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Examining school ethnic-racial socialization in the link between race-related stress and academic well-being among African American and Latinx adolescents

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ABSTRACT

Experiences with race-related stressors at school are linked to negative academic consequences, such as lowered belonging and engagement. One factor known to buffer racial stressors is ethnic-racial socialization (ERS). Although students receive ERS messages in school, less is known about how school ERS may reduce the negative consequences of school race-related stress (SRS) on youth's academic outcomes. To date no studies have examined the moderating effects of school ERS on SRS and whether the associations vary for African American and Latinx youth. Thus, the current study examined the direct effects of SRS and school ERS on youth's academic well-being, the moderating role of school ERS against SRS, and whether these associations varied for African American and Latinx youth. Multiple group regression analysis with 221 African American and 219 Latinx adolescents demonstrated that SRS was negatively associated with the academic outcomes. Cultural socialization was associated with more positive outcomes. Furthermore, there were significant interactions between SRS and color-evasive socialization, such that SRS was associated with lower belonging at higher compared to lower levels of color-evasive messages. Additionally, SRS was associated with less school engagement for those who reported high color-evasive socialization messages, but there was no association for those who reported low color-evasive messages. The results indicate that color-evasive school ERS messages can exacerbate the negative associations between SRS and academic well-being for both African American and Latinx youth and highlight how school racialized experiences may have unique or similar effects across groups. Implications for culturally relevant school practices and interventions are discussed.

Overwhelming evidence indicates that African American and Latinx youth experience racial discrimination in school from teachers and peers (Assari & Caldwell, 2018; Banerjee et al., 2018; Benner & Graham, 2011; Wong et al., 2003). Racialized experiences influence race-related stress, defined as emotional, physical, or psychological strain that taxes or exceeds one's coping resources and threatens well-being resulting from experiences with racism and discrimination (Plummer & Slane, 1996; Utsey et al., 2002). Research with Latinx adolescents has found a negative association between race-related stress and academic well-being, specifically with school belonging (Roche & Kuperminc, 2012), an important predictor of academic success (Gillen-O'Neel & Fuligni, 2013). However,

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research has not directly explored the influence of race-related stress on academic well-being outcomes with African American adolescents. Given that students report multiple racial discriminatory experiences per day with many of these experiences occurring within school (English et al., 2020; Hope et al., 2015), school race-related stress might shape academic well-being, specifically feelings of connection and engagement with their school, for African American and Latinx youth.

One factor that might buffer the negative effects of race-related stress on students' academic well-being is ethnic-racial socialization (ERS). ERS includes messages and behaviors transmitted to youth about race, ethnicity, and managing racial discrimination (e.g., Hughes et al., 2006; Wang et al., 2020). Data demonstrate that some parental ERS messages can buffer the negative effects of racial discrimination on both African American and Latinx adolescents' academic, identity, and mental well-being (e.g., Butler-Barnes et al., 2019; Bynum et al., 2007; Saleem & Lambert, 2016; Sanchez et al., 2018). However, less is known about how school ERS may reduce the negative consequences of school race-related stress (SRS) on youth's academic well-being and how this may vary for African American and Latinx youth, who are often underserved and report racial discrimination in schools (Benner, 2017). Because schools are an important socialization context where youth discuss race and have racial encounters (Aldana & Byrd, 2015; Howard, 2020; Saleem & Byrd, 2021), this study aimed to fill these gaps in research by investigating the link between SRS and school belonging and engagement. Furthermore, the study examined school ERS as a moderator of these associations and whether the moderating effects differed by race/ethnicity for African American and Latinx adolescents.

1. Race-related stress

The Integrative Model of Minority Child Development (Garcia Coll et al., 1996) highlights the importance of race-related stressors on the development of youth of color with attention to environmental (e.g., school) and culturally relevant factors (e.g., ERS) that are salient to the development and adjustment of youth of color across domains of functioning. Ecological theories suggest that youth develop within nested and interrelated systems that influence experiences and outcomes across development (Bronfenbrenner, 1992; Spencer et al., 1997). The microsystem is the most proximal to the child and includes immediate relationships (e.g., parent) and institutions (e.g., school) that the child interacts with that can impact development. One salient microsystem, the school, has a critical role in shaping academic well-being through students' experiences and interactions with teachers and peers (Eccles & Roeser, 2011). Negative interactions within schools, such as racially discriminatory experiences, are linked to a myriad of consequences for academic well-being such as achievement, engagement, and belonging as well as their psychological functioning (Benner et al., 2018; Chavous et al., 2008; Wong et al., 2003).

Experiences with racial discrimination can create race-related stress (Carter, 2007). Within a developmental and ecological model on racial stress and trauma, Saleem et al. (2019) proposed that the ecological contexts in which youth of color are embedded can influence their experiences with and management of racial stress. At the community level, schools are a salient context for youth. Race-related stress associated with the school context may have negative implications on adolescents' academic well-being. Adolescence is a vulnerable period in which youth are grappling with questions about themselves in trying to determine who they are, how they compare to others, and what their future might hold (Ogbu, 1981; Spencer et al., 2006). Furthermore, students' school-based racialized experiences during adolescence are especially important as youth may be more aware of racism during this developmental period and may concurrently desire social connection within school. Interactions within school and with salient socializers, such as teachers, can shape how adolescents perceive themselves, their feelings about school, and their connection to school and the curriculum (Arnett, 2004; Eccles & Roeser, 2011).

Although there can be multiple perpetrators of racial discrimination in schools, significant research highlights several ways that teachers can engage in racially discriminatory behaviors such as interpersonal encounters, unfair grading practices, inequitable disciplinary practices, and disproportional discouragement of African American students from pursuing advanced classes (Fisher et al., 2000). Teachers tend to hold more negative perceptions and academic expectations for African American and Latinx students as compared to European American students (Glock, 2016; Tenenbaum & Ruck, 2007), which in turn can relate to less positive student-teacher interactions (Pringle et al., 2010; Van den Bergh et al., 2010). Additionally, as compared to European American children, African American and Latinx children are recommended more often for special education classes and less frequently for gifted programs, significant predictors of long-term academic outcomes (Weir, 2016). Racial bias and discriminatory experiences such as these can be sources of SRS for African American and Latinx youth, who report significantly more SRS as compared to European American youth (Fisher et al., 2000).

