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Racial Identity, Racial Discrimination, and Classroom Engagement Outcomes Among Black Girls and Boys in Predominantly Black and Predominantly White School Districts

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This study examined the associations among racial identity beliefs (centrality and public regard), racial discrimination, and academic engagement outcomes among 1,659 African American adolescents across two demographically distinct school districts, one predominantly Black, working class (n = *1,100) and one predominantly White, middle class* (n = *559). Across these districts, the youths reported that race was a central aspect of their identity and demonstrated varying levels of public regard. Racial*

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discrimination was negatively associated with academic curiosity and persistence, but this effect was moderated by gender and racial identity. Our findings demonstrate the harmful influence of discrimination on the academic engagement of African American adolescents and the protective roles of racial identity beliefs across gender and school racial contexts.

Keywords: African American adolescents, gender, racial discrimination, racial identity, school racial context

Adolescence is a critical period for identity development. Youth are developing a sense of their personal identities in relation to their social contexts and their interactions within them—often becoming more conscious of how their social identities relate to the ways they are viewed and treated by others. For many African American[1] adolescents, racial identity becomes increasingly salient as youth consider the implications of their racial group membership in their daily lives and in the broader society (e.g., Spencer & Markstrom-Adams, 1990). The school context is an important developmental setting in which to study racial identity processes among Black adolescents, as youths' race-related experiences and beliefs have been linked to a variety of academic achievement outcomes, including motivation and engagement (DeCuir-Gunby, 2009; O'Connor, 1999; Oyserman, Harrison, & Bybee, 2001). Further, Black youth commonly encounter experiences in school that challenge the meaning and value of their racial identities—such as discrimination in classroom and peer contexts (Chambers & Tabron, 2013; Fisher, Wallace, & Fenton, 2000; Thompson & Gregory, 2011)—with deleterious academic impacts (Chavous, Rivas-Drake, Smalls, Griffin, & Cogburn, 2008; Wong, Eccles, & Sameroff, 2003).

However, all youth do not respond to discrimination in the same way. Individual differences in racial identity, or beliefs about the importance and meanings of one's racial group, have helped explain the variation in Black adolescents' experience of and adaptive responses to racial discrimination (Sellers, Caldwell, Schmeelk-Cone, & Zimmerman, 2003; Sellers & Shelton, 2003). Gender is also an important consideration in the school experiences and racial identity processes of Black youth. Black girls and boys occupy distinct social positions in the United States, in part as a result of gendered racial stereotypes leading to differential discriminatory treatment within educational contexts (Ispa-Landa, 2013; James, 2011; Murphy, Acosta, & Kennedy-Lewis, 2013). Furthermore, Black girls and boys may vary in their responses to personal devaluation experiences such as racial discrimination (Chavous et al., 2008; Ispa-Landa, 2013). Few studies, however, have explicitly tested both these contentions in relation to school outcomes.

In our study, we explored the relationships among Black adolescents' school-based racial discrimination experiences, racial identity beliefs regarding the importance (centrality) and affective meanings they attach to being

Black (public regard), and classroom academic engagement (curiosity and persistence). A key objective was to consider gender variation in discrimination experiences and its role as a risk factor for low engagement. We also examined gender variation in the ways racial identity beliefs functioned to promote engagement or mitigate the deleterious impacts of discrimination. Finally, we considered youth in predominantly Black and predominantly White school districts. While racial identity studies have included Black adolescents from demographically diverse communities and school contexts, few studies have considered how school racial context relates to adolescents' discrimination experiences and the roles and functions of racial identity in relation to their academic motivation and engagement.

School-Based Racial Discrimination as an Academic Risk Factor

A growing body of literature provides evidence that racial discrimination operates as a risk factor for negative academic outcomes among Black adolescents (e.g., Neblett, Philip, Cogburn, & Sellers, 2006). Compared with youth in earlier developmental stages, Black adolescents are at increased risk of experiencing racial discrimination—due to increased freedom of movement outside the home and parental/family contexts; increased racial cleavage in peer networks; physical maturation, which can lead to their being viewed as less innocent and more threatening; and increased social cognitive capacities for understanding how they are viewed by others (Chavous et al., 2008). For many Black youth, racial discrimination exposures at school are not uncommon, including reported experiences of negative treatment from teachers (e.g., stereotype-based treatment, harsher punishment than for other children) and from peers (e.g., social exclusion, verbal or physical harassment) (Fisher et al., 2000). Furthermore, documented race differences in teacher/administrator disciplinary practices indicate Black adolescents' likelihood of experiencing racial bias and discrimination in school (Sellers et al., 2003).

School-based racial discrimination experiences may be uniquely detrimental to academic engagement. First, schools are contexts in which adolescents spend significant proportions of their time, in curricular, extracurricular, and social activities. As such, interactions with teachers and peers at school influence how youth think about themselves as learners and, subsequently, their motivation and engagement (Daniels, 2011; Ladson-Billings, 1994). Stereotype-based treatment and overt harassment may undermine Black students' personal sense of value and belonging in the academic context, increasing the likelihood of school disengagement (Dotterer, McHale, & Crouter, 2009; Wong et al., 2003). Indeed, racial discrimination has been linked to a variety of outcomes relevant to school success for Black adolescents—such as declines in grades, academic self-efficacy, and school utility values (Chavous et al., 2008; Wong et al., 2003); decreased school bonding (Smalls,

White, Chavous, & Sellers, 2007; Thomas, Caldwell, Faison, & Jackson, 2009); and more school problem behaviors (Smalls et al., 2007).

Racial Identity as a Promotive and Protective Factor

Although racial discrimination is not uncommon in the lives of Black adolescents, its impact is not the same for all. One source of individual differences in Black youths' responses to discrimination is their racial identity beliefs. Developments in racial identity research have illuminated how adolescents' meaning-making processes around race in the face of discrimination can mitigate the harmful effects of these experiences on psychological and academic outcomes (e.g., Butler-Barnes, Chavous, Hurd, & Varner, 2013; Chavous et al., 2003; Thomas et al., 2009). In the present study, we draw on the Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity (Sellers, Smith, Shelton, Rowley, & Chavous, 1998) to examine adolescents' racial identity beliefs regarding the importance and meanings of their racial group membership. We focus on two dimensions of racial identity, centrality and public regard. Racial centrality is the extent to which youth view their racial identity as an important part of their self-concept and reflects youths' sense of connectedness to their racial group (Sellers et al., 1998). Public regard represents the affective meanings youth attach to their racial identity, specifically beliefs about how others in society view Black people, reflecting youths' awareness of societal racial bias (Sellers et al., 1998).

Examination of the racial centrality and public regard dimensions of racial identity is particularly appropriate for our study's focus on Black adolescents' meaning-making processes in the context of school discrimination. These racial identity dimensions have been implicated—indirectly and directly—in the literature on Black student motivation and achievement, but they are often not examined empirically. For instance, over the past four decades, researchers focused on the "achievement gap" or the "underachievement" of Black youth drew on conceptual frameworks suggesting that Black youths' constructions of a strong Black identity are incompatible with pro-achievement orientations and behaviors. Fordham and Ogbu's (1986) popular ecological-cultural framework asserted that African Americans' historical experiences of discrimination and barriers to economic and social mobility led to the development of an oppositional culture toward mainstream institutions, including schools and pro-academic values and engagement behaviors. This oppositional orientation is said to allow individuals to maintain kinship ties with other in-group members who might sanction them for their school engagement. Similarly, psychological frameworks focused on stigma effects posit that for socially stigmatized minority group members, stronger group identification and more awareness of their group's stigmatized status (made salient through negative stereotypes and stereotyped-based treatment in daily academic contexts) can lead to academic dis-identification, or disconnecting of their personal

identity from academic contexts they associate with being stigmatized (Cokley, McClain, Jones, & Johnson, 2012; Major & O'Brien, 2005). Subsequently, this dis-identification process would lead to decreased interest in and effort on academic tasks. Repeated racial discrimination at school may be experienced by Black youth as a barrier to school success and may convey negative academic expectations and stereotypes. As such, the cultural-ecological and psychological stigma frameworks would suggest that youth with stronger connections to their racial group identity (higher centrality) and those perceiving more societal stigma against Blacks (lower public regard) may be more likely to take on an oppositional orientation to schooling and to be more at risk for academic dis-identification in response to discrimination experiences. However, few studies based on the cultural-ecological and psychological stigma frameworks have explicitly tested these contentions by examining the associations among adolescents' negative race-related experiences (e.g., racial discrimination), their racial identity beliefs, and their academic engagement outcomes.

