racial identity attitudes and their school racial climate can increase sense of belonging in several ways: youth may feel that their teachers and fellow students accept them for who they are; youth may also perceive that they are similar to those around them and thus feel included in the school community; and both factors can facilitate social bonds and supportive interpersonal relationships (Booker, 2006; Goodenow, 1993). Our congruence perspective also draws from organizational theory in highlighting the importance of congruence between individual values and contexts for connection to the setting. For example, Chrobot-Mason and Thomas (2002) suggest that individuals who value their racial group membership would be more comfortable in settings with a multicultural orientation, and that this comfort has implications for satisfaction and perseverance. This scholarship suggests the importance of students' affective connections with their school environments as critical to enhancing and sustaining motivation within the school environment.

### *Predictions*

Our congruence perspective predicts that the effect of strong and positive racial identity on academic motivation at school will vary by the racial climate of the school. In the literature, researchers most often conceptualize a strong and positive racial identity as characterized by high centrality and high private regard. We expect that youth with higher centrality would report higher autonomous motivation when race is made salient in positive ways—that is school racial climates where youth perceive school norms as emphasizing the importance of race and appreciation for group differences. For private regard, congruence will relate to aspects of the school racial climate that relate to positive or negative affect. For instance, youth with high private regard in settings characterized by positive experiences around their racial group membership (such as positive intergroup contact, equal status, and positive attitudes/respect) would experience higher intrinsic motivation for school. However, youth with high private regard and perceiving more negative

climates would experience lower intrinsic motivation because these settings do not affirm youths' positive feelings toward their group.

Fewer studies of connections between African American students' racial identity and achievement focus on public regard. A few studies suggest positive associations between public regard and achievement motivation beliefs. Chavous et al. (2003), for instance, found that youth with profiles of racial identity beliefs indicating high centrality, high private regard, and high public regard were more attached to school than youth with high private regard, high centrality, and relatively lower public regard. Furthermore, while lower public regard has been related to perceiving more racial stigma (e.g., discrimination), research suggests lower public regard also can buffer the negative psychological impact of stigma (Sellers, Copeland-Linder, Martin, and Lewis, 2006). Specifically, youth whose perceptions of societal regard for their group include the possibility of bias may experience fewer negative consequences on well-being or motivation when faced with evidence of group bias.

The congruence perspective can extend this work by considering the motivational implications of whether students' daily school settings are consistent or inconsistent with their broader beliefs systems around society's views of their racial group. Based on our congruence perspective, we would expect that youth with higher public regard would report higher intrinsic motivation than those with lower public regard when their school racial climate experiences are consistent with their expectation that others view their group positively. On the other hand, while perceiving negative racial climates generally would relate to decreased intrinsic motivation and positive affect around school, youth with lower private regard likely would report higher intrinsic motivation than those with high public regard when perceiving negative racial climates. We posit that youth with lower public regard would be more buffered from the negative impacts of negative racial climate than those holding higher private regard beliefs.

### *Summary*

The first part of this paper has outlined the congruence perspective, which takes a person-environment fit approach in conceptualizing the role of racial identity in achievement motivation processes. A main premise was that considering the nature of youths' academic contexts and how racial identity relates to students' connections with their contexts could help reconcile seemingly mixed findings in the literature linking racial identity to achievement motivation and contribute to understanding of mechanisms linking racial identity to achievement outcomes.

### **Empirical Examples**

In this second section we present two empirical examples supporting our congruence perspective. The first example is from a study of high school youth first



reported in Byrd and Chavous (2011). The second example is from a new multi-university study of college students. Both examples examine the interaction of private regard, public regard, and centrality with racial climate to predict motivational outcomes. These examples illustrate how congruence between students' racial identity and perceived racial climate relate to the ways that they connect to their daily academic settings and the implications of this connection for important motivational and achievement outcomes. Finally, we use these examples to point to important next steps in work examining racial identity-context congruence.

### ***Example 1: High School Study***

The first example provides evidence of the importance of congruence between affective components of racial identity (private regard) and school racial climate. In assessing school racial climate, we focused on perceptions of the extent that positive intergroup interactions and respect for all races were normative at school. We considered whether congruence between private regard and climate was related to intrinsic motivation, measured by students' reported interest in and enjoyment of school. Additionally, we tested whether students' sense of belonging at school was a mechanism linking congruence and intrinsic motivation by examining whether a sense of belonging mediated the relationship between congruence and motivation.

### ***Participants***

Participants were 263 African American eleventh grade public school students (53 percent male) drawn from the Maryland Adolescent Development in Context Study (MADICS). Participants lived in neighborhoods varying in urbanicity and socioeconomic status (see <http://www.rcgd.isr.umich.edu/pgc/home.htm> for the detailed study and sample information). In face-to-face and self-administered interviews, participants completed measures of racial identity, racial climate, discrimination, belonging, and intrinsic motivation, along with reports of demographic characteristics.

