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## The Moderating Influence of the Strength of Racial Identity on the Relationship Between Teacher-Student Racial Similarity-Dissimilarity and Classroom Engagement

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The moderating influence of the strength of racial identity on the relationship between  
teacher-student racial similarity-dissimilarity and classroom engagement

By

Md Enamul Kabir

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in

Communication Studies

Minnesota State University, Mankato

Mankato, Minnesota

August 2020

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The moderating influence of the strength of racial identity on the relationship between teacher-student racial similarity-dissimilarity and classroom engagement

Md Enamul Kabir

This thesis has been examined and approved by the following members of the student's committee.

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#### ABSTRACT

This research, titled '*The moderating influence of the strength of racial identity on the relationship between teacher-student racial similarity-dissimilarity and classroom engagement*', was conducted by Md Enamul Kabir, a graduate student in the Department of Communication Studies at Minnesota State University, Mankato as a requirement for completing a Master of Arts degree in August 2020. The purpose of this quantitative study was to understand how the strength of racial identity moderates the effects of the teacher-student racial similarity and dissimilarity on the engaging behavior of students with their instructors in United States classrooms. This study questioned the prevalent assumption that similarity and dissimilarity predicted the nature of interaction and established the following primary hypothesis: *the effect of similarity and dissimilarity in racial identity between teacher and students on the level of classroom engagement will depend on the students' strength of social identification with race*. 114 students participated in an online survey which was administered through *Qualtrics*. The results showed that the moderating effect was significant, but there was not enough evidence to support the effect at high and low levels of identification.

## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Teacher-student engagement in the classroom has been a salient component in classroom research for decades, mostly because the learning process, outcome, and other aspects in the classroom are heavily associated with the nature of the teacher-student relationship (Hamre & Pianta, 2006; Skinner & Pitzer, 2012). The quality of this relationship and engagement varies in different classrooms because individuals are emotionally and culturally different. While in some cases, it depends on the nature of the instructional strategies, some classroom engagement may be impacted by the way teachers themselves act in the classrooms. For example, classroom engagement research shows that teacher's quality of enthusiasm in delivering a lecture (Zhang, 2014), how teachers disclose their personal information (Borzea & Goodboy, 2016), and consequently how positively or negatively students perceive their teacher play a vital role in their engagement (Alicea, Suárez-Orozco, Singh, Darbes, & Abrica, 2016). Previous scholars have sought to understand such issues that may shape the quality of this engagement. The scholarships on classroom engagement, however, have remained understudied to depict how the racial identity of students and teachers would play a role in this case.

Previous scholars have nominated a few reasons why race may be relevant in this context. The most prominent of them is that racial diversity in US schools and colleges have grown more than ever. According to United States Census Bureau (2018), out of the 18 million students enrolled in college, the white students consisted of 52.9 percent, where only 20.9 percent were Hispanic, 15.1 percent were black, and 7.6 percent were



Asian. The enrolled graduate students were 61.2 percent white, 13.6 percent Hispanic, 12.3 percent black, and 11.2 percent Asian (United States Census Bureau, 2018). As the American Council on Education reported, out of the three hundred and forty five thousand full-time faculty at public four-year colleges, the majority are White (70.6 percent), only 22.2 percent are faculty of color, 4.5 percent are international, and 2.7 percent are from various racial groups (Espinosa, Turk, Taylor, & Chessman, 2019). With the growing diversity in students, rose the need of a more diverse faculty. In a survey of Latino students in higher education, similar race teachers were reported as more supportive and satisfactory than dissimilar teachers (Santos & Reigadas, 2002). Similarly, previous research revealed that teacher-student racial similarity with an individually engaged relationship indicates greater achievement for students including higher grades, higher graduation rates, and an increase in class enrollment, etc. (Campbell & Campbell, 2007). On the other hand, a survey in some historically black universities, most of the students reported not feeling any importance of a racially similar teacher (Hickson, 2002). Rather, they preferred more of a faculty who would care about their education. Such mixed results made the understanding of how racial identity plays a role in the classroom engagement complex. Hence, this study considered investigating the strength of the racial identity of students to better understand the effects of racial similarity-dissimilarity between teacher and students in their classroom engagement.