Experiences with race-related stressors in school can lead to alienation and school disengagement (Osbourne, 1997). Moreover, SRS may influence youth's sensitivity to or worry about how teachers or peers perceive their intelligence and values (e.g., hardworking; Jernigan & Daniel, 2011). Such feelings related to SRS may elicit stereotype threat (i.e., the concern [consciously or unconsciously] with confirming stereotypes of academic incompetence), which in turn might influence racially minoritized students to dis-identify with school or academics to protect their self-concept from the negative associations of race-based academic stereotypes (Crocker & Major, 1989; Steele, 1997). Thus, it is likely that SRS can negatively influence students' feelings of school belonging and engagement (Jernigan & Daniel, 2011).

2. SRS and school belonging

School belonging entails students' perceptions of the degree to which they feel accepted, included, and supported by others in the school community (Anderman, 2003; Goodenow & Grady, 1993). School belonging is important for several academic outcomes such as achievement, academic competence, and school withdrawal (Gillen-O'Neel & Fuligni, 2013; Korpershoek et al., 2020). For example,

using a large-scale dataset that included African American and Latinx adolescents, Faircloth and Hamm (2005) found that school belonging positively predicted students' grades and grade point average. Similarly, with a longitudinal sample of Latinx adolescents, higher school belonging perceptions were generally related to higher perceptions of academic competence and expectations over time (Hernández et al., 2016).

There is some evidence that school racial stressors are linked with decreased school belonging for youth of color at the secondary level (Booker, 2006; Bottiani et al., 2016; Dotterer et al., 2009; Roche & Kuperminc, 2012). For example, in a sample of Latinx adolescents, stress associated with discrimination was negatively correlated with school belonging, but stress related to immigration was not associated with school belonging (Roche & Kuperminc, 2012). Additionally, research with African American adolescents has found that racial discrimination is negatively linked to students' school belonging (e.g., Bottiani et al., 2016). More research supports a link between discrimination and belonging at the college level (e.g., Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Johnson, 2007; Nuñez, 2009). Furthermore, a meta-analysis examining individual and social level predictors of school belonging found that teacher support was one of the strongest predictors of school belonging (Allen et al., 2018). As such, repeatedly experiencing racial discrimination from teachers, or others in school, is likely to negatively influence students' feelings of respect or value at school.

3. SRS and school engagement

School engagement broadly involves students' thoughts, feelings, and behaviors toward the school environment, learning activities, and curriculum (Fredricks et al., 2004). Students who are engaged participate in school activities and classroom discussions and exhibit interest in learning (Fredricks et al., 2004). In contrast, when students are disengaged, they demonstrate disruptive behavior and are more likely to withdraw from school (Hirschfield & Gasper, 2011; Rumberger & Rotermund, 2012). For example, in a longitudinal sample of predominantly African American adolescents in Grades 7–11, the rate of change in engagement after accounting for several covariates was negatively associated with the rate of change in problem behaviors over time (Wang & Fredricks, 2014). It is important to understand students' engagement with consideration to school race-related experiences.

Studies have not explored SRS and school engagement, but research with both African American and Latinx adolescents have found that racial/ethnic discrimination is negatively associated with school engagement (Banerjee et al., 2018; Benner et al., 2018; Byrd & Carter Andrews, 2016; Dotterer et al., 2009; Leath et al., 2019). Furthermore, studies examining general stress and engagement have found negative associations (Choudhuri et al., 2012; O'Neal, 2018). For example, in a longitudinal sample of Latinx youth, reports of stress negatively impacted students' engagement over time and engagement mediated the association between stress and achievement (O'Neal, 2018). Race-related stress connects more specifically to one's social identity, and thus it is likely that race-related stress created from the school might lead to school disengagement.

4. The role of school ERS in youth's response to school racial stress

One protective factor for youth who experience SRS could be ERS. The parental ERS socialization literature has served as a foundation for understanding the content of school ERS. Research has shown that parental ERS tends to be positively related to academic outcomes (Wang et al., 2020) and can moderate the negative effects of discrimination on adolescents' academic (e.g., Wang & Huguley, 2012) and psychosocial outcomes (e.g., Harris-Britt et al., 2007; Neblett et al., 2008). Other sources of socialization may also play a similar role in helping youth manage the effects of SRS. The current study is the first to explore the buffering role of school ERS.

School ERS can be applied within the broader construct of school climate, school "norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices, and organizational structures" (Thapa et al., 2013, p. 358). Although some conceptualizations include race and culture (e.g., Thapa et al., 2013), others do not. Additionally, work specific to school racial climate often has an emphasis on racial discrimination as compared to ERS messages (Byrd, 2017). Yet, students of color often understand aspects of race and culture through a variety of methods that can be understood as forms of socialization including interpersonal interactions, teaching practices, and policies (Saleem & Byrd, 2021). For example, messages can be conveyed through non-verbal methods (e.g., bulletin boards displaying messages about a specific culture) or verbal messages, which are most explicit. The current study focused on three types of school ERS messages perceived by youth: (a) cultural socialization, (b) color-evasive socialization, and (c) critical consciousness socialization.

Cultural socialization refers to opportunities for youth to learn about their own culture (Byrd, 2017). Such opportunities can come in history courses, through celebrations like Black History Month, or when reading culturally affirming books by authors sharing the students' background. Previous research has shown that school instruction and practices that incorporate adolescents' culture are important for engagement and belonging (e.g., Aronson & Laughter, 2016; Dotterer et al., 2009; Howard, 2001; Schachner et al., 2019; Young, 2010). Del Toro & Wang (2021) found that school cultural socialization was associated with better grades over time and the associations were mediated by ethnic-racial identity. However, other research in racially minoritized samples suggests that adolescents' perceptions of cultural socialization in school may not be directly associated with academic outcomes like belonging, interest, and academic self-concept (Byrd, 2015, 2016).

In contrast to cultural socialization, *color-evasive socialization messages*, often termed colorblind, de-emphasize the role of race and culture in society and one's personal life (Byrd, 2017). Scholars theorize such messages are harmful for the engagement of youth of color (Atwater, 2008; Schofield, 2006), but few studies have examined youths' perceptions of these messages from school or the effects of such perceptions. It is likely that color-evasive messages are most evident in direct exchanges where teachers or staff tell students that "race doesn't matter" or minimize race. Some work indicates that greater perceptions of color-evasive socialization are related to lower feelings of belonging, academic competence, and intrinsic motivation for African American youth (Byrd, 2015).