### ***Measures and Variables***

Racial identity was measured using a shortened version of the Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity (Sellers, Rowley, Chavous, Shelton, and Smith, 1997) with a response scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The *centrality* subscale consisted of three items measuring the importance of race to the self-concept (e.g., "Being Black is an important reflection of who I am";  $\alpha = .73$ ). The *private regard* subscale consisted of six items measuring youths' affective (positive or negative) feelings about their racial group membership (e.g., "I am happy that I am Black";  $\alpha = .77$ ). Finally, two items measured *public regard*,

indicating the youths' perceptions of how positively or negatively society felt about their group (e.g., "Others think that Black people are unworthy";  $r = .41$ ).

*School racial climate* was measured using two scales developed by the MADICS researchers. Peer racial climate was assessed with four items tapping into norms around the frequency of intergroup associations at school, as well as the quality of those interactions. Youth reported the amount of interracial contact between students and the degree of respect shown between students of different races at school (e.g., "How often do students of different races sit together in the cafeteria?";  $\alpha = .73$ ). These items were on a scale of 1 (never) to 5 (very often) or 1 (none) to 5 (all). Teacher/staff racial climate tapped into equal status and institutional supportive norms and was assessed with two items that asked youth how many teachers showed equal respect for students of different races on a scale of 1 (none) to 5 (all), and degree of racial tension between staff and students on a scale of 1 (almost never) to 5 (almost always;  $r = .37$ ).

Our motivational outcome of interest, *school intrinsic motivation*, was measured by three items. Participants indicated how much enjoying their classes, liking what they were learning, and feeling smart were important reasons they went to school on a scale of 1 (not an important reason) to 7 (a very important reason;  $\alpha = .84$ ).

We conceptualized youths' individual, interpersonal experiences with racial discrimination at school as separate from their perceptions of the normative school racial climate. To account for the effects of personally experienced discrimination when examining identity-climate congruence effects, we included racial discrimination in tested study models. School-based racial discrimination was measured with two scales with possible responses ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (almost every day). Peer discrimination consisted of three items on how often youth were excluded or got into conflicts at school because of their race ( $\alpha = .87$ ), and teacher discrimination consisted of five items on how often teachers treated youth unfairly because of their race ( $\alpha = .89$ ). Other control variables included in tested models were eleventh grade GPA, gender, and a composite measure of family socioeconomic status representing family income and highest education attained in the home (reported by parents when youth were in eighth grade).

*Sense of belongingness* at school was measured by two scales indicating youth reports of support and acceptance from teachers and peers at school. Two items assessed peer support, or how often youth depended on other students for help with problems at school and schoolwork on a scale of 1 (almost never) to 5 (almost always;  $r = .43$ ). Three items were included for teacher support, or how happy youth were with their relationships with their teachers, and whether they experienced acceptance or conflict on the same response scale ( $\alpha = .59$ ).

**Table 14.1: Hierarchical Regression of Racial Identity and School Racial Climate Predicting Intrinsic Motivation (High School Sample)**

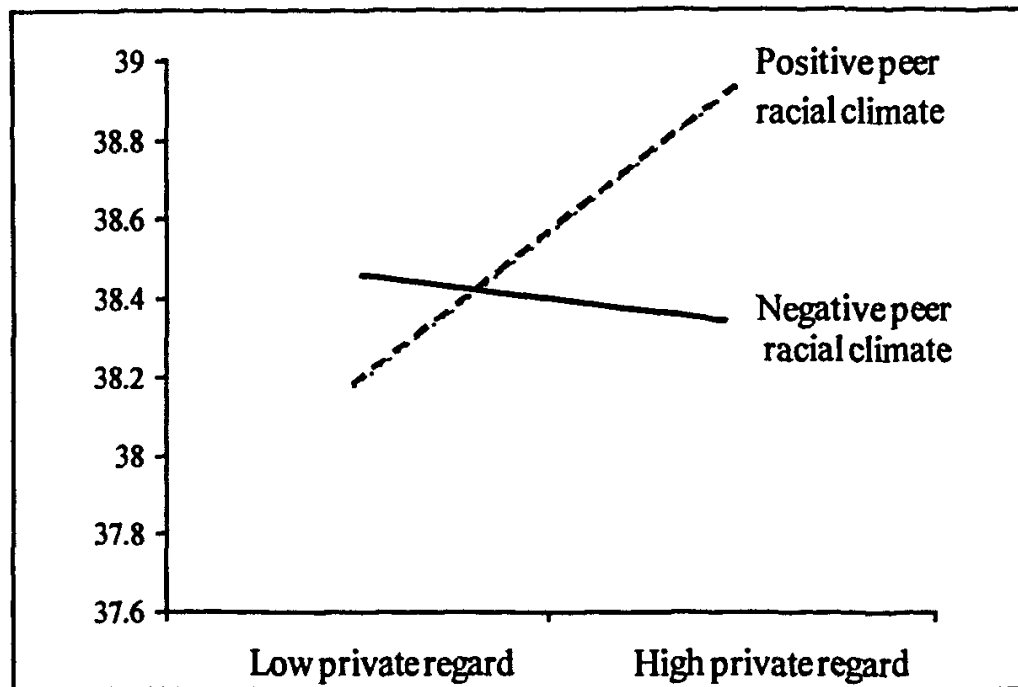
Model F df regression, df R2 change	Step 1		Step 2		Step 3	
	3.87 (11,346)***		3.67 (17,340)***		4.83 (19,338)***	
	0.10*		.05**		.05***	
	B	Std. Err.	B	Std. Err.	B	Std. Err.
Intercept	35.04*	14.47	38.47**	14.30	42.54**	13.88
Year of Birth	-0.40	0.18	-0.45*	0.18	-0.52**	0.18
Gender	0.05	0.16	0.03	0.16	0.01	0.16
SES	-0.07	0.09	-0.05	0.09	-0.11	0.09
GPA	0.38***	0.11	0.39***	0.11	0.25*	0.11
Teacher Discrim.	0.05+	0.15	-0.01	0.15	0.08	0.14
Peer Discrim.	0.16	0.17	0.07	0.17	0.09	0.17
Private Regard	0.31	0.17	0.29+	0.17	0.22	0.17
Public Regard	0.09	0.09	0.05	0.09	0.22	0.17
Centrality	-0.01	0.11	0.03	0.11	0.02	0.09
Peer Racial Climate	0.07	0.11	0.11	0.11	0.07	0.11
Teach. Rac. Climate	0.41**	0.14	0.34*	0.14	0.12	0.11
					0.23	0.14
Priv Reg x Peer Clim			0.57**	0.21	0.43*	0.21
Priv Reg x Teach Clim			0.43*	0.21	0.32	0.20
Pub Reg x Peer Clim			0.08	0.12	0.08	0.12
Pub Reg x Teach Clim			-0.11	0.10	-0.14	0.10
Cent x Peer Climate			-0.04	0.14	0.03	0.14
Cent x Teacher Climate			-0.18	0.15	-0.21	0.14
Teacher Acceptance/ Support					0.55***	0.12