In contrast, racial identity researchers conceptualize identity beliefs as individual differences in Black youths' meaning-making processes around their group membership that can help explain the variation in their academic outcomes (e.g., Butler-Barnes et al., 2013; Chavous et al., 2003; Cokley et al., 2012; O'Connor 1997, 1999). Within this literature, Smalls and colleagues (2007) describe the cultural-ecological and stigma frameworks as reflecting a "Black identity as risk" perspective. They assert that such frameworks can help inform mechanisms through which membership in a marginalized group can be deleterious to some Black adolescents' academic adjustment. However, they also highlight the dearth of attention to positive linkages of Black identity with pro-achievement values and orientations, a gap noted by other scholars as well (e.g., Zirkel & Johnson, 2016). As such, the authors articulate the "Black identity as promotive" perspective, highlighting evidence of African Americans' historical values around education, including struggles to attain education for upward social mobility and positive community development. From this perspective, Black youth who strongly connect to their Black identity (high centrality) in ways that recognize their group's educational values and the racial biases faced by their group in educational pursuits (low public regard) may be motivated to succeed academically, especially in the face of their own race-related challenges (Grills et al., 2016; Lozada, Jagers, Smith, Banales, & Hope, 2017; White-Johnson, 2012).

Empirical studies support both the "Black identity as risk" and "Black identity as promotive" perspectives, but the overall body of work largely supports the Black identity as promotive perspective. For instance, research with diverse Black youth samples shows positive direct associations of racial centrality with academic engagement outcomes (e.g., Miller-Coto & Byrnes, 2016; Rivas-Drake et al., 2014; Thomas et al., 2009). However, positive public regard beliefs also have been linked to positive school engagement (e.g.,

Rivas-Drake, Hughes, & Way, 2009; Rivas-Drake et al., 2014). Along with direct associations with school engagement, racial identity can play protective roles in relation to Black youths' negative race-related experiences in their daily social contexts, such as discrimination. Racial identity beliefs reflecting higher centrality have been shown to moderate (buffer) relationships between discrimination and Black adolescents' academic outcomes, such that the negative effects of racial discrimination on academic outcomes are mitigated (Chavous et al., 2008; Sellers, Copeland-Linder, Martin, & Lewis, 2006; Thomas et al., 2009; Wong et al., 2003). Similarly, negative public regard beliefs have been shown to mitigate the negative effects of discrimination on Black adolescents' mental health and behavioral outcomes, through providing a lens through which youth can process and cope with their experiences (Sellers et al., 2006). Less research, however, has examined public regard as a protective factor in relation to academic outcomes. Taken together, extant scholarship suggests a stronger connection to their Black identity (higher centrality) can promote youth motivation in ways articulated by the "Black identity as promotive" perspective, but perceiving negative societal views of one's group (lower public regard) can also undermine engagement, consistent with the "Black identity as risk" perspective. However, in the context of experiencing racial discrimination at school, stronger racial centrality and lower public regard may buffer youth against the academic costs of those experiences.

Gender Considerations

Researchers have begun to shed light on gender differences in Black adolescents' racial identity processes (Plummer, 1995; Spencer, Fegley, & Harpalani, 2003), including experiences of school-based racial discrimination (James, 2011; Murphy et al., 2013). Within this work, scholarly attention has focused on how school contexts present unique challenges to Black boys that help explain the achievement disparities between Black boys and other youth (DeCuir-Gunby, 2009). Black boys are particularly likely to be perceived as aggressive and violent, especially as they develop during adolescence (James, 2011; Rogers & Way, 2015), and these gendered racial constructions influence their treatment and adjustment outcomes at school (Howard, 2008). For example, Black adolescent boys have higher rates of suspension and expulsion than other youth with similar infractions (e.g., Noguera, 2008) and are more likely to be referred to remedial classes based on behavior (Ferguson, 2000; Mason, Gunersel, & Ney, 2014).

The school-based discrimination experiences of Black girls have been relatively understudied as girls of color are often excluded from the literature on girls and gender processes in education (Anderson, 2015; Blake, Butler, Lewis, & Darensbourg, 2011; Brown, 2010). Similarly, in the literature on Black youth, concern over the status of Black males in education (although

important and warranted), along with Black girls' relatively higher academic achievement and attainment outcomes, can result in underexamination of Black girls' educational processes (Chavous & Cogburn, 2007). Increasingly, researchers are documenting the race-related treatment that Black girls routinely encounter at school, for instance, harsher school discipline compared with female peers from other racial/ethnic groups (Blake et al., 2011). One contributing factor is teachers' treatment of Black adolescent girls reflecting racialized gender expectations (Lei, 2003; Morris, 2005, 2007; Murphy et al., 2013). For instance, Morris (2005, 2007) describes how teachers labeled Black girls as defiant and disruptive ("loud", "aggressive," "combative") for behaviors incongruent with White, mainstream femininity norms, such as passivity and quietness. Further, the girls were likely to be disciplined for violating these norms. In sum, Black boys and girls both experience discriminatory treatment in their day-to-day school settings, although the frequency and nature of these experiences may vary across gender groups.

Black boys and girls also may respond to discrimination in different ways, in part due to differences in gender socialization. For example, Black adolescent boys' experience of disrespectful and punitive treatment at school by teachers (based in negative stereotypes and feelings of threat around Black males) has been linked to their development of oppositional orientations toward schooling (e.g., devaluing school, decreasing interest and subsequent effort) (Beasley, Miller, & Cokley, 2014; Okonofua & Eberhardt, 2015; Swanson, Cunningham, & Spencer, 2003). This line of scholarship suggests that these maladaptive attitudes are reinforced by teachers (e.g., through punitive treatment) who do not have a lens for understanding how Black boys may construct identities (characterized by expressions of hypermasculinity or bravado) as coping strategies for survival in an unsupportive learning context (Spencer et al., 2003). The extant literature presents different perspectives on Black girls' academic responses to racial discrimination. Social identity scholars suggest that because girls are socialized to value relationships, discriminatory experiences that threaten valued relationships may be particularly detrimental to their academic engagement (e.g., Oyserman et al., 2001). Racial socialization scholarship suggests that Black girls are more likely to maintain strong school values and engagement in the face of discrimination due to cultural and gender socialization in Black families emphasizing Black femininity as aligned with academic achievement and the necessity of education for women's self-sufficiency and mobility (Archer-Banks & Behar-Horenstein, 2012; Smalls et al., 2007). These lines of study focused on within-group analyses of boys or girls and did not explicitly compare discrimination impacts for boys and girls in the same schools.

While there is a dearth of work examining gender variation in school-based racial discrimination, Chavous and colleagues' studies with Black middle and high school students from a middle-class, suburban school district found that boys generally reported more teacher and peer racial discrimination than girls (Chavous et al., 2008). These experiences affected boys' and girls' motivation in different ways. Among boys, teacher and peer discrimination negatively affected all the academic engagement indicators assessed (e.g., grade performance, self-concept, school importance values). Among girls, racial discrimination related to fewer indicators of academic engagement but to more negative psychological adjustment outcomes. The findings suggest that Black boys experiencing racial discrimination at school are at heightened risk for school disengagement while Black girls may be less vulnerable to the negative impacts of these experiences on academic engagement (although at psychological cost).

In the Chavous et al. (2008) study, racial identity also functioned differently for boys and girls in relation to school racial discrimination. While discrimination negatively affected all youth, there were weaker negative associations of teacher discrimination with academic performance, school importance values, and academic self-concept for boys with higher racial centrality than for boys with lower centrality. Similarly, higher racial centrality buffered the negative impacts of peer discrimination on girls' school importance values. Both findings are consistent with the Black identity as promotive perspective (Smalls et al., 2007). However, having lower racial centrality also played a protective role for Black girls; reported teacher discrimination was related to higher academic self-concept among girls with lower race centrality. The authors suggested that for some Black girls, de-emphasizing their racial identity might have allowed them to maintain classroom engagement when experiencing discriminatory treatment from their White teachers. This study, however, examined a single racial identity belief—centrality. Thus, it is unclear whether beliefs around societal racial bias (public regard) would mitigate the negative impacts of discrimination on boys' and girls' school engagement.