### **Problem statement and the purpose of the study**

**Problem Statement.** The most essential factor that makes the research on the strength of racial identity in teacher-student engaging behavior in the US necessary is that

there has been a little research on the strength of racial identity in general. While previous research heavily focused on perceived racial similarity or dissimilarity (Campbell & Campbell, 2007; Elliot, 1979; Takei & Shouje, 2008), racial identity (Fujioka & Neuendorf, 2015; Ligett, 2018), racial categorization of mixed race (Lewis, 2016), etc., only a small number of studies have addressed the strength of identity. Oommen's (2017) study indicated that the strength of identity can moderate the relationship and exchange between leaders and subordinates. However, the study only explored the strength of one's religious identity, while the vital basis of identification in the US is race. This study considers the strength of racial identity as a moderator to predict its effect on the relationship between teacher-student racial similarity-dissimilarity and their engaging behavior in classroom.

Also, teacher-student interaction is essentially core to classroom communication. The fact that classrooms are structured with participation made the instructor-student interaction central to creating an engagement. This depends on students engaging in discussion, asking questions, responding to teacher questions, etc. Such engaging behaviors of students can indicate their learning outcome (Skinner & Pitzer, 2012). However, some instructional issues appear to be potential factors to predict the nature of that engagement such as the sensitivity of teacher (Alicea et al., 2016), teacher self-disclosure (Borzea & Goodboy, 2016), and teacher enthusiasm (Zhang, 2014), etc. As much it is relevant that a study on the nature of teacher-student engaging behavior in the classroom is necessary to promote better learning outcomes, the lack of an adequate empirical exploration of what role race plays along with the other determining factors is

similarly apparent. Therefore, considering the substance of race in the US, an investigation is necessary to test the relationship between the strength of racial identity and teacher-student classroom engagement.

**Purpose of the study.** The purpose of this research was to understand how the strength of racial identity impacts the nature of engaging behavior (i.e. asking questions, classroom participation, paying attention to the teacher, maintaining eye contact while the teacher is speaking, etc.) of students with their instructors in the classroom.

**Precis of the Chapters.** This paper is organized as follows: Chapter two reviews the existing literature on classroom engagement, including 1) Conceptualization of classroom engagement, 2) factors influencing classroom engagement such as instructional factors, teaching-related factors, and gender and race factors, and 3) theoretical framework explaining similarity-attraction theory and social identification theory. Chapter three discusses the methods used to collect and analyze the data. Chapter four offers the results of the analyzed data and chapter five consists of a discussion of the findings in relation to the hypothesis established in the study. It also includes a description of the limitations of the study and recommendations for future research. Chapter six concludes the paper and provides a summary of findings.

## CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

### Conceptualization of Classroom Engagement

‘Classroom engagement’ was conceptualized in several research studies as participation of students in learning activities, student involvement in class (Astin, 1984) and interactions between teachers and students as well as between peers (Kuh, 1991). The earliest work on the conceptualization of the ‘classroom engagement’ was conducted by Ralph Tyler in 1969. Tyler (1969) defined the term as ‘time on task’, which has later facilitated a basic ground for his successors to work on and develop the idea further.

In the light of Pace’s (1980) concept ‘quality of effort’, the phrase ‘classroom engagement’ was then defined as the ‘student involvement’ in the classroom (Astin, 1984). Further works of conceptualization of ‘classroom engagement’ was followed by Kuh (2009) who described classroom engagement as classroom participation in the productive learning activities and quality of student effort. Later, Appleton, Christenson and Furlong (2008) reconstructed the term to a threefold framework which encompasses psychological, behavioral, and emotional engagement. Affective/emotional engagement is, the social, emotional and psychological attachment of students to the school (Appleton, et al., 2008). The emotional portion of the tripartite construct was further emphasized in Lawson and Lawson’s (2013) study, According to them , “students are not on automatic pilot in the school and their feelings and attachments matter” (p. 436). Cognitive engagement is defined as the psychological investment students make to understand the materials assigned to them (Appleton, et al., 2008). Finally, behavioral

engagement is particularly the broadest and wide-explored portion of the tripartite engagement construct which is defined as the student's involvement in activities, and their attitude and compliance towards the school rules (Appleton, Christenson, Kim, & Reschly, 2006; Birch & Ladd, 1997). Alicea et al. (2016) later expanded the behavioral section of the tripartite concept in their study as intentional activities in a classroom regarding involvement in courses such as attending classes, class participation, reading assignments, studying for tests, and turning in assignments etc. These activities range from the responses of students to the teacher to the communication that happen among the students themselves as well (Alicea et al., 2016).