## Results

The results are briefly summarized here—see Byrd and Chavous (2011) for full reports on analysis techniques, descriptives, and bivariate correlations. A hierarchical ordinary least squares regression was conducted with racial identity and racial climate as predictors of intrinsic motivation (see Table 14.1).

**Figure 14.1: Interaction of Private Regard and Peer Racial Climate (High School Sample).**

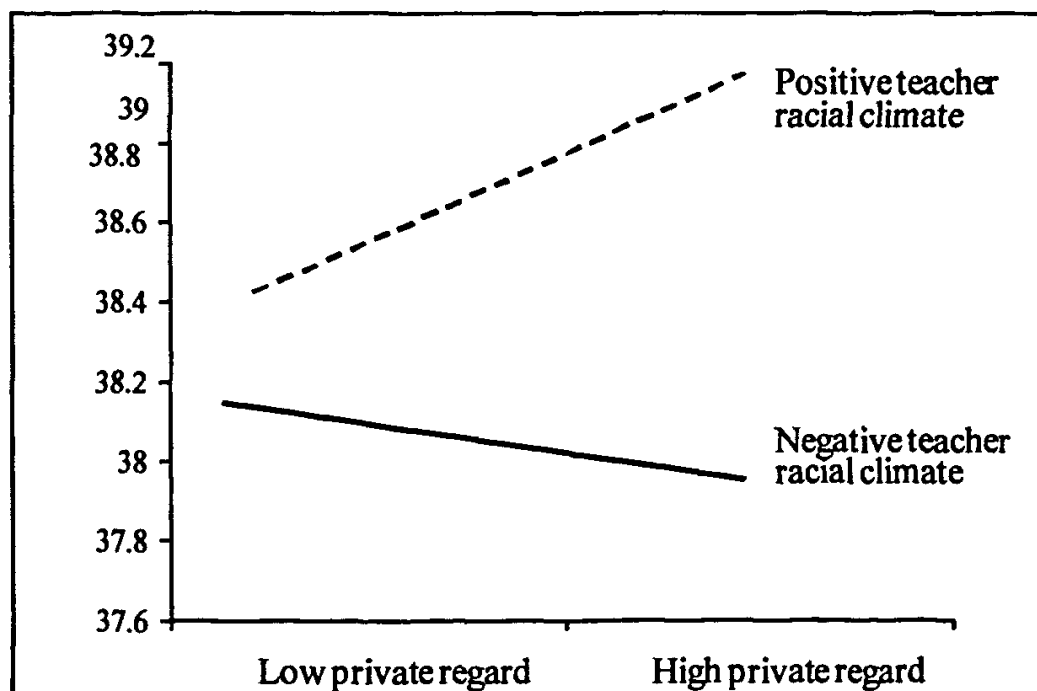
### Intrinsic Motivation



Interactions between racial identity and racial climate were found for private regard and both racial climate scales. The interactions were plotted according to procedures outlined by Aiken and colleagues (Aiken, West, and Reno, 1991). Figure 14.1 illustrates the interaction between private regard and peer racial climate ( $B = 0.57, p < .01$ ). As predicted by the congruence perspective, youth with high private regard in settings with more frequent and positive interactions between students of different races reported higher intrinsic motivation than youth with high private regard in more negative settings. Figure 14.2 shows a similar pattern for private regard and teacher/staff racial climate ( $B = 0.43, p < .05$ ). We found no relationship between centrality or public regard and racial climate; neither did we find interactions between centrality or public regard and climate.