Schools as Racialized Developmental Contexts

Finally, our examination of linkages between racial identity and academic engagement considers adolescents' school demographic contexts. Schools are developmental contexts that influence academic adjustment in a variety of ways, including interactions with teachers and peers (Stewart, 2007; Thibodeaux, 2013). Studies of racial identity processes have included Black adolescent samples from a variety of demographic contexts, from schools in predominantly Black working-class communities (e.g., Chavous et al., 2003) to predominantly White middle-class suburban schools (e.g., Ispa-Landa & Conwell, 2014), to ethnically diverse schools (Chavous et al.,

2008; Douglass, Mirpuri, & Yip, 2017; Yip, Seaton, & Sellers, 2010). While researchers often highlight the importance of considering context in interpreting their study findings, there has been little explicit consideration of how Black adolescents' racial identity beliefs may function within differing demographic contexts (Hurd, Sellers, Cogburn, Butler-Barnes, & Zimmerman, 2013). For instance, to what extent are racial connectedness (centrality) and awareness of societal racial bias (public regard) important for academic engagement in school contexts in which Black youth are the minority or the majority? How might youths' racial identity function in relation to discrimination within such settings?

Black students routinely experience race-related stressors in predominantly White schools that may undermine academic engagement (Carter, 2007; Carter-Andrews, 2009, 2012; Ferguson, 2002; Howard, 2008). For instance, in a qualitative study of Black high-achieving students attending a predominantly White high school, Carter-Andrews (2009) describes students with high racial group connectedness and critical awareness of how racism operated in their surrounding school settings. These students actively rejected the notion that academic success was unattainable as "White property" (p. 301) and were motivated to achieve as Black students in a White hegemonic environment. Venzant-Chambers and Huggins (2014) articulate the "racial opportunity costs" of achievement for academically successful students of color as they navigated school contexts and spaces reflecting White middle-class norms and expectations. These costs included deemphasis of their cultural background within academic settings, daily interactions and treatment that reflect pejorative stereotypes of their racial group, and exclusion from peer groups and social circles. Such studies raise complex questions around the roles of racial identity in the school lives of Black students in predominantly White schools, for instance, whether some students' academic engagement may be supported by high racial centrality and understanding of societal racism (beliefs aligned with lower public regard), especially when they personally experience discrimination. This line of research also suggests that some students with stronger centrality and lower public regard (reflecting awareness of racial bias) may experience challenges to school engagement in predominantly White school settings.

Racial identity processes are also relevant among youth in majority Black school settings. The demographic make-up of U.S. public school teachers has remained overwhelmingly White and middle class (85% White, women) (Boser, 2014), and predominantly Black public schools are less likely to be well resourced, including having highly experienced teachers (Diette, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 2006; National Center for Education Statistics, 2015). Consequently, Black youth in these settings are likely to be taught by White teachers with little prior experience working with communities of color or extensive multicultural training (e.g., Goldenberg, 2014). As such, Black youth in majority Black schools may experience racial discrimination,

such as through intergroup teacher interactions and treatment based in negative racial stereotypes, which can undermine classroom engagement. Furthermore, Black youth may experience both intergroup and intragroup peer discrimination based on race, the latter of which may be particularly likely in majority in-group contexts (Williams, Tolan, Durkee, Francois, & Anderson, 2012). Regarding racial identity, scholars highlight how predominantly Black schools can support identities that contribute to school success (Graham & Anderson, 2008; Long, Monoi, Harper, Knoblauch, & Murphy, 2007). For some youth, exposure to diverse in-group peers, including those who excel academically, may contribute to a shared sense of racial and community connectedness (promoting high centrality), which in turn can positively affect academic motivation and engagement (Ladson-Billings, 1994). Harper's (2007) review of urban school studies highlights how Black adolescents in predominantly same-race schools developed an appreciation of the historical context of Black identity (exposures emphasizing group connectedness and accomplishment in the context of historical racism), which related to better achievement and self-esteem. Such orientations (reflecting high centrality and lower public regard) may help promote academic engagement. However, little research has focused on racial discrimination experiences within predominantly Black schools, and further, it is less clear whether and how racial identity beliefs may protect youth from the negative academic impacts of such experiences within these settings.

Study Aims

In this study, we explored the associations among Black adolescent boys' and girls' school-based racial discrimination experiences, racial identity beliefs, and classroom academic engagement. Key goals were to examine gender variation in (a) teacher and peer discrimination experiences and (b) the associations among racial discrimination experiences, racial identity beliefs, and academic engagement outcomes. In addition, (c) we considered the nature of these associations within a predominately Black and a predominately White school district context. First, we expected that Black boys would report more experiences of discrimination (teacher and peer) than Black girls (Chavous et al., 2008). Second, based on prior research demonstrating the negative effects of racial discrimination on adolescent motivation (Wong et al., 2003), we hypothesized that teacher and peer discrimination would be negatively associated with classroom engagement (curiosity and persistence), especially among boys. We also hypothesized direct, positive associations of racial centrality and public regard with academic engagement, based on scholarship highlighting the promotive, motivating roles of racial connectedness (Chavous et al., 2003) and the motivational risks of racial stigma awareness (Rivas-Drake et al., 2014). Research has demonstrated the protective functions of strong racial connectedness and awareness of racial bias in the context of

discrimination experiences (e.g., Sellers et al., 2006). As such, we hypothesized that higher centrality and lower public regard would moderate the associations of discrimination with engagement outcomes, attenuating the negative effects of discrimination on engagement.

Regarding gender, our hypotheses derive from extant scholarship. Black boys may be particularly likely to respond to marginalizing, disrespectful treatment in a setting by disengaging from the setting and the demands of the setting (Chavous et al., 2008; Howard, 2008; Swanson et al., 2003). Thus, we expected that boys would show more classroom disengagement (lower curiosity and persistence) when reporting more racial discrimination, especially teacher discrimination. However, theory and research also highlight the deleterious effects of discrimination for Black girls, suggesting that contextual experiences that threaten valued relational contexts (e.g., discrimination from teachers and peers) may be particularly detrimental to girls' academic self-constructions (Archer-Banks & Behar-Horenstein, 2012; Oyserman, Grant, & Ager, 1995). As such, we expected that school-based discrimination would show negative, weaker but still significant associations with girls' academic engagement.

Finally, there is a dearth of research examining contextual variation in the associations among racial discrimination, racial identity, and academic engagement, specifically the variation between youth in predominately Black and predominately White school settings. As such, this study tested contentions from prior scholarship linking racial centrality and public regard to positive academic engagement for Black adolescents, especially in predominately White schools, where they may routinely experience token status and challenging racial climates (Butler-Barnes, Varner, Williams, & Sellers, 2017).

Method

Participants

The study sample included 1,659 self-identified Black/African American adolescents from two public school districts in a Midwestern metropolitan area. The participants were part of a larger longitudinal study on racial socialization processes through the Center for the Study of Black Youth in Context (principal investigators: Tabbye Chavous, Carla O'Connor, Robert Jagers, Stephanie Rowley, and Robert Sellers, National Science Foundation, #0820309). Participant data from Wave 1 were utilized, and the sample ranged from 12 to 19 years old at Time 1 (M = 14.42 years, SD [standard deviation] =1.65). All the participants self-identified as male or female (54% female). Participants were recruited from middle and high schools in two school districts within the same school system, one predominantly Black (District 1, n = 1,100) and one predominantly White (District 2, n = 559). Each district included one middle school and one high school. The average participant

parent/primary caregiver education was a bachelor's degree, and District 1 parents/caregivers reported slightly lower education (some college) than those from District 2 (college degree).