Finally, *critical consciousness socialization messages* encourage awareness of racial inequality in the U.S. (Byrd, 2017). These messages teach youth that inequality exists and provides them opportunities to develop strategies to work against it. Critical pedagogy programs are seen as beneficial for the engagement of marginalized youth in particular (e.g., Luter et al., 2017; Seider & Graves, 2020). For some youth, awareness of racism may help promote academic effort through positive racial socialization (Sanders, 1997). However, only a few studies have measured students' perceptions of critical consciousness socialization in everyday classrooms. There is developing evidence that critical consciousness socialization is associated with lower feelings of belonging (Byrd, 2016), but is not directly related to other academic outcomes (Byrd, 2015, 2016). The negative association may be due to the fact that when youth learn about inequality, they may experience anger about injustice (Bañales et al., 2021) and feelings of resentment toward those who are more privileged in their schools (Hardiman et al., 2007). Thus, school messages about inequality might also be associated with lower public regard and less belonging. However, studies of youths' critical consciousness beliefs find positive relations to academic engagement (Godfrey et al., 2019).

As noted, only a few studies suggest that school cultural socialization, color-evasive socialization, and critical consciousness socialization have direct effects on academic outcomes. These dimensions may instead serve as buffers against the negative effects of SRS. For example, within the family literature, there is evidence that cultural socialization messages focused on learning about one's history and promoting pride can reduce the negative consequences of racial stressors for youth (Brown & Tylka, 2011; Neblett et al., 2008; Wang & Huguley, 2012). Although there are mixed findings documenting the buffering effects racial barrier messages, some studies indicate the benefits of such messages (Hughes et al., 2006). In one study, African American youth who reported more parental messages about racial barriers reported less anger and depressive symptoms when they experienced discrimination as compared to those who reported fewer messages (Saleem & Lambert, 2016).

ERS messages may have a buffering effect for several reasons. First, positive messages about one's group (i.e., cultural socialization) may promote a positive ethnic-racial identity, which is a known buffer of discrimination (Yip et al., 2019), and recent research has explored how school ERS messages are associated with ethnic-racial identity (e.g., Byrd & Legette, 2021). Second, messages about the prevalence of racial discrimination and their group's historical resistance to it can help youth make external and structural, rather than internal and/or individual attributions, to racialized experiences (Bañales et al., 2021). Such attributions are associated with a number of positive outcomes (Bañales et al., 2021; Crocker & Major, 1989; Hope & Bañales, 2019; Luter et al., 2017; Rapa et al., 2018).

When students learn about inequality and their group's efforts to overcome it, they may also gain a greater sense of agency for combating individual and institutional discrimination and learn to identify political and civic engagement opportunities that can mitigate it (Bañales et al., 2021; Hope et al., 2019; Seider et al., 2018; Seider & Graves, 2020). The acknowledgment of these messages in school may allow students to make meaning of race-related stressors and provide a sense of validation in the face of SRS that can help to preserve academic success.

Color-evasive socialization messages, in contrast to critical consciousness and cultural socialization messages, might promote internal attributions for discrimination and thus increase feelings of frustration and hopelessness. That is, if youth are being told in school that race does not matter in their lives and youth experience negative treatment, they may conclude that their interpretation of reality is inaccurate or that their individual characteristics are the source of the treatment (Han, 2009; Lewis, 2001; Schofield, 2006). Studies suggest that adults with more color-evasive attitudes tend to make personal attributions for racial inequality and endorse beliefs of White superiority (Speight et al., 2016). Such negative feelings might translate into lower engagement with and connection to school.

It is, however, possible that racism-aware socialization could make youth more susceptible to the negative effects of discrimination. Some find that such parental socialization is negatively associated with well-being in African American adolescents (Davis & Stevenson, 2006; Stevenson et al., 1997) and, under some conditions, can exacerbate the effects of discrimination on well-being (Harris-Britt et al., 2007; Park et al., 2019). It is possible that learning about inequality may worsen the effects of SRS because youth could feel low self-efficacy to combat a systemic issue or gain a sense of distrust of institutions (Davis & Stevenson, 2006; Jost & Hunyady, 2005; Saleem & Lambert, 2016). In contrast, socialization that produces color-evasive attitudes might make youth less aware of the prevalence and impact of racial discrimination on their lives, producing an "ignorance is bliss" effect (e.g., Coleman et al., 2013). For example, African American college students were less bothered by racist social media posts when they had higher color-evasive attitudes (Tynes & Markoe, 2010).

The current study is the first to test school ERS as a moderator. Only one previous study provides some related evidence; Byrd and Ahn (2020) constructed latent profiles of multiple dimensions of ERS from families and schools and discrimination from schools, neighborhoods, and the internet for a sample of adolescents from four ethnic-racial groups. The profile that reported high discrimination and high socialization was higher on some academic outcomes (i.e., interest, academic self-concept, and usefulness of school) as compared to a profile with average discrimination and low socialization. Notably, however, the high discrimination/socialization profile was lower on academic engagement.

5. Ethnic variation in the effects of school ERS

Examining ethnic group heterogeneity in the benefits of school ERS is important given the dearth of literature on school ERS and the need to understand these practices within both heterogeneous and homogeneous school contexts. Although scholars have indicated that family ERS has some distinct characteristics across African American and Latinx families, there is also considerable overlap in the overall purpose and process of ERS (Hughes et al., 2006). Worth noting, ERS messages within African American families are often motivated by concerns that their children will experience racism, thus leading parents to instill pride and prepare youth for discrimination (Hughes et al., 2006, 2009; Neblett et al., 2009). However, in Latinx families ERS messages are often motivated by

desires to retain culture and identity in the pressure of assimilation (Hughes et al., 2006; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2009). For Latinx families, ERS is influenced by generation status or salience of ethnic racial identity (e.g., Joseph & Hunter, 2011; Tran & Lee, 2010; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2009), with some studies showing that later generational youth report fewer ERS messages (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2009). The family ERS literature provides a foundation for our understanding of ERS within schools, and considerations of how ERS may be unique across ethnic-racial groups can provide a context for similarities and differences in school ERS.