**Figure 14.2: Interaction of Private Regard and Teacher/Staff Racial Climate (High School Sample)**

### Intrinsic Motivation



In this dataset we were able to test whether belongingness acted as a mediator of the effect of congruence on intrinsic motivation. We examined several conditions within a mediated moderation framework (Muller, Judd, and Yzerbyt, 2005). Peer support did not act as a mediator, but teacher support did mediate the interaction of private regard and teacher/staff climate ( $B_{\text{step1}} = .34, p < .05$ ;  $B_{\text{step2}} = .23, \text{ns}$ ). Furthermore, this mediation was moderated by private regard ( $B = .18, p < .10$ ), such that youth with higher private regard reported a stronger relationship between teacher/staff racial climate and teacher support. The results suggest that not only are youth with higher private regard experiencing more support and acceptance in positive climates, and that this accounts for their higher enjoyment of school, those with high private regard also perceive more support from teachers in positive climates, compared to those with low private regard. In other words, high private regard youth are experiencing multiple benefits from the congruence between their beliefs and their perceptions of the school setting.

### Discussion

The analyses in the high school sample provided strong support for our identity-context congruence perspective. Specifically, students with positive affective feelings about their racial group (high private regard) showed higher intrinsic

school motivation when their perceived racial climate was consistent with their positive racial identity beliefs. Also consistent with our expectations, the relationship between private regard-racial climate congruence and intrinsic school motivation was mediated through school belongingness. However, our inquiry raised several questions. First, as we did not find evidence of congruence effects for centrality and public regard, we speculated that one factor is the particular dimensions of school racial climate we assessed. For instance, our peer climate scale tapped into students' views of the normative amount of contact, as well as the quality of the contact, while the teacher/staff climate scale included items addressing both equal status and institutional norms. Would distinguishing aspects of racial climate that assess the frequency of intergroup context from the quality of that contact help illuminate congruence processes and provide more explanatory power? Alternatively, we posited that racial identity-racial climate congruence may function in different ways for different dimensions of racial identity. For instance, does congruence between perceived racial climate and particular aspects of racial identity (e.g., private regard) "matter" more than congruence with other dimensions of identity with regard to impact on affective connections to and motivation within the school setting? Another question is related to the types of contexts we assessed. For instance, would the consequences of racial identity-racial climate congruence or incongruence look similar in secondary and post secondary contexts? Our second example below provides some insight into these questions using data from a study of first year college students.

### *Example 2: College Student Study*

#### *Participants*

Participants included 164 second-semester freshmen (24 percent male) drawn from the Racial Identity Longitudinal Study (RILS, R. Sellers, P.I.) of African American college transition. Three universities were included in the study, including a predominantly White university in the Midwest ( $n = 56$ ), a predominantly White university in the Southeast ( $n = 96$ ), and a historically Black university in the Southeast ( $n = 54$ ). Male and female students were evenly distributed across campuses ( $\chi^2(2) = 2.13, ns$ ). The participants ranged in age from 18 to 22 ( $M = 18.45, SD = 0.59$ ). They completed self-report measures of racial identity, college racial climate, satisfaction with their campus experience, and demographic information.

#### *Measures*

Racial identity was measured similarly to the high school sample, though using the full Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity (Sellers et al., 1997) with a

response scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The *centrality* subscale consisted of eight items ( $\alpha = .75$ ), the *private regard* subscale consisted of six items ( $\alpha = .79$ ), and the *public regard* subscale consisted of five items ( $\alpha = .84$ ).

Students' perceptions of their *college racial climate* were assessed on four dimensions using Chavous' (2005) modification of the Green et al. (1988) scale of school interracial climate for secondary students. Perceptions of *intergroup association* were measured by six items about norms around intergroup contact (e.g., "Students at [university] think it's good to get to know other students of different races";  $\alpha = .84$ ). Perceived *equal status* between races was measured by six items (e.g., "All students at [university] are treated equally";  $\alpha = .80$ ). Perceptions of *interdependence*, or the degree to which different racial groups worked toward common goals and benefitted from one another on campus, was measured with six items (e.g., "Black and White students at [university] need each other";  $\alpha = .74$ ). Finally, *institutional supportive norms* (administrator and faculty support for intergroup contact) were assessed with four items (e.g., "The university administration at [university] encourages students to make friends with students of different races";  $\alpha = .81$ ).

Like the high school study, we were interested in examining students' affective connection to the college context. In this study, we assessed *academic satisfaction* as our main dependent variable, which was measured with one item asking how satisfied students were with their academic life on a scale of 1 (very unsatisfied) to 7 (very satisfied).