School District Demographic Contexts

District 1 included schools drawing from predominantly Black working-class communities (71% of students qualified for free or reduced lunch). For District 1, the total population of the city had remained constant over the past 10 to 15 years (29,793 residents per the 2000 Census compared with 29,319 residents in the 2010 Census). However, there were noteworthy demographic changes. In 2000, Black and White residents accounted for almost equal parts of the total city population, 46% (13,690) and 47% (13,989), respectively, but by 2010, this shifted to 57% (16,842) Black residents and 37% (10,962) White residents. From 2000 to 2010, the percentage of families below poverty level went from 7.8% to 17.7% for the total population and approximately 13.1% for Black families. For the data collection period, the estimated median household income was approximately $45,000. During the study data collection, the administrative staff in District 1 were predominantly Black (56%) and White (43%), with a few Latinx administrators (1%). Conversely, the teaching staff were 61% White and 39% Black. Approximately 94% of district students were African American, with 1.6% Caucasian, 1.5% Asian, 0.3% Latinx, 2.3% Middle Eastern, and 0.7% Multiethnic.

District 2 schools were in a historically White, upper-middle-class township, with some Black students being bused in and others living in communities proximal to the schools. Most students' parents/caregivers identified as middle to upper class, and 22% of students qualified for free or reduced lunch. The total population of the township has remained constant over the past 10 to 15 years: 64,860 residents according to the 2000 Census compared with 63,648 in the 2010 Census. There were also significant demographic changes over time. The number of White residents decreased from 54,644 in 2000 to 50,227 in 2010, while the number of Black residents increased by over 50% from 2000 to 2010 (from 3,360 to 7,396). From 2000 to 2010, the percentage of township families below poverty level went from 1.6 to 3.7, and 3.4 for Black families. During the study data collection period, Census data estimated the median household income in the township as $98,000. Most of the administrators (86%) were White; 14% were Black. The majority of teachers were White (93%), 4% were Black, and 3% were of Asian or Latinx descent. During the study period, 60% of district students were White, 25% African American, 10% Asian, and 5% Latinx. Also, 27% (1,847) of District 2 students were bused in from the surrounding communities of color.

Procedures

The study was approved by the institutional review board at the researchers' university and the school/district administrators. Participant recruitment was conducted during the 2012 to 2014 school years. All Black/African American adolescents from the districts' secondary schools and their parents/primary caregivers were invited to participate in an online survey. Recruitment fliers were distributed to school staff and students during lunch periods, mailed to participants' homes, and distributed at community parent meetings. Parental consent and participant assent were obtained before survey administration. Surveys were administered at participants' school sites (approximately 45–60 minutes) during noncore subject class periods (e.g., study periods, homeroom), during the lunch hour, or after school. Students received a $20 Visa gift card for participating. Surveys included measures of (a) psychological adjustment and mental health, (b) social and academic beliefs, (c) self-perceptions and identity, (d) educational and occupational goals and expectations, and (e) school experiences, including climate and discrimination.

Measures

Racial Identity

Racial identity beliefs were measured with the Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity and Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity–Teen (Sellers, Rowley, Chavous, Shelton, & Smith, 1997; Scottham, Sellers, & Nguyen, 2008). The racial centrality subscale included four items assessing the extent to which being Black was important to the respondent's self-concept (boys: $\alpha = .57$, girls: $\alpha = .54$)—for example, "I have a strong sense of belonging to other Black people."[2] Public regard, or the extent to which youth felt others viewed Blacks in a positive or negative manner, was assessed with three items (boys: $\alpha = .70$, girls: $\alpha = .69$)—for example, "People think that Blacks are as good as people from other races." For each item, responses ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Higher scores indicated higher centrality and public regard.

School-Based Racial Discrimination

Teacher and peer discrimination experiences were measured using two subscales from the School-Based Discrimination Scale (Wong et al., 2003). Four items assessed the reported frequency of teacher discrimination, for example, being disciplined more harshly or being graded more harshly by one's teachers due to one's race (boys: $\alpha = .94$, girls: $\alpha = .91$), and three items assessed peer-based discrimination, for example, being picked on by peers or getting into fights due to one's race (boys: $\alpha = .93$, girls: $\alpha = .90$). Responses were on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*almost every day*).

Classroom Engagement

Engagement was assessed with items from Wellborn and colleagues' student engagement scale (Skinner, Wellborn, & Connell, 1990; Skinner, Kindermann, & Furrer, 2009). The adapted scale has been used with reliability in previous research with African American participants (Neblett et al., 2006, who established the two subscales of academic curiosity and persistence). In the current study, two items assessed academic curiosity (boys: $\alpha = .76$, girls: $\alpha = .69$)—for example, "I work hard when we start something new in class." Four items assessed academic persistence, or the extent to which students continue class effort in the face of challenges (boys: $\alpha = .63$, girls: $\alpha = .72$). Example items included "If I can't get a problem right the first time, I just keep trying" and "When I do badly on a test, I work harder next time." For each subscale, responses for each item ranged from 1 (*not at all true*) to 4 (*very true*).

Demographic Background

We included youth-reported gender and grade year in school (6th–12th), and highest parent/primary caregiver–reported education level as a socioeconomic status indicator.

Data Analysis

First, we conducted descriptive analyses with the primary study variables (means, standard deviations, correlations). Using multivariate analyses of covariance (MANCOVAs), we compared teacher and peer discrimination by gender and school district. This allowed for examining the general prevalence of discrimination among Black adolescents as suggested by extant scholarship, whether different discrimination types are more often experienced by girls or boys, and whether discrimination varied across youth in predominantly Black and predominately White districts. Next, we used linear regression methods to explore our primary study aims (Aiken & West, 1991). In Step 1, we entered child grade year and highest parental/primary caregiver education as control variables, along with gender, racial centrality, public regard, and discrimination (peer and teacher). Step 2 included two-way interactions of the gender, racial identity, and discrimination variables. In Step 3, three-way interactions between gender, racial identity, and discrimination were entered. We tested regression models for our two dependent variables (academic curiosity and academic persistence), testing separate models within each of our two study district samples. This multistep approach allowed us to (a) examine gender differences among teacher and peer discrimination experiences, racial identity beliefs, and academic engagement outcomes across school districts and (b) consider whether racial identity beliefs mitigated the associations of discrimination with academic curiosity and persistence in similar or different ways for girls and boys.

Table 1
Summary of Significant Gender and District Effects for the School-Based Racial Discrimination and Racial Identity Variables

Category	Group	Adjusted Mean	Standard Error	Difference	95% Confidence Interval Lower	95% Confidence Interval Upper	*p* Value
Teacher discrimination							
Gender	Boys	1.83	0.04	0.29	1.76	1.91	.001
	Girls	1.54	0.03		1.47	1.60	
District	District 1	1.59	0.03	0.19	1.53	1.65	.001
	District 2	1.78	0.04		1.70	1.86	
Peer discrimination							
Gender	Boys	1.65	0.04	0.24	1.58	1.72	.001
	Girls	1.41	0.03		1.35	1.47	
Racial centrality							
Gender	Boys	3.52	0.03	0.18	3.46	3.59	.001
	Girls	3.34	0.03		3.28	3.39	
District	District 1	3.28	0.03	0.30	3.23	3.33	
	District 2	3.58	0.04		3.51	3.65	
Public regard							
Gender	Boys	3.20	0.04	0.14	3.13	3.27	.001
	Girls	3.06	0.03		2.99	3.12	
District	District 1	3.24	0.03	0.18	3.19	3.29	
	District 2	3.02	0.04		2.94	3.10	

Note. Covariate was child grade level; difference was calculated by subtracting higher mean value from lower mean value.

Results

Preliminary Descriptive Analyses

Through a series of MANCOVAs, we examined gender and school district differences in the (a) discrimination and (b) racial identity variables (see Table 1). MANCOVAs were conducted to account for correlations between the dependent variables (teacher and peer discrimination, and centrality and public regard). In each model, child grade level was included as a covariate. Overall, boys reported significantly more frequent teacher and peer discrimination than girls, $F(1, 32) = 34.13$, $p < .001$, and the respondents in District 2 reported significantly more teacher discrimination than those in District 1, $F(1, 13) = 14.16$, $p < .001$. We also examined gender and district differences at the item level for the teacher and peer discrimination variables, to further explore whether boys and girls differed in experiences of particular types of discrimination and whether certain experiences were reported more in our predominately White school district

sample (District 2) than in our predominately Black school district sample (District 1). We found a significant gender effect for each teacher and peer discrimination item, with boys reporting more of each type. Also, a significant district effect for three of the four teacher discrimination items (i.e., "At school . . . how often do you feel teachers call on you less often than they call on other kids, how often do you get disciplined more harshly by teachers than other kids, and how often do you feel teachers think you are less smart than you really are . . . because you are Black?") indicated more reported discrimination among District 2 respondents than for District 1. There were no significant district differences in peer discrimination items. Finally, a Gender × District effect resulted for the item "At school, how often do you feel teachers grade you harder than they grade other kids because you are Black?" Boys in District 2 reported a significantly higher frequency of harsher grading due to race than boys in District 1.