While some researchers have limited the definition of classroom engagement within the boundary of classroom walls, others have expanded concept beyond the school area and classroom. The latter believed that we should consider the activities students work on at home or outside the classroom that still are affiliated to the school. For example, the homework assignments that students are required to complete at home are still a part of classroom work. Zhang's (2014) study is an example of works that encompassed activities outside the classroom wall in the concept 'student engagement'. Student's positive conduct, such as following rules and paying attention, and getting involved in academic, social, or extracurricular activities, etc. were considered as the examples of classroom engagement in Zhang's study. The idea of participation in such various activities between school walls and outdoors turned the term classroom engagement into a broader concept. However, as the present study sought to explore specifically the interactive live engagement between teachers and students in the

classroom, and also that existing research determined oral participation as an important component of classroom engagement (Frymier & Houser, 2016), the present study has set the focus only on participation of students with the instructor which falls into behavioral portion of engagement. The set of indicators of oral participation in engagement includes raising comments or asking questions in the classroom (Fassinger, 1995), responding to teacher questions (Frymier & Houser, 2016), expressing opinion and arguments, asking for help from the instructor, and participating in discussions in the class etc.

In summary, classroom engagement is conceptualized as the behavioral, psychological and emotional engagement or the participation (Appleton et al., 2008) of students in learning activities and interaction with the instructor. The present study concentrates on the range of engagement in oral participation between teacher and students in the classroom, as well as it takes teacher-student nonverbal engagement into account since that is reportedly an important form of communication (Mehrabian, 1970). The following discussion looks into the factors which generally influence the classroom engagement between teacher and students.

### **Factors Influencing Classroom Engagement**

Factors that shape the student engagement in the classroom fall into three areas: teacher-related factors, instructional factors, and gender and race factors. The following discussion will offer the empirical studies that investigated the instructional set of factors.

**Instructional factors.** Existing research suggested that introducing technologically advanced curriculum can be a potential factor to influence classroom

engagement (Durham, Russell & Van Horne, 2018). Durham et al. found that instructional technologies in academic curriculum influence classroom engagement. The study indicated that integrating visual media and establishing collaborative learning in an active learning classroom contributes to positive student engagement in the classroom. Durham et al.'s study justified some earlier research which also claimed that, new slideware technologies, mobile learning, social media use, and interactive whiteboard (Berque, 2004) etc. can increase the teacher-student engagement (Gunuc & Kuzu, 2015).

**Teacher-related factors.** First, teacher self-disclosure is an influential factor that can positively or negatively shape the nature of student engagement with teacher. Exploring self-disclosure and student engagement, Borzea and Goodboy (2016) claimed that self-disclosures of teachers that correspond with the lesson can positively influence some elements of student engagement, such as, oral participation along and activities outside the class. However, Borzea and Goodboy's study further suggested that to maintain the positive influence some teacher misbehaviors should be avoided, such as confusing teaching manners and criticizing student's response, etc. This study strengthened a previous work of Cayanus et al. (2003) that revealed a relationship between teacher self-disclosure and student engagement in the classroom. Cayanus et al. explained that students' motive to participate in interaction with a teacher can be positively or negatively influenced by the nature and the relevance of the information teachers reveal about themselves in the classroom that students are not likely to find from any other sources outside.

Second, existing research on student's perception of teacher has further extended to include sensitivity of the teacher. Alicea, Suárez-Orozco, Singh, Darbes, and Abrica (2016) examined the relationship between classroom engagement and the students' perception of their instructor's sensitivity. In highly engaged classrooms, students perceived their teacher as 'sensitive' to their academic needs (Alicea et al., 2016). According to Alicea et al., if student's perception about their teacher is positive, the level of classroom engagement is supposed to be higher. Similarly, Rimm-Kaufman, Early, and Cox (2002) also found that students are more prone to engage in a classroom where teachers are sensitive.