Within the school context, youth's perceptions of messages focused on cultural pride of their own group (e.g., cultural socialization) and messages focused on racial injustice and how to respond (e.g., critical consciousness socialization) may vary based on racial-ethnic and cultural differences. These differences may influence whether school ERS messages reduce the negative consequences of SRS. Youth may have some similar encounters with racial stressors within and outside of school (e.g., Rosenbloom & Way, 2004), and both African American and Latinx youth report high prevalence with discrimination and academic/discipline disparities within the school context compared to other groups (e.g., Fisher et al., 2000; Hunter, 2016; Skiba et al., 2011). However, there is also evidence that Latinx youth may have some distinct racialized stressors (e.g., immigration, assimilation; Rosenbloom & Way, 2004) that can influence their experiences of SRS. Furthermore, the protective benefits of school ERS may vary based on youth's perceptions of mistreatment, acknowledgement, and value of their own ethnic-racial groups within their school context, which can be understood in part by SRS and school ERS.

6. Current study

Previous research documents that receiving messages about race and having race-related experiences in school can influence academic outcomes for African American and Latinx youth (Aronson & Laughter, 2016; Assari & Caldwell, 2018; Banerjee et al., 2018; Benner & Graham, 2011; Byrd, 2017; Wang & Huguley, 2012). However, little is known about the unique effects of SRS on the academic well-being of African American and Latinx adolescents. Additionally, to date no studies have examined how school ERS messages may buffer the effects of SRS on youth's academic well-being and whether these effects vary by race/ethnicity for youth contending with race-related stressors.

To address these gaps, Aim 1 of the current study examined whether the associations between SRS, cultural socialization, critical consciousness socialization, and color-evasive socialization and academic well-being (i.e., school belonging and school engagement) varied for African American and Latinx adolescents. Some previous literature leads us to expect a link between higher SRS and lower belonging and engagement (e.g., Benner et al., 2018; Bottiani et al., 2016; Dotterer et al., 2009; Leath et al., 2019). Furthermore, although the parental ERS literature suggests positive relations between cultural socialization and certain aspects of academic well-being (e.g., academic engagement; Wang et al., 2020), to date existing evidence does not support a similarly consistent link for school cultural socialization (Byrd, 2015, 2016). Therefore, we did not hypothesize a direct relationship in either group. However, we expected color-evasive socialization to be negatively associated with academic well-being for both groups (Byrd, 2015). Furthermore, we did not expect critical consciousness socialization to be directly related to engagement, but it might be negatively associated with belonging in both groups (Byrd, 2015, 2016).

Aim 2 explored whether the protective effects of school ERS messages, in the link between SRS and academic well-being, differed by race/ethnicity. Based on findings within the overall ERS literature, it was hypothesized that cultural socialization would mitigate the effects of SRS whereas color-evasive socialization would exacerbate the effects of SRS for both groups (Brown & Tylka, 2011; Neblett et al., 2008). Given mixed findings on the protective effects of messages that teach youth about racial discrimination and how to respond (Byrd & Ahn, 2020; Harris-Britt et al., 2007; Park et al., 2019), there were no a priori hypotheses about the protective effect of critical consciousness messages across groups. However, with the unique histories and cultural factors for African American and Latinx people within the United States, there may be differences in how critical consciousness socialization moderates the relation between SRS and academic well-being.

7. Method

7.1. Participants and procedures

The sample consisted of 221 African American and 219 Latinx U.S. adolescents aged 13 to 17 years ($M = 15.08$, $SD = 1.37$). The sample was 50% girls and students were in Grades 9–12 ($M = 9.35$, $SD = 1.59$). Participants lived in 288 cities in 39 states, the most common states being Texas (12.7%), Florida (11.5%), California (10.5%), Georgia (6.1%), and New York (4.9%).

Procedures were approved by the Institutional Review Board at the third author's university. Participants were recruited from around the country through Qualtrics Panels, an online survey delivery service that researchers can use to recruit study participants. Parents were contacted through an email invitation that included the expected duration of the study and the type of incentive available for participation. Parents completed a screening survey; if they had a child between the ages of 13–17 years who attended public or private school, the parent was asked to give consent for their child to complete the study. The parent was then asked to have their child complete the rest of the survey online. Adolescents then completed demographic information; those who identified as European American, African American, Asian American, or Latinx were allowed to continue to the rest of the survey until quotas for their ethnic-racial group (approximately 200 in each group) were filled. There were two attention checks, asking participants to select a particular response option (e.g., "Strongly agree"). The first was in the School Climate for Diversity block (nfailed = 215) and the second was in the outcomes block (nfailed = 59). Participants who failed were included in the current sample as long as they met other criteria (116 who failed attention check #1 and 35 who failed attention check #2). Participants who completed the survey too quickly (i.e., less than

one-half of the median completion time) were excluded ($n = 73$, including 21 Black/African American and 23 Hispanic/Latinx). Parents were compensated in credit that they could redeem through Qualtrics for gift cards and other awards. Although Asian American students are also minoritized and experience negative consequences from race-related stressors (Rosenbloom & Way, 2004), their racialized experiences, ERS, and outcomes are more distinct from African American and Latinx youth. Thus, for the purpose of the current study European American and Asian American adolescents were excluded from the sample.

7.2. Measures

7.2.1. School ethnic-racial socialization

School ethnic-racial socialization was assessed using the School Climate for Diversity Scale–Secondary (SCD-S; Byrd, 2017). The socialization subscales were cultural socialization (five items, $\alpha = 0.87$; e.g., “at your school, you have chances to learn about the history and traditions of your culture”), critical consciousness socialization (seven items, $\alpha = 0.80$; “teachers teach about racial inequality in the United States”), and color-evasive socialization (five items, $\alpha = 0.74$; “your school encourages you to ignore racial/ethnic difference”) on a scale of 1 (*not at all true*) to 5 (*completely true*). Composite scores were formed by taking the average of the items, with higher scores indicating higher values.

7.2.2. School racial stress

Adolescents’ self-reported the extent to which in-person school discrimination was upsetting as measured the educational subscale of Adolescent Discrimination Distress Index (ADDI, Fisher et al., 2000) (four items, $\alpha = 0.84$). Participants responded to whether an incident has occurred because of their race or ethnicity (e.g., “you were wrongly disciplined or given after-school detention”) and if so, how much it had upset them on a scale from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*extremely*). Scores were summed with higher scores indicating more bothersome discrimination at school.