As in the high school sample, personal racial discrimination was included as a variable in study models to account for the effects of personal experiences on satisfaction when examining racial identity-racial climate congruence effects. Racial discrimination was measured using the Daily Life Experiences scale (Harrell, 1994). Participants rated how frequently 18 discriminatory events occurred in the past year on a scale from 0 (never) to 5 (once a week or more). Other control variables entered in study models included gender, age, university, and a composite measure of family socioeconomic status representing family income and parents' education.

## Results

Means and standard deviations are presented in Table 14.2. To examine associations of racial identity and racial climate with academic satisfaction, we conducted hierarchical ordinary least squares regression. All predictor variables were centered around the grand mean, and interaction terms were computed between each of the three racial identity variables and the four racial climate variables. Control variables were entered in step 1, followed by racial climate and

racial identity variables in step 2, with racial identity by racial climate interaction terms entered in step 3. Any significant interactions were plotted using the procedure recommended by Aiken and colleagues (Aiken et al., 1991).

**Table 14.2: Means and Standard Deviations for Study Variables  
(College Sample)**

	Mean	SD
Age	18.45	0.59
SES	5.58	1.74
Personal racial discrimination	1.54	0.75
Centrality	5.18	1.07
Private regard	6.49	0.65
Public regard	3.58	1.06
Intergroup association	4.28	1.21
Equal status	3.99	1.19
Interdependence	5.29	0.99
Institutional supportive norms	4.67	1.17
Academic satisfaction	6.02	1.48

The findings are presented in Table 14.3. The final model explained 28 percent of the variance in academic satisfaction. A marginal main effect was found for public regard, such that those who reported higher public regard reported being less satisfied with their academic life ( $B = -0.24, p < .10$ ). There was also a main effect of perceived equal status, such that perceptions of higher equal status were associated with more satisfaction ( $B = 0.36, p < .01$ ). This was qualified by two interactions. There were no other main effects of racial identity or racial climate but several interactions, three with private regard and two with centrality.

The first interaction was between private regard and equal status ( $B = 0.42, p < .05$ ). The main effect of equal status on satisfaction can be seen in Figure 14.3. What is also evident is that individuals who reported higher private regard reported higher satisfaction when they perceived their school as fair relative to those who perceived less equal status.

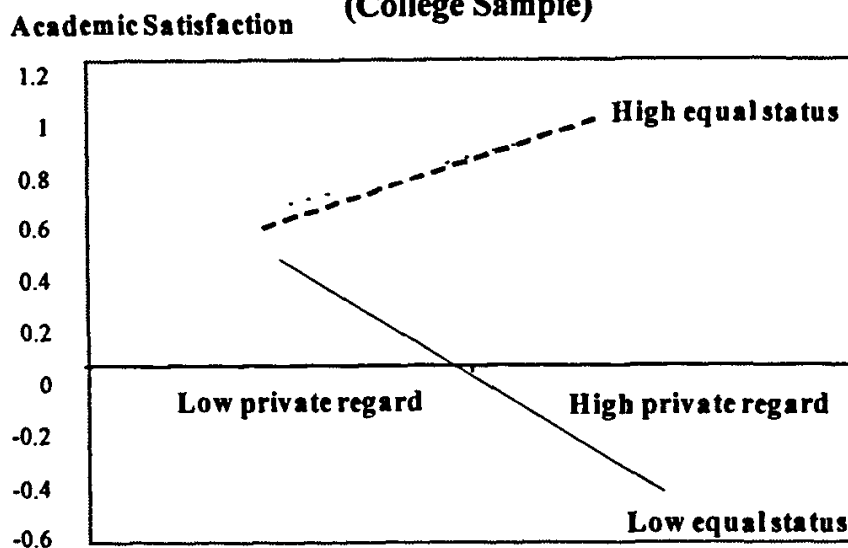


**Table 14.3: Hierarchical Regression of Racial Identity and School Racial Climate Predicting Academic Satisfaction (College Sample)**

Model F df regression, df R2 change	Step 1		Step 2		Step 3	
	0.42 (6,156)		1.08 (13,149)		2.112** (25,137)	
	0.02		.07		.19**	
	B	Std. Err.	B	Std. Err.	B	Std. Err.
Intercept	2.23	3.89	0.99	3.91	0.39	3.72
Gender	-0.05	0.28	0.07	0.29	-0.02	0.28
SES	-0.08	0.07	-0.08	0.07	-0.11+	0.07
Southeast PWI	0.25	0.34	0.60	0.37	0.72*	0.36
Midwest PWI	0.34	0.37	0.72+	0.41	0.83*	0.40
Age	-0.01	0.21	0.03	0.21	0.07	0.20
Discrimination	0.14	0.16	0.23	0.18	0.21	0.17
Private Regard			-0.35+	0.20	-0.20	0.23
Public Regard			-0.19	0.13	-0.24+	0.13
Centrality			-0.06	0.13	-0.04	0.12
Association			-0.04	0.12	-0.11	0.12
Equal Status			0.24+	0.13	0.36**	0.13
Supportive Norms			-0.08	0.14	-0.01	0.15
Interdependence			-0.09	0.15	-0.10	0.15
Priv Reg x Association					0.27	0.23
Priv Reg x Equal Status					0.42*	0.21
Priv Reg x Supportive					-	0.30
Priv Reg x Interdepend.					1.21***	0.23
Pub Reg x Association					0.47*	0.11
Pub Reg x Equal Status					-0.13	0.12
Pub Reg x Supportive					-0.11	0.15
Pub Reg x Interdepend.					0.21	0.16
Cent x Association					0.04	0.11
Cent x Equal Status					-0.11	0.13
Cent x Supportive					-0.39**	0.16
Cent x Interdependence					0.41	0.14
					0.13	