Third, another teacher-related factor that influences classroom engagement is teacher enthusiasm. Zhang (2014) claimed that teacher enthusiasm effectively predicts classroom engagement. Among the three dimensions of engagement- emotional, behavioral and cognitive, the last-mentioned was found to be the most effective in terms of teacher enthusiasm, while the least effective engagement type that can be triggered by teacher enthusiasm is behavioral engagement.

In short, major teacher-related factors that shape the level of student engagement with the teacher includes teacher self-disclosure, teacher sensitivity, and teacher enthusiasm. The following discussion reviews the existing research on gender and racial factors.

**Gender and race factors.** Alongside teacher-related or instructional factors, existing research studies have also revealed that the identities of different individuals,



whether racial or gender, can also predict their level of behavioral engagement in the classroom. For example, Lietaert, Roorda, Laevers, Verschueren, and De Fraine (2015) claimed that male and female students in a class involve in different levels of engagement with their teacher where female students reportedly produce a higher level of engagement than male students in a class. Previous research especially granted support on the gap of the 'level of behavioral engagement' between female and male students (Martin, 2007; Sontam & Gabriel, 2012). In addition to gender difference, Sontam and Gabriel further posited that different racial individuals rendered different level of engagement. For example, African-American students tended to be more engaged than other students spending more time on tasks and frequently seeking help from skill lab mentors, However, Sontam and Gabriel's study only examined the engagement between students while the role of teacher-race was left uninvestigated.

A clearer picture of the role of teachers' racial identity in classroom engagement can be found in the following research. For example, Campbell and Campbell's (2007) study on university-level students reported evidence of racial similarity between mentors and students leading to student's academic achievement including higher grades, higher graduation rates, and an increase in class enrollment, etc. with the condition of the teacher's engagement with the student individually. However, previous studies on racial identity in classroom engagement predominantly focused on the members of the minority racial groups (Walker, Wright, & Hanley, 2001) and have not addressed the role of the racial difference between teacher and student in engagement where many of the classroom engagement factors are correlated with race issues. For example, teacher self-

disclosure may also create a psychological gap in the classrooms if a teacher and the students do not belong to a similar racial group (Maingi, 2017). Maingi referred to the gap as a 'disconnect' that may occur at the disclosure of one's dissimilar racial background to students. Maingi himself reported a discomfort between students and him as he revealed his racial identity to them. This discomfort may damage the enthusiasm or motivation of a teacher for students learning or make the teacher less sensitive to student needs.

On top of that, it is believed by many that there are still inequity and sufferings of minority racial groups in diverse classrooms (Takei & Shouse, 2008; Jost et al., 2005). Despite the technological progress in the classrooms, learning outcome of students still can be limited for minority students as racial membership affects the teacher-student interactive engagement (Ladson-Billings 2001; McIntyre 1997). In some cases, black students perceived that they would not be welcomed by white individuals (Tatum, 1992). Given the consistent and historical evidence of racism that black individuals face, and that the perception of discrimination can evidently come with negative effects on the student engagement in the classroom, an impact of that perception on the teacher-student interaction would not be surprising (Dotterer et al., 2009).

In summary, the major factors influencing classroom engagement can be categorized in two areas as follows. First, teacher-related factors which include sensitivity of teacher, teacher self-disclosure (Borzea & Goodboy, 2016), and teacher enthusiasm (Zhang, 2014), second, instructional factors includes instructional technologies in academic curriculum such as slideware technology and visual media, etc.

(Berque, 2004; Durham et al., 2018). Beside the teacher-related and instructional categories, existing research revealed that students of various racial background engage in classroom interaction differently (Martin, 2007; Sontam & Gabriel, 2012). The present study explores how one's strength of racial identification may play a role on that influence in the teacher-student engagement. What makes the race a significant factor in the context of the classroom for this study is first, the long tragic history of race in the US that set off the racialization of classrooms (segregation, and discrimination, etc.) and second, the growing racial diversity in college classrooms. The following chapter will offer a thorough exploration into the context of race in the US.