7.2.3. School belonging

School belonging was measured with the relatedness subscale of the Basic Needs Satisfaction scale adapted for school (Deci & Ryan, 2000). The scale includes eight items asking youth how much they have friends at school and how much others at the school like them (e.g., “the people I talk to at school do not seem to like me”) and was measured on a 1 (*not at all true*) to 5 (*completely true*) scale ($\alpha = 0.83$).

7.2.4. Engagement

Engagement was measured with eight items ($\alpha = 0.81$) adapted from the Scale of Academic Engagement (Skinner & Belmont, 1993) and the Motivated Strategies of Learning Questionnaire (Pintrich et al., 1991) measuring how much students participate in school and persist after failure (e.g., “When I have trouble understanding something, I give up”) on a scale of 1 (*not at all true*) to 5 (*completely true*).

7.3. Analytic strategy

The study analyses were conducted with Mplus 7 (Muthén & Muthén, 1998–2012) and Full Information Maximum Likelihood (FIML) with robust standard errors. FIML allows for model estimation using missing data theory that includes all available data. Multiple group analysis was conducted to examine whether the (a) associations between SRS, cultural socialization, critical consciousness socialization, and color-evasive socialization and academic well-being varied for African American and Latinx adolescents; and (b) moderating effects of school ERS messages in the link between SRS and academic well-being differed by race/ethnicity. Assumptions for regression were tested and met. Mean deviated product terms were utilized to examine the interactions between SRS and the school ERS messages. Significant interaction terms were probed using Aiken et al. (1991) procedures. Simple slope analyses were conducted to evaluate the moderator at one standard deviation above and below the mean. Multiple group analyses were conducted to examine whether the regression paths varied for African American and Latinx youth. First, models in which the paths for both groups were forced to be equal were compared to a model with the paths for both groups freely estimated. The Wald chi-square test was utilized to compare fully constrained models to models with one path at a time freely estimated. Significant improvement in model fit for specific paths conveyed that the path was significantly different across groups and should be freely estimated. Therefore, the final models were informed by the Wald chi-square tests to include free and constrained paths as needed for African American and Latinx youth (see Table 2 and Table 3 for final models).

Analyses were conducted in two phases and school belonging and engagement were examined in separate models. Gender and age were controlled in each model. For Aim 1, school belonging and engagement were regressed on SRS with a multiple group framework to examine whether the associations varied for African American and Latinx youth. For Aim 2, the two-way interactions between SRS and school ERS messages were added to examine whether the school ERS messages moderated the associations between SRS and academic well-being and whether moderation varied by race/ethnicity.

8. Results

8.1. Associations between school racial stress, school ERS, and academic well-being

8.1.1. School belonging

Bivariate associations among study variables are presented in Table 1. School belonging was regressed on age, gender, SRS, cultural socialization, critical consciousness socialization, and color-evasive socialization. The Wald chi square tests revealed that none of these paths varied by ethnicity, therefore, in the final model all paths were constrained to be equal for African American and Latinx youth. In the final model, SRS was associated with lower school belonging ($b = -0.05, p < .001$). Cultural socialization was associated with higher belonging ($b = 0.31, p < .001$) and critical consciousness was marginally associated with lower belonging ($b = -0.08, p = .09$). There was not a direct effect of color-evasive socialization on belonging ($b = -0.02, p = .59$).

With the addition of the two-way interactions, the Wald chi-square test indicated that no paths varied by ethnicity to improve model fit. Therefore, all paths were constrained to be equal. In the final model, SRS was associated with less school belonging ($b = -0.04, p < .001$) and cultural socialization was associated with increased school belonging ($b = 0.32, p < .001$). Additionally, color-evasive socialization moderated the association between SRS and school belonging ($b = -0.02, p = .03$; see Table 2 and Fig. 1). Simple slope analyses indicated that the significant negative association between SRS and school belonging was stronger at higher ($b = -0.06, p < .001$) as compared to lower ($b = 0.03, p = .02$) levels of color-evasive messages.

8.1.2. School engagement

School engagement was regressed on age, gender, SRS, cultural socialization, critical consciousness socialization, and color-evasive socialization. The Wald chi square tests revealed that the association between gender and school engagement varied by ethnicity (Wald $\chi^2(1) = 4.82, p = .03$). Thus, in the final model, the path between gender and school engagement was freed and all other paths were constrained to be equal for African American and Latinx youth. SRS was associated with decreased school engagement ($b = -0.04, p < .001$). Cultural socialization was associated with increased school engagement ($b = 0.15, p = .001$) and color-evasive socialization was associated with decreased school engagement ($b = -0.12, p = .004$). There was not a direct effect of critical consciousness on engagement ($b = -0.02, p = .75$).

With the addition of the two way interactions, the Wald chi-square test revealed that the path between gender and school engagement, again, varied by ethnicity (Wald $\chi^2(1) = 5.71, p = .02$). Therefore, this path was freed to improve model fit and all other paths were constrained to be equal across the two groups. In the final model, SRS was associated with less school engagement ($b = -0.03, p < .001$). Cultural socialization was associated with more school engagement ($b = 0.16, p < .001$) and color-evasive socialization was associated with less school engagement ($b = -0.12, p = .01$). Additionally, color-evasive socialization moderated the association between SRS and school engagement ($b = -0.02, p = .02$); see Table 3 and Fig. 2). Simple slope analyses indicated a significant negative association between SRS and school engagement for youth who reported higher levels of color-evasive messages ($b = -0.05, p < .001$). However, there was no association between SRS and school engagement for youth who reported low levels of color-evasive messages ($b = -0.01, p = .38$).