\*p&lt;.05 \*\*p&lt;.01 \*\*\*\*p&lt;.0001

**Figure 14.3: Interaction Between Private Regard and Equal Status  
(College Sample)**



The second interaction, between private regard and interdependence ( $B = 0.48, p < .05$ ), is pictured in Figure 14.4. Similar to the first interaction, there was a stronger, positive relationship between private regard and satisfaction among students perceiving higher interdependence on campus, that is, perceiving racial groups as working together, having positive interactions and valuing the contributions of the other group.

**Figure 14.4: Interaction of Private Regard and Interdependence  
(College Sample)**

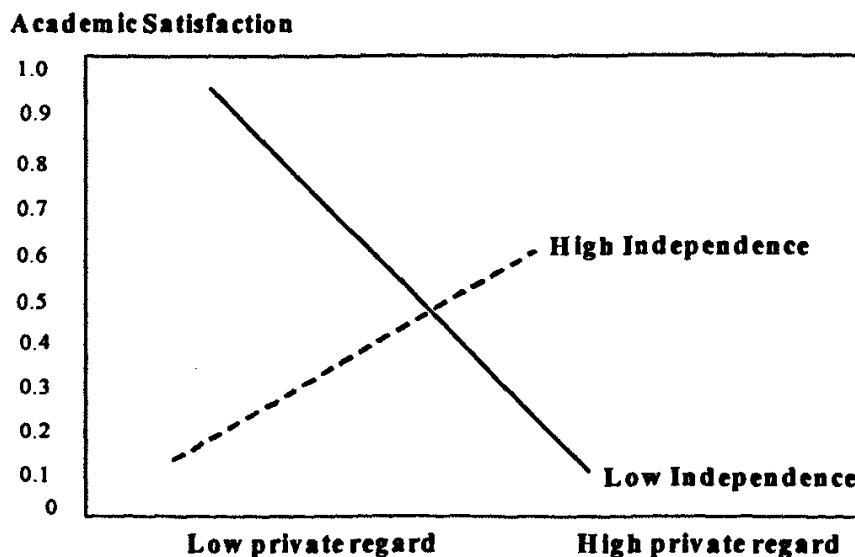
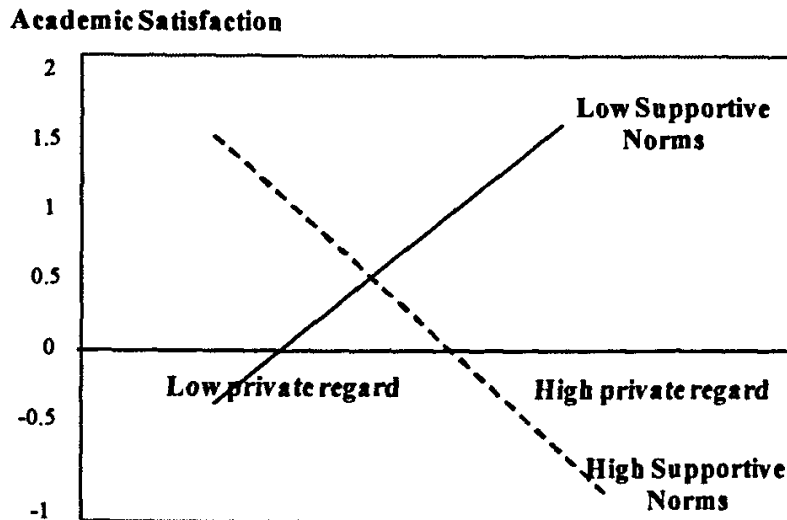


Figure 14.5 shows the third interaction, between private regard and supportive norms ( $B = -1.21, p < .001$ ). Here, incongruence is associated with higher satisfaction in that there was a significant, negative relationship between private