Regarding racial identity, MANCOVA indicated gender and district effects for centrality $F(1, 13) = 19.02$, $p < .001$ and $F(1, 32) = 48.04$, $p < .001$, respectively, and public regard, $F(1, 8) = 9.30$, $p < .001$ and $F(1, 17) = 21.05$, $p < .001$, respectively (see also Table 1). Boys reported higher racial centrality than girls, and girls reported lower public regard. Also, the District 1 sample reported significantly lower centrality and higher public regard than the District 2 sample.

Bivariate Correlations

The findings indicate similarities and differences in how racial identity beliefs related to youths' school discrimination experiences. Across districts, there were moderate to large correlations between teacher and peer discrimination (ranging from .69 to .86). With regard to racial identity, racial centrality showed significant, small and positive associations with teacher discrimination across districts. However, for District 1 respondents, public regard was unrelated to teacher discrimination, and peer discrimination was not significantly associated with centrality or public regard. In contrast, in District 2, lower public regard was associated with higher teacher and peer discrimination ($r = -.17$, $p < .001$ and $r = -.37$, $p < .001$, respectively). In the District 1 sample, youth in higher grade levels (older youth) reported more teacher and peer discrimination ($r = .11$, $p < .001$ and $r = .14$, $p < .001$, respectively), but grade level was unrelated to reported discrimination in the District 2 sample.

School Discrimination Experiences as Predictors of Classroom Engagement Belief[3]

We conducted hierarchical linear regression analyses to examine the gender and race-related variables (racial identity and racial discrimination) as predictors of classroom engagement outcomes (curiosity and persistence). We tested separate models for each school district to explore how

racial identity beliefs and discrimination experiences related to boys' and girls' academic engagement within the predominantly Black (District 1) and predominantly White (District 2) school racial contexts. In the first block of each model, parental education and youth grade level were included as control variables, then gender, racial identity (i.e., centrality and public regard), and school-based racial discrimination variables (teacher and peer) were entered. To examine gender and racial identity beliefs as moderators of the associations between racial discrimination and engagement outcomes, a series of two-way interaction terms were computed and entered into the second model block. Finally, for the third block, we computed and entered a set of three-way interactions to examine whether the associations of racial discrimination with engagement outcomes varied as a function of both gender and racial identity beliefs. In all the tested models, we used the procedures outlined by Aiken and West (1991) to examine higher-order interactions. Continuous predictor variables were standardized before entry into the models, and we plotted significant interactions to interpret the nature of the interactions. For example, for each significant Discrimination × Racial Identity interaction, a plot illustrated the simple slope of the dependent variable estimated at selected conditional values ($M + 1$ *SD* and $M - 1$ *SD*) of the relevant racial identity variable and discrimination variable (Preacher, Curran, & Bauer, 2006).

District 1

For the adolescent participants in District 1, correlational analyses indicated similar associations among the primary study predictor and control variables for girls and boys overall. An exception was that among the boys, older youth (those in higher grade levels) reported lower public regard ($r = .09$, $p < .05$), while grade level was not significantly related to public regard among the girls. Furthermore, boys with higher parental education reported more teacher and peer discrimination ($r = .10$, $p < .05$ and $r = .09$, $p < .05$, respectively), while the girls' parental education was unrelated to discrimination. The discrimination variables were not associated with racial identity variables for both girls and boys.

The regression model results for District 1 are summarized in Table 2. For the academic curiosity model, while the final model (Step 3) was significant, $F(19, 1{,}098) = 9.117$, $p < .001$, only Step 1 (controls and independent variables) contributed significantly to the variance explained in curiosity. The results of the Step 1 model, $F(7, 1{,}098) = 21.88$, $p < .001$, are summarized in Table 3. This model accounted for 12% of the variance explained in curiosity. In Step 1, there were direct, positive associations of racial centrality and public regard with curiosity ($\beta = .07$, $p < .05$ and $\beta = .06$, $p < .05$, respectively), and teacher ($\beta = -.14$, $p < .01$) and peer ($\beta = -.20$, $p < .001$) discrimination showed significant negative associations with curiosity.

Table 2
Summary of Academic Curiosity and Persistence Regressed on Gender, School-Based Discrimination, and Racial Identity Variables for District 1 (n = 1,100)

	Curiosity			Persistence		
Variable	b	SE_b	β	b	SE_b	β
Gender (boys = 0, girls = 1)	.03	.03	.03	.09	.04	.07**
Highest parental education	−.01	.02	−.01	−.02	.02	−.03***
Child grade level	−.01	.01	−.02	−.07	.01	−.17
Racial centrality	.04	.02	.06*	.03	.02	.05
Public regard	.03	.02	.06*	.05	.02	.08**
Teacher discrimination	−.08	.03	−.14**	−.06	.03	−.09
Peer discrimination	−.11	.03	−.20**	−.19	.03	−.29***
	R^2 = .12			R^2 = .20		
	F = 21.88***			F = 37.88***		

Note. SE = standard error.
†p <.10, *p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.

The final District 1 academic persistence model (Step 3) was also significant, $F(19, 1{,}099) = 14.37$, $p < .001$, accounting for 20% of the variance in academic persistence. However, only Step 1 (independent variables, controls), $F(7, 1{,}099) = 37.87$, $p < .001$, contributed significantly to the variance explained in persistence (see Table 2). Girls reported higher academic persistence than the boys (β = .09, $p < .01$). Public regard was positively associated with persistence (β = .08, $p < .01$), and peer discrimination was negatively related to persistence (β = −.29, $p < .001$).

District 2

For the District 2 youth sample, correlational analyses indicated similar and different associations among the primary study predictor and control variables across gender groups. For both girls and boys, higher racial centrality related to reports of more frequent teacher discrimination (r = .14, $p < .05$ and r = .17, $p < .01$, respectively), but peer discrimination was unrelated to centrality. Teacher and peer discrimination also showed small significant, negative correlations with public regard across gender (ranging from r = −.13 to r = −.22). However, girls with lower parental education reported more teacher and peer discrimination (r = −.20, $p < .001$ and r = −.15, $p < .01$, respectively) and lower public regard (r = .16, $p < .01$), while the boys' parental education was unrelated to their discrimination and racial identity variables.

Table 3

Summary of Academic Curiosity Regressed on Gender, Racial Identity, and Teacher and Peer Discrimination Variables for District 1 (n = 1,100)

	Step 1			Step 2			Step 3		
Variable	b	SE_b	β	b	SE_b	β	b	SE_b	β
1. Gender (boys = 0, girls = 1)	.02	.05	.02	.02	.05	.02	.02	.05	.02
Highest parental education	.04	.02	.07	.04	.02	.06	.04	.02	.07†
Child grade level	−.02	.02	−.05	−.02	.02	−.05	−.02	.02	−.05
Racial centrality	.01	.02	.01†	.04	.04	.06	.04	.04	.07
Public regard	−.03	.02	−.05	−.04	.04	−.08	−.03	.04	−.06
Teacher discrimination	−.08	.03	−.14*	−.10	.05	−.18*	−.06	.05	−.10
Peer discrimination	−.08	.03	−.15**	−.07	.05	−.12	−.10	.05	−.18*
2. Gender × Centrality				−.06	.05	−.08	−.05	.05	−.07
Gender × Public Regard				.02	.05	.03	.02	.05	.03
Gender × Teacher Discrimination				.05	.07	.06	.01	.07	.01
Gender × Peer Discrimination				−.04	.07	−.04	.01	.07	.01
Teacher Discrimination × Centrality				−.01	.04	−.02	−.07	.04	−.15
Teacher discrimination × Public Regard				.04	.03	.08	.01	.04	.01
Peer Discrimination × Centrality				−.01	.03	−.01	.07	.04	.15
Peer Discrimination × Public Regard				−.02	.03	−.04	−.03	.04	−.06
3. Teacher Discrimination × Gender × Centrality							.21	.08	.26**
Teacher Discrimination × Gender × Public Regard							.10	.06	.14†
Peer Discrimination × Gender × Centrality							−.23	.07	−.33***
Peer Discrimination × Gender × Public Regard							.01	.06	.02
R^2	.07			.06			.08		
F	6.88***			3.39***			3.54***		