9. Discussion

The current study addressed several gaps within the literature on school ERS in examining the direct effects of SRS and school ERS on academic well-being, the moderating role of school ERS against SRS, and whether these associations varied for African American and Latinx adolescents. Direct effect findings indicated that SRS was negatively associated with academic well-being outcomes. Cultural socialization was associated with more school belonging and engagement, and color-evasive socialization was associated with decreased academic engagement for both groups. Moderation results revealed significant interactions between SRS and color-evasive

Table 1
Bivariate correlations means, and standard deviation for study variables, by ethnicity.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Age	–	0.02	–0.10	0.03	0.06	0.04	0.06	0.07
2. Gender	–0.09	–	0.13 *	0.02	–0.04	0.02	0.04	–0.01
3. School Racial Stress	0.11 ⁺	0.05	–	–0.06	0.16 *	0.16 *	–0.33 ***	–0.33 ***
4. Cultural Socialization	–0.01	0.11 ⁺	0.08	–	0.66 ***	0.47 ***	0.33 ***	0.16 *
5. Critical Consciousness	0.03	0.03	0.30 ***	0.60 ***	–	0.49 ***	0.10	0.03
6. Color-Evasive	0.11 ⁺	0.06	0.25 ***	0.51 ***	0.43 ***	–	0.02	–0.12 ⁺
7. Academic Belonging	–0.08	–0.03	–0.36 ***	0.32 ***	0.03	0.09	–	0.40 ***
8. Academic Engagement	–0.04	–0.18 **	–0.22 **	0.04	–0.08	–0.11	0.47 ***	–
African American mean (SD)	15.09 (1.37)	0.52 (0.50)	4.44 (4.82)	3.23 (0.99)	3.08 (0.86)	2.74 (0.94)	3.71 (0.73)	3.85 (0.74)
Latinx mean (SD)	15.06 (1.37)	0.48 (0.06)	4.26 (5.27)	3.06 (1.00)	2.89 (0.84)	2.87 (0.90)	3.78 (0.77)	3.79 (0.76)

Note. Correlations for African American adolescents above diagonal; correlations for Latinx adolescents below diagonal.

⁺ $p < .10$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Table 2
Regression of academic belonging on school racial stress and school ethnic-racial socialization.

	Step 1				Step 2			
	African American		Latinx		African American		Latinx	
	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE
Intercept	3.80***	0.36	3.89***	0.35	3.74***	0.36	3.84***	0.35
Age	-0.01	0.02	-0.01	0.02	-0.00	0.02	-0.00	0.02
Gender	0.00	0.06	0.00	0.06	0.02	0.06	0.02	0.06
School Racial Stress (SRS)	-0.05***	0.01	-0.05***	0.01	-0.04***	0.01	-0.04***	0.01
Cultural Socialization (CS)	0.31***	0.04	0.31***	0.04	0.32***	0.04	0.32***	0.04
Critical Consciousness (CC)	-0.08 ⁺	0.05	-0.08 ⁺	0.05	-0.07	0.05	-0.07	0.05
Color-Evasive (CE)	-0.02	0.04	-0.02	0.04	-0.03	0.04	-0.03	0.04
SRS X CS					0.00	0.01	0.00	0.01
SRS X CC					0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01
SRS X CE					-0.02*	0.01	-0.02*	0.01
	R ² = 0.25*** (0.04)		R ² = 0.25*** (0.04)		R ² = 0.25*** (0.04)		R ² = 0.26***(0.04)	

⁺ * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

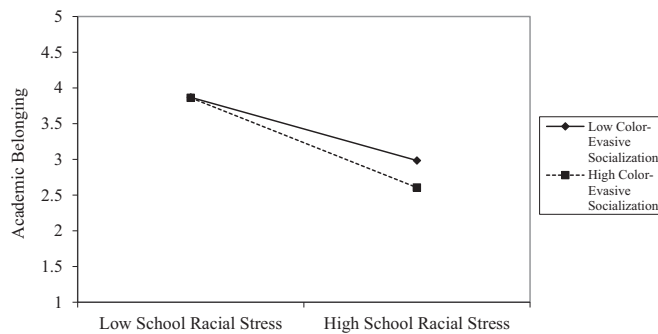


Fig. 1. School color-evasive messages moderate the association between school racial stress and academic belonging for African American and Latinx adolescents.

Table 3
Regression of academic engagement on school racial stress and school-ethnic-racial socialization.⁺

	Step 1				Step 2			
	African American		Latinx		African American		Latinx	
	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE
Intercept	3.67***	0.38	3.79***	0.38	3.59***	0.38	3.74***	0.37
Age	0.01	0.03	0.01	0.03	0.02	0.03	0.02	0.03
Gender	0.03	0.09	-0.27*	0.10	0.04	0.09	-0.28*	0.10
School Racial Stress (SRS)	-0.04***	0.01	-0.04***	0.01	-0.03***	0.01	-0.03***	0.01
Cultural Socialization (CS)	0.15**	0.04	0.15**	0.04	0.16***	0.04	0.16***	0.04
Critical Consciousness (CC)	-0.02	0.05	-0.02	0.05	-0.00	0.05	-0.00	0.05
Color-Evasive (CE)	-0.12**	0.04	-0.12**	0.04	-0.12*	0.04	-0.12*	0.04
SRS X CS					-0.00	0.01	-0.00	0.01
SRS X CC					0.00	0.01	0.00	0.01
SRS X CE					-0.02*	0.01	-0.02*	0.01
	R ² = 0.12*** (0.03)		R ² = 0.13*** (0.03)		R ² = 0.13*** (0.03)		R ² = 0.16***(0.04)	

⁺ * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

socialization, such that SRS was associated more strongly with lowered reports of school belonging for youth who reported higher color-evasive messages as compared to those who reported lower messages. Additionally, SRS was associated with lower school engagement for those who reported higher school color-evasive socialization messages. Although we anticipated differences between African American and Latinx youth, the findings were similar for both African American and Latinx youth across the final models. Thus, our study suggests that even though African American and Latinx families engage in ERS socialization messages for different reasons, youth’s perceptions and the functionality of ERS outside of the nuclear family may be unique. ERS received within the school context may work similarly in shaping school belonging and engagement for African American and Latinx youth. Particularly in the context of SRS, color-evasive messages may invalidate African American and Latinx youth’s racialized experiences, thereby decreasing

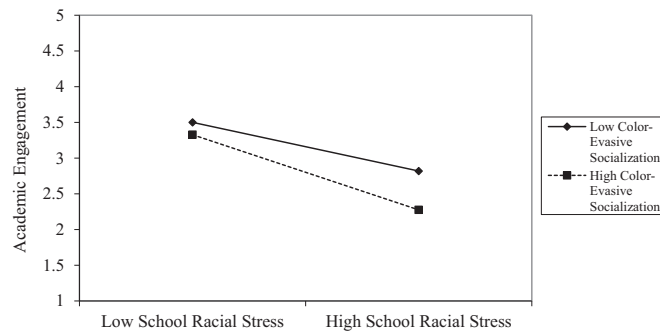


Fig. 2. School color-evasive messages moderate the association between school racial stress and academic engagement for African American and Latinx adolescents.

their collective sense of belonging and engagement.