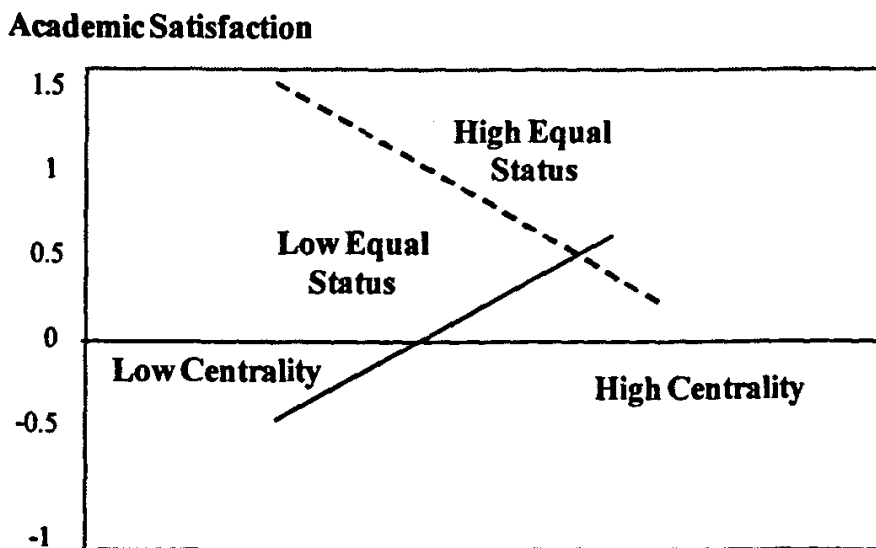
regard and academic satisfaction among students perceiving institutional norms as being more supportive of intergroup contact relative to those with more negative supportive norms perceptions.

**Figure 14.5: Interaction of Private Regard and Supportive Norms (College Sample)**

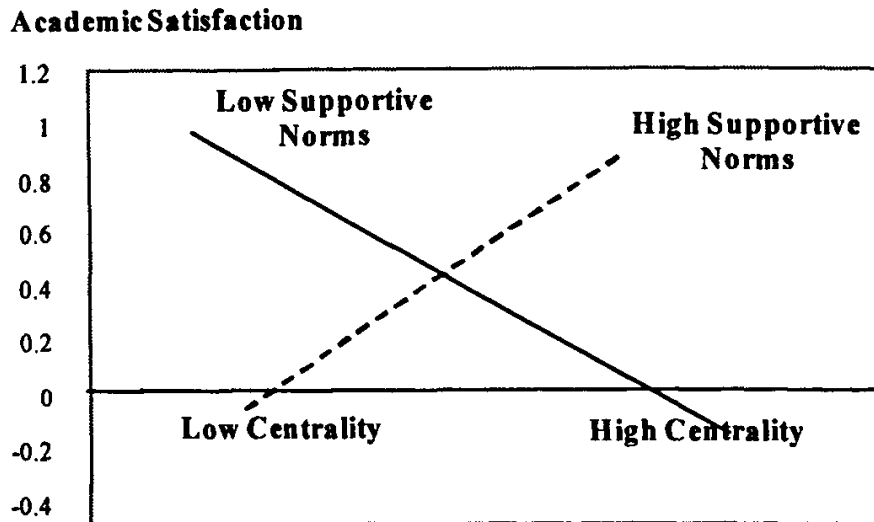


Two interactions were found for centrality. Figure 14.6 shows that equal status was not a factor in academic satisfaction for students higher in centrality, although the lower centrality individuals did differ ( $B = -0.39, p < .01$ ). In Figure 14.7, we see that higher perceived university support for intergroup contact is associated with higher satisfaction for high centrality individuals, compared to lower perceived support ( $B = 0.41, p < .05$ ).

**Figure 14.6: Interaction of Centrality and Equal Status (College Sample)**



**Figure 14.7: Interaction of Centrality and Supportive Norms  
(College Sample)**



### **Discussion**

The college sample results provided some support for our congruence perspective, while other findings were counter to our predictions. The significant interactions between private regard and equal status, private regard and interdependence, and centrality and supportive norms are consistent with our expected relationships, indicating that racial identity-context congruence and academic outcomes relate to affective connections to the college context (academic satisfaction) necessary for autonomous motivation in the setting (Deci and Ryan, 2008).

Two other interaction effects were unexpected, however. Private regard was positively related to academic satisfaction for those perceiving fewer supportive institutional norms, and negatively related to satisfaction for those reporting more supportive norms. One reason for this finding could be that information obtained from the racial climate is differentially related to students' beliefs about the significance of race (centrality) relative to their affective feelings about their race (private regard). Administrative support for intergroup contact may give African American students the message that racial difference is valued and that group membership is an important characteristic to consider in one's interactions. For students higher in centrality, this will be congruent with their beliefs, and the interaction between centrality and supportive norms supports this (Figure 14.7). On the other hand, more institutional efforts to support positive intergroup contact may reflect the administration's efforts to improve a college context where racial problems and tensions are present. For instance, African American students may see the administration's support as reactive rather than an institutional value and as efforts that may force them into interactions that likely will be negative. For individuals higher in racial pride (private regard) then, perceiving more institutional efforts to support intergroup relations may relate to a more negative experience of

their college academic life (lower satisfaction) than those perceiving fewer institutional efforts (as suggested by Figure 14.5). These results suggest that different dimensions of racial climate may interact in ways not fully captured in this study.