Note. SE = standard error.
†$p < .10$. *$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

The regression results for academic curiosity in District 2 (predominantly White) are summarized in Table 4. The final curiosity model, $F(19, 558) = 3.54$, $p < .001$, accounted for 8% of the variance in academic curiosity, and Steps 1 and 3 contributed significantly to the variance explained in curiosity (significant change in R^2). In Step 1, teacher and peer discrimination were negatively associated with academic curiosity ($\beta = -.14$, $p < .05$ and $\beta = -.15$, $p < .05$, respectively). With the addition of Step 3 variables, a significant three-way interaction of Teacher Discrimination × Gender × Centrality resulted ($\beta = .26$, $p < .01$). Post hoc analysis indicated a significant, negative association of teacher discrimination with curiosity among boys lower in racial centrality (1 *SD* below the centrality mean, $p < .05$), while the association of teacher discrimination with curiosity was nonsignificant among boys higher in racial centrality (1 *SD* above the centrality mean). There was a significant, positive association between teacher discrimination and curiosity among girls lower in centrality ($p < .001$) and a significant, negative association for girls higher in centrality ($p < .001$) (see Figure 1). A significant Gender × Centrality × Peer Discrimination interaction also resulted ($\beta = -.32$, $p < .001$). For boys with lower race centrality, peer discrimination was related to lower curiosity ($p < .05$), but the relationship was nonsignificant for boys with higher race centrality. For girls with lower racial centrality, the association of peer discrimination and curiosity was nonsignificant, but peer discrimination was related to lower curiosity for girls reporting higher centrality ($p < .001$) (see Figure 2).

The regression results for academic persistence in District 2 are summarized in Table 4. In the District 2 academic persistence model, $F(19, 557) = 7.23$, $p < .001$, the final model (Step 3) accounted for 18% of the variance explained in persistence, and Steps 1 and 3 contributed significantly to the variance explained (significant increase in R^2 from .15 in Step 1). In the first model step, parent education was positively related to persistence ($\beta = .10$, $p < .05$). Lower public regard was related to higher persistence ($\beta = -.11$, $p < .01$), and higher peer discrimination was related to lower persistence ($\beta = -.30$, $p < .001$). With the addition of Step 3, a significant three-way Gender × Teacher Discrimination × Public Regard interaction resulted ($\beta = .22$, $p < .01$). Post hoc analysis indicated that the associations of teacher discrimination with academic persistence varied across gender and public regard levels. For boys with lower public regard, teacher discrimination was related to higher persistence ($p < .01$), while teacher discrimination was related to lower persistence among girls with lower public regard ($p < .04$). For both boys and girls with higher public regard, teacher discrimination was unrelated to academic persistence (see Figure 3)

Discussion

The current study adds to emerging literature focused on racial identity, gender, and academic processes among Black youth. We explored gender

Table 4

Summary of Academic Persistence Regressed on Gender, Racial Identity, and Teacher and Peer Discrimination for District 2 (n = 559)

	Step 1			Step 2			Step 3		
Variable	b	SE_b	β	b	SE_b	β	b	SE_b	β
1. Gender (boys = 0, girls = 1)	.08	.05	.07†	.08	.05	.06	.11	.05	.09*
Highest parental education	.06	.02	.10	.05	.02	.08*	.05	.02	.08*
Child grade level	−.04	.02	−.09	−.04	.02	−.09*	−.04	.02	−.08*
Racial centrality	.03	.02	.05	.04	.04	.07	.05	.04	.09
Public regard	−.07	.03	−.11**	−.08	.04	−.13*	−.06	.04	−.09
Teacher discrimination	−.04	.03	−.07	.05	.05	.09	.06	.06	.10
Peer discrimination	−.18	.03	−.30***	−.23	.05	−.38***	−.23	.05	−.39***
2. Gender × Centrality				−.03	.05	−.04	−.04	.05	−.05
Gender × Public Regard				.03	.05	.03	.02	.05	.02
Gender × Teacher Discrimination				−.14	.07	−.16*	−.13	.08	−.14†
Gender × Peer Discrimination				.05	.07	.06	.07	.07	.08
Teacher Discrimination × Centrality				−.08	.04	−.16*	−.10	.05	−.20*
Teacher Discrimination × Public Regard				−.01	.03	−.02	−.07	.04	−.14†
Peer Discrimination × Centrality				.07	.04	.15*	.08	.05	.17†
Peer Discrimination × Public Regard				.01	.03	.02	−.01	.04	−.01
3. Teacher Discrimination × Gender × Centrality							.10	.08	.12
Teacher Discrimination × Gender × Public Regard							.17	.06	.22**
Peer Discrimination × Gender × Centrality							−.08	.07	−.11
Peer Discrimination × Gender × Public Regard							.01	.06	.01
R^2	.15			.15			.18		
F	15.11***			7.72***			7.23***		

Note. SE = standard error.
†$p < .10$. *$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

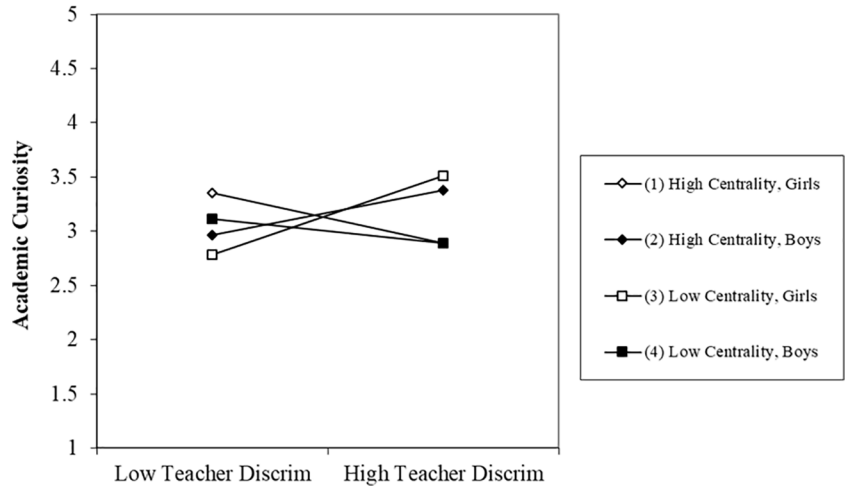

Figure 1. **Summary of Teacher Discrimination × Gender × Centrality Interaction effect on academic curiosity for District 2.**

variation in adolescents' school-based racial discrimination and in the associations among their discrimination experiences, racial identity beliefs, and classroom academic engagement. In addition, we considered these associations in demographically distinct school district contexts. Our results provided evidence of gender differences in youths' reported teacher- and peer-based racial discrimination experiences and in how these experiences related to academic outcomes. The results supported contentions that a stronger connection to one's racial group may act as a buffer against the impact of discrimination on youth outcomes and that racial stigma awareness can undermine Black students' academic engagement. However, racial identity beliefs did not protect boys and girls in the same way from the negative effects of school-based discrimination in relation to academic engagement. Furthermore, racial identity functioned to promote engagement and buffer against discrimination impacts in different ways across school racial contexts.