9.1. School racial stress and academic well-being

Consistent with our hypotheses and previous literature (e.g., Benner et al., 2018; Bottiani et al., 2016; Dotterer et al., 2009; Leath et al., 2019; Roche & Kuperminc, 2012), SRS was associated with decreased school belonging and engagement. It is likely that repeatedly experiencing racial discrimination in school leads students to perceive a part of their social identity (i.e., race) is not valued in the school context. As a way to cope with these racialized experiences students might disconnect from the school environment to maintain positive domains of their identity and self-concept (Osborne & Jones, 2011). In this way, SRS might influence students' lowered school engagement and feelings of belonging. Additionally, it is possible that SRS impacts students' perceptions of their school as a just and fair environment. For example, students who perceive their teachers as empathetic and fair report higher school belonging as compared to students who report more negative interactions with teachers (Allen et al., 2018; Wegmann, 2017). Moreover, research with African American students has found that increases in students' perceptions of inequitable discipline practices is negatively associated with their school belonging (Bottiani et al., 2016). Thus, SRS might foster students' negative perceptions of the school environment or of themselves and reduce their school engagement and belonging. Thus, it is important for school psychologists and other adults within the school context to consider the presence and impact of racial stressors on students' schooling experiences.

9.2. Cultural socialization and academic well-being

Consistent with theory (Aronson & Laughter, 2016; Young, 2010) and in contrast to our hypotheses, cultural socialization was a positive predictor of students' school belonging and school engagement. The findings suggest that positive opportunities to learn or engage about one's own racial/ethnic culture may allow youth to internalize positive messages about their race and increase students' positive experiences within school (Del Toro & Wang, 2021). For example, school staff may look for ways to celebrate and appreciate students' cultural, racial, and ethnic diversity. These experiences can increase students' perceptions that their cultural community is important and respected which likely impacts students' connection and engagement to school. Our findings align with other studies indicating that African American students were more engaged in school when their learning environment was personal and relational, when they had teachers who demonstrated positive attitudes about students, and when they had teachers who used culturally responsive teaching (Love & Kruger, 2005). However, our findings were contrary to Byrd (2015, 2016) who found that cultural socialization did not predict students' school belonging. The samples were different from the current study, with Byrd (2015) only including African American students and Byrd (2016) including European American, Asian American, African American, and Latinx students. Additionally, the two previous studies controlled for perceptions of other racial climate dimensions, which may have suppressed the effect of cultural socialization.

9.3. Critical consciousness and academic well-being

Previous literature has indicated that critical consciousness socialization might be negatively associated with feelings of belonging (Byrd, 2015, 2016). There was, in fact, a marginally significant negative relation for both African American and Latinx youth. As noted, learning about inequality may increase the perception that others do not value one's ethnic-racial group (Rivas-Drake, 2011; Rivas-Drake et al., 2009) or illicit anger about injustice (Bañales et al., 2021). Furthermore, as expected, critical consciousness socialization was not significantly associated with engagement. It is likely that our non-significant findings are due to the complexity of critical consciousness. Other studies have found that the three dimensions of critical consciousness (i.e., critical reflection, sociopolitical efficacy, and critical action) associate differently with various outcomes for racially minoritized youth (Diemer & Rapa, 2016; Watts et al., 2011). For example, Godfrey et al. (2019) utilized profile analyses and found four classes of critical consciousness that varied in levels across three dimensions and varied in their association with school engagement. To foster adjustment and well-being, youth may need sufficient space to not only understand inequality and interrogate racism, but also to foster feelings of hope and self-efficacy to

take action. Given the importance of addressing topics of racial stressors within the school context (Howard, 2020; Saleem & Byrd, 2021; Stevenson, 2014), school staff can look for opportunities to foster each of these components of critical consciousness. For example, Diemer et al. (2021) highlighted promising critical consciousness practices that could be applied within the school context, such as utilizing “schooling models informed by activism and resistance, ethnic studies curricula, partnerships between youth and adults, youth organizing, and youth leadership councils.”

9.4. Color-evasive socialization and academic well-being

As predicted, color-evasive messages were associated with less engagement and qualified by a significant interaction with SRS, but color-evasive messages were not directly associated with belonging. Receiving color-evasive messages in school that ignore or discount racial differences may feel invalidating to youth of color (Atwater, 2008; Schofield, 2006). A previous study also showed that receiving color-evasive messages in school was associated with worse outcomes for youth, including lowered perceptions of belonging, academic competence, and intrinsic motivation (Byrd, 2015). Furthermore, receiving these messages while concurrently experiencing racial stressors may decrease feelings of acceptance, belonging, and desire to engage at school. The lack of a direct association with belonging was qualified by a significant interaction with SRS.

Color-evasive messages similarly moderated the association between SRS and school belonging and school engagement. Aligned with our hypotheses, the negative associations between SRS and school belonging and engagement were stronger for youth who reported high amounts of color-evasive messages. Color-evasive socialization messages leave youth without a framework to process their experiences of discrimination (Han, 2009; Lewis, 2001; Schofield, 2006) and likely increase damaging internal attributions (e.g., Speight et al., 2016). It is also possible that by ignoring race with color-evasive messages and practices, students perceive that teachers, staff, or other students might deny or become defensive about the fact that racialized experiences occur, which in turn can create more stress for African American and Latinx students. Additionally, if teachers or school psychologists ignore race in the classroom or larger school context, they are likely perpetuating racial/ethnic gaps in learning opportunities. Of note, receiving high and low color-evasive messages in the context of SRS was associated with lowered belonging, but the association was stronger for youth reporting more color-evasive messages. This finding conveys that higher color-evasive messages can worsen the negative association between SRS and belonging for African American and Latinx adolescents. According to the integrative model of child development, consideration of race must receive explicit attention when addressing youth developmental outcomes for youth of color (Garcia Coll et al., 1996). As such, teachers, school psychologists, and other staff must acknowledge race and the implications of racial stressors on students' schooling experiences (Howard, 2020). School staff should aim to increase their racial literacy skills by proactively addressing and responding to race-based experiences and concerns that arise (Stevenson, 2014). There is also a collective urgency to establish safe and supportive schools that address racial stressors across multiple levels of the school ecology to foster a healthy school racial climate (Saleem et al., 2021).