### **Context of Race in the US and the Strength of Racial Identity**

The term 'race' was found exclusively in the regions of the American continent which were dominated by the European settlers (Smedley, 1999). It was used to distinguish humans in different groups based on phenotypic attributes such as skin color, nose shape, etc. (Harrison, Thomas & Cross, 2017). For hundreds of years afterward, this idea of categorization served as a tool to differentiate people from people. It provided the European settlers a strategy to establish their superiority over others, most extensively, people of African descent. The categorization was intended merely to downgrade the social status of people of color and to keep the white bloodline pure. Hypodescent is the example of their further discriminatory classification of black and white mixed offspring. The term hypodescent refers to "an individual who has a lineal ancestor, maternal or paternal, who is or was a member of a subordinate group, is likewise a member of the subordinate group" (Harris, 1964, p. 108). This racial manifestation was originally

implicated by one-drop rule, that is an individual would be accorded to a black identity if one single ancestor is black. Such an imposed conferment of self-concept was crucial as there was anxiety among white people that a single drop of black blood could contaminate the pure white race (Lewis, 2016).

The idea of race also facilitated the long-existed slavery. It was not until the 1860s that racial categorization backed up and helped to establish the slavery system specifically for the people of African descent (Morgan, 1975). Several documents suggest that Europeans were ready to consider the people of African descent as of their same social standard until the last decade of the 17th century --- until that time marriage between black and white people was common in many areas (Morgan, 1975; Parent, 2003). In the post-slavery time, many local and state laws including black codes and Jim Crow laws to limit black people from their housing, voting and education rights (Reskin, 2012). Reskin (2012) explained, “Southern states prevented almost all blacks from voting until the late 1960s by making registration impossible. Segregationists' tactics included requiring one or another of the following: prohibitive poll taxes, literacy tests, evidence that one's grandfather had been a registered voter, frequent re-registration, lengthy residence in a district...” (p. 28). Consecutively the political exploitation of race began in the southern states. There is more than little evidence of the use of racial fears of ‘black violence’ by southern politicians to win over the opponents (Alexander, 2012).

Such state-mandated racial discrimination and racist policies attempted to cripple African Americans in every possible way. Disparities in earnings, health care, education opportunity, civic participation, labor market, etc. showed the continued discriminatory

treatment to African Americans. For example, segregation in education based on race left a devastating impact that still shows the wide gap between white and black graduation rates in school (Mickelson, 2003). Several studies also captured the racial disparities in housing and residence. Today, houses owned by black people are valued less in the market compared to white owners (Williams, Nesiba & McConnell, 2005). The long-lasting effect of segregation apparently created a disparity between black and white neighborhoods. The disparities show how experiences of the people of each race are very different from others.

The negatively portrayal of the people of color also affected the way new generations view and perceive about different racial groups. For hundreds of years, African Americans were stereotyped as lazy, overly sexed, loud, irrational, and intelligence-lacking, overly emotional, and superstitious (Smedley, 1999). Moreover, the targets of racism went beyond African Americans. The sufferings Asian Americans have been through because of the Chinese Exclusion Act, continuous stereotypes, and body-shaming cannot be negligible. For example, Filipinos have been consistently denigrated as unclean and uncivilized bodies and were pointed out as the carriers of tropical diseases (Anderson, 2006). Even at the onset of the recent COVID19 pandemic, 650 racist acts were reported by Asian Americans (Kandil, 2020).

Today, because segregation exists no more, people of different ethnicities connect in schools and colleges a lot more than before. It would be intriguing to see whether their cultural difference and survival experiences play a role in their engaging behavior with one another. Besides, after a myriad of scholarly criticism on racism and racial inequality,

the imposed identification based on race still exists. Every national census, academic form, health care inquiry and employment application still require people to check the option of their racial identity that is bestowed upon them. This is where the strength of one's racial identity come into play. Researchers suggested that individuals prefer to interact with one from similar identity group over others who are from a different group (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). This preference would most likely exist for people who strongly identify with their groups. A recent study in India suggested that people who identify themselves with high Hindu religious identity, compared to other Hindus with low religiosity, were less likely to engage in contact with people of Muslim religious identity and felt threatened by them (Croucher, Juntunen, & Zeng, 2014). However, the Hindu individuals whose identification with religion was low apparently displayed different behavior than the Hindus with strong identity. Thus, an individual with low level of identification with an identity may not show the preference. Moreover, their action, interaction, and engagement in society may also be impacted by how strongly they identify with this social classification. The purpose of the present study is to examine the effect of the strength of one's racial identity on classroom engagement between teachers and students. Next discussion will offer a theoretical ground on how racial similarity or dissimilarity impacts the nature of interpersonal interaction.