The resulting interaction between centrality and equal status, at first glance, appeared to be counter to what would be expected based on our congruence perspective. In this case, higher centrality related to higher satisfaction among students reporting lower equal status across racial groups, while centrality related positively to satisfaction among students perceiving lower equal status. However, a closer consideration of the equal status climate dimension could help illuminate the seemingly unexpected finding. Perceiving equal status within an academic setting could signal a color-blind ideology, which could mean that group differences are downplayed, which would be incongruent with high centrality beliefs. Thus, students higher in centrality might feel less satisfied in their academic settings when perceiving these norms. An alternative explanation is that among higher race central students perceiving lower racial equality may relate to higher academic satisfaction, because negative academic experiences may be more likely to be attributed to factors related to inequality rather than to the self. The findings raise important questions about what constitutes congruence or incongruence in relation to the significance dimension of racial identity beliefs (centrality) relative to affective beliefs (private regard).

As in the high school sample, we found no interaction effects for public regard, although there was a main effect. Public regard may function uniquely from other assessed dimensions of racial identity, perhaps because public regard does not concern individuals' own perceptions of their group but, rather, their beliefs about others' perceptions. Public regard may have a greater impact on other forms of motivation (e.g., educational values, utility beliefs, or expectations). Unlike the high school sample, we found interactions for centrality in the college sample, which may speak to the need to distinguish between aspects of climate that give youth messages about the significance of race, rather than how much their group is liked and respected.

The college sample was able to shed insight into how different aspects of climate can be congruent with youths' racial identity beliefs. In fact, significant interactions resulted with three of the four measured dimensions of racial climate. In contrast, there were no significant interactions with intergroup association. This variable may not have informed congruence effects in this study because the intergroup association scale was primarily concerned with the frequency of intergroup contact rather than the positivity or negativity of the interactions. The other racial climate variables tap into the quality of intergroup interactions and thus may be more informative for examining how racial identity-context congruence relates to affective connections with students' academic contexts. We also saw evidence of congruence effects related to both the significance and affective domains of racial identity. However, findings suggest different processes related to congruence for significance and affective beliefs around racial identity. Finally, the

two examples suggest similar and different congruence effects in secondary and post secondary contexts.

### ***Future Directions and Conclusions***

This chapter has extended the description of the congruence perspective offered in Byrd and Chavous (2011) by describing specific conditions of racial identity-context congruence and showing how congruence can occur on multiple dimensions of racial climate and across levels of education. This research calls on scholars interested in the effects of racial identity on motivation and achievement to also consider the norms and values in the settings where youth are situated.

The data in this chapter point to several areas of future exploration. One direction is to measure the match in racial attitudes even more closely. Instead of assuming that positive intergroup interactions mean African Americans are liked, participants could report on how positively African Americans are perceived in their schools. Similarly, participants could report on how much they see racial group membership emphasized or celebrated in their school settings. Other racial attitudes can contribute to congruence as well, such as individuals' ideological beliefs around the meaning of race (Sellers et al., 1998). For instance, the degree to which participants themselves have a multicultural orientation could be differentially associated with their feelings of belonging in schools with different perceived ideological value systems (e.g., schools with multicultural approach or color-blind/assimilation approach), as suggested by Chrobot-Mason and Thomas (2002).

Another direction of exploration is to consider how dimensions of racial climate interact in determining congruence with racial identity beliefs. For example, to what extent would high racial centrality be congruent or incongruent with a perceived school racial climate characterized by high equal status, but also a color-blind ideology? Similarly, it is important to explore whether congruence between different aspects of racial climate and racial identity beliefs has an additive effect on motivation, or whether congruence on some dimensions of racial climate can compensate for incongruence in other areas. Finally, while our analyses focused on comparing students with higher or lower racial identity beliefs relative to the sample, future research also could consider youth with varying levels of endorsement of particular identity beliefs (i.e., differences in the nature and effects of racial identity-context congruence for individuals with very strong beliefs versus those with moderate beliefs, or with youth who vary in their patterns across a particular set of identity beliefs). Finally, while we focused on motivational outcomes related to individuals' connections with their proximal academic contexts, future work might consider the implications of congruence or incongruence for other motivational outcomes, such as educational values or future aspirations.

In sum, our goal in this chapter and empirical examples was to complicate the discussion of the linkages between African American racial identity and achieve-

ment motivation by offering a framework explicitly considering the role of school context. Results suggest the utility of considering variation among African American students, both in their racial identity beliefs and in ways they experience race in their daily academic settings. Our conceptual framework and examples highlight how similar racial identity beliefs can have different consequences depending on students' experience of their school/institutional racial climate. Our work has important implications and potential for informing literatures on ethnic minority achievement motivational processes. One implication is that a strong and positive sense of African American identity is not incompatible with positive academic identities and motivation beliefs, and contexts that affirm students' positive views of their group identity can lead to their developing even more positive connections between their personal identities and schooling. Thus, interventions aimed at changing African American youths' educational values or identity beliefs may be less effective relative to efforts to create more inclusive academic contexts.

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