Contrary to our hypotheses, neither school cultural socialization messages nor critical consciousness messages influenced the associations between SRS and youth's academic well-being. Although learning about one's culture in school material, activities, and discussions (i.e., school cultural socialization) can increase academic well-being, these messages in isolation may not be sufficient to reduce the racial stress that youth feel within school. As indicated within the family literature, receiving a combination of ERS messages could be more beneficial for youth (e.g., Neblett et al., 2008). Similarly, learning about racial inequality and how race plays a role in success and opportunities may increase awareness about discrimination and bias, however, the way in which school critical consciousness is measured does not provide direct strategies for how youth can respond to or overcome the racial barriers. More research is needed to examine different dimensions and combinations of critical consciousness socialization and how these dimensions shift over time in ways that may influence academic well-being for African American and Latinx students. Messages about cultural pride and racial inequities might not work in buffering SRS if youth perceive that their group is devalued or if they do not believe that change can actually happen in their schools. Furthermore, if youth receive conflicting ERS messages within school and across other contexts, it may provide confusion for adolescents. Thus, it would be helpful to understand school ERS collectively and in the context of other ERS received outside of the school context.

9.5. Strengths, limitations, and future directions

A primary strength of the study was the examination of ethnic-racial group heterogeneity in understanding SRS and school ERS on academic belonging and engagement for African American and Latinx adolescents. This study is the first to test the moderating role of school ERS against SRS and examine ethnic-racial group heterogeneity within these associations. The study provides novel findings about the role of SRS and school ERS in contributing to academic well-being outcomes for African American and Latinx adolescents.

It is also important to highlight some study limitations. There are other aspects of the school environment that can influence the study variables examined. For example, the ethnic-racial composition of teachers and students can influence youth's exposure to and the effects of SRS or ERS (e.g., Benner & Graham, 2013). Due to limited demographic information within the current study, we were unable to account for school ethnic-racial composition and ascertain whether and how this had an influence. However, there is evidence that the more congruent school ethnic-racial composition is with youth's own ethnic-racial identity, the more likely youth feel a sense of belonging and report positive aspects of school racial climate (Benner & Graham, 2013; Kuo & Yang, 2017; Leszczensky et al., 2017). Therefore, future studies should examine the contributing role of school ethnic-racial composition, or other school climate factors, in understating the interplay between school ERS, SRS, and youth's outcomes. Future studies should also consider novel ways to explore and unpack the multimodal aspects of school ERS.

Another limitation is the use of a cross-sectional design, which inhibits the ability to make causal inferences and confirm directionality in the associations between school racial stress, school ERS, and academic well-being. For example, although we examined school belonging and engagement as outcomes, future studies should consider whether school ERS messages predict belonging and engagement or whether belonging and engagement predict youth's experiences of school ERS. Additionally, given existing evidence that youth's understanding and responses to racial stressors are likely to change across development (Brown & Bigler, 2005; Saleem et al., 2019; Seaton, 2010), it is important for future studies to examine how these experiences change over time and across different development periods (e.g., elementary age).

Additionally, future studies would benefit from considering possible mechanisms that can help explain the associations between school ERS and academic outcomes and between SRS and youth's school belonging and engagement. Notably, previous studies show that ethnic racial identity can explain the association between parental ERS and youth's psychological and academic outcomes (Hughes et al., 2009; Huguley et al., 2019; Rivas-Drake et al., 2014). For example, cultural and critical consciousness socialization messages can assist youth by promoting a strong ethnic-racial identity, which can reduce the effects of race-related stressors (Yip et al., 2019). Similarly, within the school context receiving messages about culture, race, and racial inequities could influence racial awareness and promote a positive self-concept through increased ethnic racial identity (e.g., private regard, public regard), which in turn may increase youth's feelings of belonging and engagement in school. Additionally, experiencing SRS could lead to lowered aspects of ethnic-racial identity (e.g., private regard, public regard) or increased feelings of hopelessness or anger, which in turn may lead youth to feel decreased belonging and less engaged within the school context. Future studies should examine these associations and mechanisms and investigate the heterogeneity among other racially minoritized groups.

10. Conclusions

Given that SRS is associated with negative academic well-being, and racial bias within school is associated with racial disparities for African American and Latinx youth (Fisher et al., 2000; Hunter, 2016; Skiba et al., 2011), schools must find ways to reduce the negative consequences of SRS and promote a healthy school racial climate. Previous studies and the current findings indicate that cultural socialization can promote feelings of belonging and engagement. Thus, school-based programs, trainings, and interventions should identify ways to discuss race and provide students opportunities to learn about the traditions and history of their racial groups to instill pride and promote academic well-being. This can include, but is not limited to, embedding content within curriculum, celebration of cultural holidays, visual depictions, and verbal conversations. School staff should reflect on, and be attentive to, the fact that ERS messages are transmitted across multiple methods (e.g., verbal, curricula) and are communicated directly and indirectly to students (Saleem & Byrd, 2021).

Schools must identify ways to acknowledge the racialized experiences of students and staff instead of avoiding or ignoring such conversations (Howard, 2020; Stevenson, 2014). Results indicate that receiving color-evasive messages in school can perpetuate or exacerbate the negative associations between SRS and academic well-being for both African American and Latinx youth. Receiving such messages can be invalidating or damaging for youth of color who are affected by racism. As such, eliminating color-evasive messages and practices is essential. Schools can start by acknowledging the reality of racism within society, committing to addressing SRS across the school ecology (e.g., policies, staff, students), and equipping students and staff with strategies to counter racial stressors that arise. Racial literacy skills also include applying healthy ERS practices that build students sense of self and self-worth (Stevenson, 2014). Interventions can integrate culturally responsive practices, foster students' ethnic-racial identity development, provide skills to respond to SRS, in addition to increasing staff and students' "ability to recognize and analyze systems of inequality and the commitment to take action against these systems (El-Amin et al., 2017)," such practices may help reduce color-evasive practices and foster student achievement and academic well-being.

Addressing racial stressors across multiple levels of the school ecology is necessary. Whole school approaches to mitigate SRS could include evaluating and modifying biased system level policies and practices, implementing staff training to understand personal bias and develop skills to address school-based racial conflicts and stressors, and delivering direct interventions to students to help them understand and manage the effects of racial stress and trauma (Saleem et al., 2021). Reducing SRS and promoting healthy ERS can foster a positive school racial climate and promote the academic well-being of African American and Latinx adolescents, as well as other youth of color.

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