### **Theoretical Framework**

**The similarity-attraction paradigm.** Similarity-Attraction paradigm suggests that people are simply attracted to the ones who share similar characteristics and attributes (Byrne & Rhamey, 1965). Elements of the characteristics may range from

personal habits to one's demographic level, socioeconomic status, etc. Originally proposed by Byrne and Rhamey (1965), similarity-attraction theory has been widely applied and explained further by social researchers of political science, social psychology, and sociology, etc. For example, Berscheid and Walster (1978) claimed that a positive feeling stems from the conversation between individuals of similar characteristics, especially because, as Berscheid and Walster (1978) explained, the disclosure of similarity yields to a pleasant communication, unlike dissimilarity. In short, SA theory suggests that similar characteristics attract individuals to interact while generating a positive feeling of common identity or belongingness (Ostroff & Schulte, 2007). Caballero and Resnik's (1986) further work on similarity-attraction theory offered an evaluative scale to measure the degree to which an individual perceives an attribute of others in an interaction. However, little research examined the theory in classroom engagement. In the light of SA paradigm, this study examines the relationship between teacher-student racial similarity/dissimilarity and their classroom engagement.

From the conclusion of SA theory, it can be assumed that racial congruence between individuals would yield similar belongingness or a sense of common identity. Social identity theory further explains a tendency of social categorization which stems from the very sense of belongingness with a social group.

**Social identification theory.** Social identification theory (SI) posits that an integral part of individual self-concept derives from their group affiliations (Tajfel, 1978). In other words, people categorize themselves and others based on their belongingness and emotional attachment to certain groups. People whose characteristics

resembles the group norms are deemed as in-group, while whose characteristics differ from the very group norms are regarded as out-group (Hogg & Reid, 2006). SI theory argues that this group identity also influences the intergroup behaviors (Turner & Oakes, 1986). For example, perceived in-group individuals would be regarded more favorably than the out-group individuals (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Edwards and Hardwood's (2003) research indicated that students rate teachers who share a similar age-group more favorably. The perceived in-group and outgroup identification promote favoritism in various ways. In-group membership especially, has been a significantly common criteria for minority children by which they choose and define their peers (Bellmore, Nishina, Witkow, Graham, & Juvonen, 2007). Griffiths and Nesdale's (2006) study of the students of three ethnic groups, Anglo-Australian (Majority), Pacific Island (Minority) and Aboriginals found a significant impact of racial in-groups and out-groups on the relationship among the students of a primary school. Students from both major and minor groups rated the aboriginal groups very less favorably (Griffiths and Nesdale, 2006). Lee and Pratto's (2011) study on the boundaries of ethnic identities and students' feeling toward in-group/outgroup of Chinese people further strengthened the notion of favoritism to in-group individuals as he revealed that mainlanders in a country are more likely to show favoritism to the people of similar race than outgroup people. Students' nature of choosing in-group members in the classroom repeats similarly while interacting with teachers.

Furthermore, Clark, Lin, and Maher's (2015) claimed that the perception of in-group or out-group also influences the willingness to engage in conversation with an



individual. In other words, the in-group/out-group feelings influence the interactive engagement that includes the compliance to listen and participation in conversation (Harsh, Lamm, Abrams, Meyers, & Telg, 2018). For a teacher-student setting, the engagement would include listening to the instructor and participating in interactive discussion. In short, along with the previous researches, the study of Clark et al. (2015) also confirmed the effects of the in-group and out-group sense of people in their communication. Research also concluded this relationship between racial identity and teacher-student engagement in college level classroom (Campbell & Campbell's, 2007). In other words, social identification sense of people that decides which racial group they belong to can shape the level of their interactive engagement.