Gender and School Context Differences in School Discrimination Experiences

We found gender variation in youths' experiences of teacher and peer discrimination across districts. In general, boys reported more frequent discrimination than girls across each item/type of discrimination experience assessed. Our findings are consistent with scholarship highlighting the

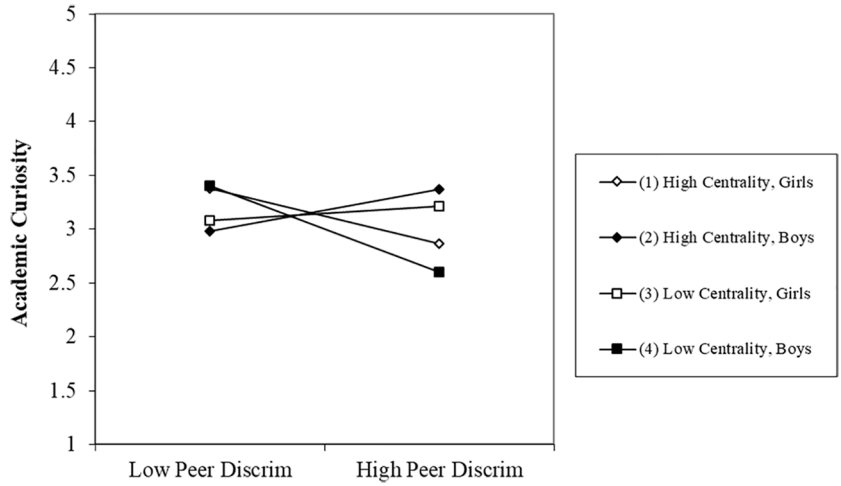

Figure 2. **Summary of Peer Discrimination × Gender × Centrality interaction effect on academic curiosity for District 2.**

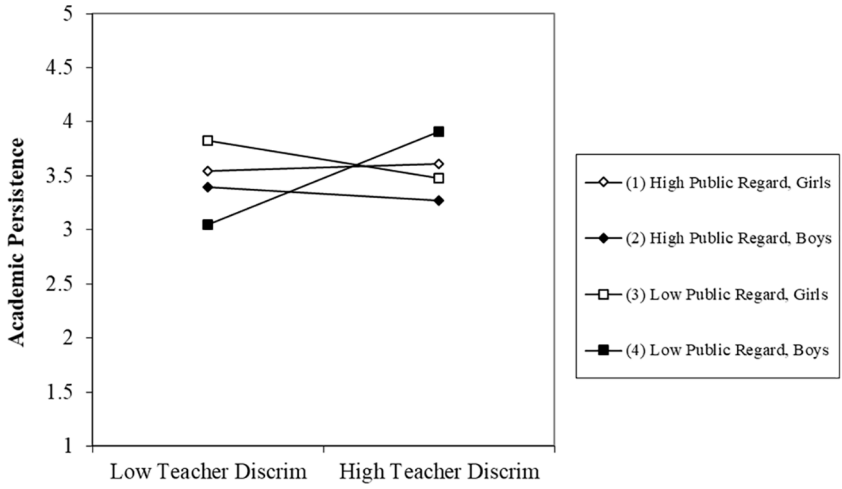

Figure 3. **Summary of Teacher Discrimination × Gender × Public Regard interaction effect on academic persistence for District 2.**

unique status of Black males in the broader American society and their likelihood of experiencing negative, stereotype-based treatment in their daily contexts, including school (e.g., DeCuir-Gunby, 2009; Howard, 2013; Noguera, 2008; Spencer et al., 2003). It is also possible that boys are more likely than girls to experience the types of school racial discrimination measured—overt experiences such as harsh punishment by teachers and getting into fights with peers. For instance, Irvine's (1986) seminal study of race and gender treatment in the classroom demonstrated how Black girls are more likely to experience more subtle forms of biased treatment, such as being ignored, negative nonverbal interactions, and relegation to caretaking roles rather than leadership roles in the classroom. Increasingly, scholars are studying how Black girls are uniquely marginalized in educational contexts based on race and gender (Archer-Banks & Behar-Horenstein, 2012). Such a focus is relevant considering Black girls' disproportionately high rates of disciplinary infractions compared with girls from other racial/ethnic groups (Blake et al., 2011).

This reasoning is supported by our findings of gender differences in racial identity. Extant research has linked higher centrality and lower public regard to perceiving more racial discrimination (Sellers et al., 1998). Across districts, the boys reported higher centrality than the girls, which could be, in part, a reflection of more frequent discrimination experiences that increase the daily salience of race for boys. However, despite their lower reported discrimination, the girls reported lower public regard, or more negative views of how society regards Black people. It is possible that the girls' lower public regard derives from racial experiences not assessed in this study (e.g., less explicit/overt treatment such as low expectations, nonverbal interactions, racial socialization). In addition, girls from families with lower parent/caregiver education (an indicator of socioeconomic status) reported more discrimination than girls with higher parent education, while the boys' parent education level was unrelated to discrimination, suggesting boys' similar discrimination risks across socioeconomic status. Thus, future work might consider how race, gender, and social class factors may influence perceptions and treatment of Black boys and girls in school (e.g., Morris, 2005; Noguera, 2008).

Along with gender differences in school racial discrimination, our results highlight the importance of considering school racial contexts (Ferguson, 2000; Ispa-Landa & Conwell, 2014). Consistent with expectations, youth in the predominantly White District 2 reported more teacher discrimination than those in the predominantly Black District 1. Furthermore, the Black boys in District 2 reported harsher grading by teachers due to race than the District 1 boys. While schools in both districts had predominantly White teachers, because the Black students in District 2 were a numerical and social minority in the classroom, they were more likely to be hypervisible, evaluated based on negative stereotypes, and subjected to negative

comparisons with White students by teachers (Howard, 2013; James, 2011; Noguera, 2008). Surprisingly, there were no district differences in reported peer discrimination. As District 1 was predominantly Black, District 1 youth may have reported treatment from out-group as well as in-group peers (Williams et al., 2012). For instance, they may have reported social exclusion or harassment from non-Black ethnic minority peers and/or other Black peers. The findings highlight the need to consider the unique ways in which race and gender may be salient in predominantly Black, White, and diverse school contexts.

Gender, Racial Discrimination, and Racial Identity in Context

The results for both school districts highlight school-based racial discrimination as a risk factor for negative academic engagement (Neblett et al., 2006; Smalls et al., 2007). However, the association of these experiences with engagement varied in relation to the students' gender and racial identity beliefs. Further, these associations varied within school districts.

District 1

District 1 was predominantly composed of Black students from working-class Black families. Although the students were surrounded mostly by same-race peers, as in national trends (U.S. Department of Education, 2016) a great majority of their teachers were White, presenting the possibility of intergroup racial discrimination from teachers. Although the District 1 youth generally reported racial discrimination as infrequent, these experiences were still negatively associated with their academic curiosity and persistence (e.g., Byrd & Chavous, 2011; Wong et al., 2003). Further, the negative association of discrimination with curiosity was similar for both boys and girls, in contrast to prior research highlighting heightened discrimination risks for Black boys (Chavous et al., 2008; Swanson et al., 2003). Thus, while the Black girls in our study encountered less frequently our assessed racial discrimination types, their interest and confidence around classroom subject matter were compromised by experiences that served to threaten teacher/peer relationships or challenge the value of their identity. As there is still a dearth of research examining gender variation in Black adolescents' racial discrimination, our findings point to the need for more examination of adolescents' race- and gender-based experiences at school, including both comparative and within-gender analysis.

Regarding racial identity, District 1 youth with higher centrality and public regard reported higher classroom curiosity and persistence, supporting the "Black identity as promotive" perspective (Smalls et al., 2007). The findings highlight how group connectedness (centrality) can benefit school engagement among youth in racially congruent demographic spaces. Similarly, Hurd and colleagues (2013) suggest that Black students in schools

with high concentrations of Black students may benefit from holding positive beliefs about how society perceives Blacks (higher public regard). That is, Black youth who believe that other groups hold more positive views of Blacks may feel less devalued and have a greater sense of safety and fairness, more optimism, and a greater sense of control over their life circumstances, all of which may yield academic benefits. However, we were surprised that racial identity did not moderate associations of discrimination with engagement outcomes, as found in prior research. Of note is that the youths in this district sample reported overall low discrimination from teachers and peers, and peer and teacher discrimination were highly correlated, likely reflecting, in part, a statistical artifact of the low frequency of both. Thus, insufficient variance in discrimination may have made it challenging to detect interaction effects. We note that the youths in this predominantly Black district reported less discrimination but higher public regard than those in District 2 (predominantly White). As such, it is possible that Black youth living and operating within predominantly Black contexts may have had fewer opportunities for day-to-day experiences that challenged their positive public regard beliefs (Hunt, Wise, Jipguep, Cozier, & Rosenberg, 2007). Subsequently, they would be able to reap the general academic benefits of higher public regard due to experiencing fewer threats to this belief system in the form of teacher and peer discrimination (Hurd et al., 2013). It is also possible that our study youths from majority Black school settings were less likely to attribute the assessed teacher and peer treatment (which tapped into treatment compared with other Black peers) as based on race. For instance, teacher treatment may be racialized (e.g., a teacher's punitive treatment of a child based in negative race stereotypes), but if it occurs in a classroom with all Black students, some youths may experience it as based on race, while others may make attributions to other distinguishing identities (e.g., gender, socioeconomic status). We were unable to locate other studies testing this contention empirically, suggesting a unique contribution of the current study and warranting future research. In sum, we could not conclude from our findings that racial discrimination and racial identity are unimportant to the lives of youth in predominantly Black schools, as both were related to the youths' academic engagement. Instead, we suggest more work examining adolescents' race-related experiences in majority Black settings (e.g., race-based intergroup and intragroup interactions and school racial climate experiences that may be more common in racially congruent settings).

District 2

District 2 included mostly White students from upper-middle-class families, with some Black students bused in from poorer communities and others living in the district. In this district, how teacher and peer discrimination functioned as risk factors for academic engagement varied by gender

and racial identity. Some findings are consistent with research suggesting the unique salience of race in predominantly White spaces and the benefits of racial identity beliefs reflecting group connection and awareness of societal bias in these spaces (e.g., Hurd et al., 2013). Furthermore, the gender patterns found align with studies conducted in racially diverse school contexts (e.g., Chavous et al., 2008), suggesting the stronger protective role of racial centrality for boys. Boys with weaker racial centrality were more vulnerable to the negative impacts of teacher discrimination on curiosity, while boys with stronger centrality showed enhanced curiosity in the context of more teacher discrimination. For the Black boys in this district, weaker racial centrality may be tied to feelings of hypervisibility in classroom settings (e.g., Howard, 2008; Noguera, 2008). As such, the negative motivational effects of experiencing frequent discrimination from teachers (Cokley et al., 2012) were exacerbated for those with weaker centrality. Similarly, peer discrimination was unrelated to academic curiosity in boys with higher race centrality, indicating the buffering effects of racial centrality. In contrast, peer discrimination experiences were de-motivating for boys less connected to their Black identity. Boys with stronger centrality may be more likely to respond to negative peer discriminatory treatment by actively engaging in the classroom (Neblett et al., 2006; Rogers & Way, 2015).

For the girls, however, stronger centrality did not buffer the discrimination effects. Teacher and peer discrimination were more deleterious to curiosity in girls with higher race centrality relative to girls with lower race centrality. Research has suggested that girls are socialized to be more interdependent and relational in school settings (e.g., Oyserman, Bybee, & Terry, 2003). Thus, girls more connected to their racial identity may have heightened sensitivity to negative race-related treatment in peer relationships, which hinders their classroom interest. The overall District 2 findings for centrality provide evidence of the importance of a strong racial group connection for classroom interest in the context of school discrimination, but racial identity may mitigate the effects of teacher and peer discrimination in different ways for boys and girls. Further, de-emphasis of their racial identity may allow some youths to engage effectively in their classrooms when their identities are devalued or challenged at school.

Even less research has examined gender variation in the roles of public regard for Black adolescents in relation to school discrimination. Our examination provides insights into girls' and boys' unique coping mechanisms against discrimination. There was a stronger positive relationship of teacher discrimination and academic persistence for boys with lower public regard relative to girls with lower public regard. For boys and girls higher in public regard, believing that others in the broader society value Black people may have helped mitigate the negative impacts of biased treatment from their teachers. In contrast, discrimination from teachers may undermine persistence on classroom tasks for girls who experience their teachers as devaluing

them as Black people and who also feel that society devalues Black people (lower public regard). Among Black boys, lower public regard buffered the effects of teacher discrimination on persistence. For boys, awareness of societal racial bias (low public regard) seemed to serve as a motivating factor for those experiencing teacher discrimination, suggesting that an understanding of racial bias can serve as a coping resource.

These findings illuminate the complex ways in which beliefs around societal racial bias and stigma can affect youths' academic motivation. Thomas et al.'s (2009) study of a nationally representative sample of Black adolescents provides support for our analysis; youth who believed others in society viewed Blacks more positively showed worse academic outcomes than youth with an awareness of racial stigma against African Americans. We also found that lower public regard related to higher persistence for District 2 youth. But holding negative public regard beliefs was more protective in the context of discrimination for boys than for girls in this district sample. As with the centrality findings, the results for public regard suggest that Black boys and girls draw on their racial identities in different ways to cope with racial discrimination at school. For Black boys, who are viewed and targeted in unique ways due to their race and gender, awareness of racism may generally serve to support positive school engagement and adaptive meaning making and academic coping in the context of experiencing discrimination (e.g., Swanson et al., 2003). For Black girls, awareness of societal racial stigma also served to promote their school engagement. However, for some of the girls, de-emphasizing societal racism may have helped counter effects of discrimination at school that functioned as threats to relationships with teachers or as threats to the value of their personal identities (Oyserman et al., 2001).

Limitations and Implications for Future Research

While our study illuminates processes important to Black adolescents' school engagement, we highlight some limitations and considerations. Our cross-sectional study design limits causal conclusions. Future research might consider developmental variation in associations of identity, discrimination, and engagement, given grade-level differences in academic variables. Our racial centrality measure had modest internal consistency, suggesting the need for more examination of this multifaceted construct across demographic contexts. As noted, most of our discrimination items captured overt experiences (e.g., harassment, fighting, behavior-based punishment) likely more prevalent for boys (Chavous et al., 2008). Varying discrimination types—including subtle, nonverbal treatment, documented as more common among girls (Campbell, 2012; Lei, 2003)—should be explored in future research. Similarly, researchers should distinguish conceptually and empirically race-related experiences relevant to racially homogeneous and heterogeneous

school contexts, including inter- and intra-group experiences, the latter being an understudied area. Finally, qualitative and mixed-methods approaches could inform how Black girls and boys are appraising and making sense of race-related school experiences.

Conclusions

Our study provides insights into how racial identity may function in relation to Black boys' and girls' academic engagement. The findings suggest that many Black adolescents draw on their racial identity beliefs as a cultural resource to remain academically engaged even in settings where they experience negative race-related treatment, supporting the "racial identity as promotive" perspective (Butler-Barnes et al., 2013; Neblett, Rivas-Drake, & Umana-Taylor, 2012; Spencer et al., 2003). However, some youth more strongly connected to their racial group and more aware of societal racial bias against Blacks were vulnerable to the negative motivational impacts of school discrimination, highlighting risks associated with identity stigma (e.g., Cokley et al., 2012). The findings support prior literature but also raise new questions regarding the nature of race and gender experiences for Black youth at school and gender variation in their meaning making and coping with negative identity-based experiences. Further, our study extends prior literature by examining youth within demographically distinct school contexts and illuminating the need for more systematic investigation of contextual factors in the study of racial identity.

Finally, our work suggests the benefits of educational practices for equity and inclusion. The youths varied in their reports of frequency of discrimination, but these experiences still mattered for their engagement. In fact, our examination of the limited discrimination types we assessed is likely a conservative estimate of youths' day to day experiences of racial stigma at school. As such, school practices might include professional development to address race-related bias among teachers, as well as classroom and schoolwide activities to promote students' critical thinking about race and improve interracial interactions. Predominantly White schools could create safer student spaces and organizations for Black students to foster a stronger sense of belonging (Holland, 2012). Finally, our results also underscore the ways in which Black students' racial and gender identities relate to their classroom experience and engagement (Byrd & Chavous, 2011). As long emphasized by scholars of Black education (e.g., Ladson-Billings, 1994), education settings could use research such as the current study to support their development and execution of culturally relevant pedagogical practices that recognize and affirm students' identities. Such approaches would serve to promote academic engagement for all students.

Notes

[1]We use *African American* and *Black* interchangeably throughout the article, as the study focus was on youth identifying as African American or Black American in the U.S. context.

[2]While the alpha values for centrality are lower than the alpha values for the other measures in the study, the alphas of .57 and .54 are similar to those in the original article by Scottham et al. (2008). In that article, the authors highlighted how alpha values can be dependent on several factors, and lower alphas still reflect adequate internal consistency as long as the internal item correlations are adequate. We ran factor analyses and found that each analysis yielded one factor and that the factor loadings were psychometrically adequate (between .49 and .70).

[3]For each model, we tested three-way interactions examining whether the influence of racial discrimination varied as a function of racial identity beliefs and gender (i.e., gender × school discrimination × racial identity).

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