As racial similarity and difference between people can predict their level of engagement, it is likely that racial similarity and difference will also predict the level of engagement between teachers and students in a classroom (Clark et al., 2015; Lee & Pratto, 2011). However, although studies suggest that similarity in the racial background of individuals promotes positive interaction and vice versa (Byrne & Rhamey, 1965; Clark et al., 2015), and that it is easily assumable that students will demonstrate a higher level of behavioral engagement with instructors of similar racial background than instructors of dissimilar race, studies have not tested the strength of social identification. Usually, individuals have membership in multiple groups, or some grow up with different values. One who is born with a certain identity may not necessarily prefer to identify themselves with it. For example, a person born in a black family may not prefer to identify himself/herself with the racial categorization. In that case, their level of

identification with black identity would not be same as somebody who is proud of their black identity (Oommen, 2017). Thus, the degree to which people identify themselves would be a key factor to how they would view other members in the group. Therefore, in the light of social identification theory, strong identifications with racial groups will lead to preference or liking for the people of same racial background compared to people from dissimilar backgrounds. However, under the condition of low-level identification, the behavioral engagement between teachers and students may not depend on their racial similarity or dissimilarity at all. Hence, the level of identification would be the actual determining factor in regards to whether the level of engagement would be high or low. Therefore, I propose the following hypotheses:

**H1:** The effect of similarity and dissimilarity in racial identity between teacher and students on the level of classroom engagement will depend on the strength of social identification with race.

**H1a:** Under high levels of social identification with race, similarity in racial background between teacher and students will lead to higher quality of classroom engagement compared to dissimilarity in racial background.

**H1b:** Under low levels of social identification with race, similarity and dissimilarity in racial background between teacher and students will have no impact on the level of classroom engagement.

### **CHAPTER THREE: METHOD**

## Procedure

Participants for this study was recruited through the SONA system from a midwestern university in the United States. SONA is a research management system that facilitated the recruitment of the research participants from different courses. Data was collected through an online survey which was administered by Qualtrics. The survey took approximately 10 minutes to complete and students received 1 extra-credit for participating in the research study. The study has been approved by IRB (IRBNet ID #: 1567690).

## Participants

In total, one hundred and fourteen respondents participated in this study. The average age of the respondents was 21.12 years ( $SD= 3.36$ ). Of all the respondents, 28.9% were male while 71.1% were female. Only 38.4% of the respondents had female instructors where 58.9% had male instructors. In addition, out of all participants, 78.1% were predominantly white, 10.5% were black, 7% were Asian, and 4.4% reported as others. 75.9% of participants reported having a white instructor, while 3.6% had black or African American instructors, 3.6% had an Asian instructor, 2.7% had a native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander instructor in the particular class they picked to reflect on. Only one participant reported that their instructor was an American Indian or Alaska native. Respondents were from various nationalities, including American ( $n=71$ ), English ( $n=1$ ), Norwegian/German ( $n=4$ ), Caucasian ( $n=3$ ), South Korean ( $n=4$ ), Russian ( $n=1$ ), Filipino ( $n=1$ ), Liberian ( $n=1$ ), Ethiopian ( $n=3$ ), Indian ( $n=1$ ), Gambian ( $n=1$ ), Laotian ( $n=1$ ), Somali ( $n=2$ ), Italian ( $n=1$ ), Ugandan ( $n=1$ ), and Nepalese ( $n=1$ ). The education level of

the respondents was as follows: 96.5% were undergraduate students while 3.5 % were at the graduate level. In addition, out of one hundred and ten undergraduate level participants, 23.7% were freshmen, 16.7% were sophomores, 27.2% were juniors, and 28.9% were senior-level students. 67.3% of participants reported having a racially similar teacher, whereas 32.7% reported having a racially dissimilar teacher.

### **Measures**

Based on the themes discussed in the literature review and the hypotheses established for this research, three variables were mainly considered in the data collection and analysis, including *the strength of racial identity*, *racial similarity and dissimilarity between teachers and students*, and *teacher-student classroom engagement*. In addition, two control variables, *self-disclosure* and *teacher enthusiasm*, were also introduced as they were found the most influential to classroom engagement in previous scholarship. However, they produced skewed results and hence they were excluded from the analysis.

**Strength of racial identity.** A modified version of *strength of social identification with religion scale* developed by Oommen (2017) was used to measure *the strength of racial identity* (see Appendix A). The scale consists of 8 likert-scale the items which was measured on a five-point scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). The greater the score on the scale, the greater would be considered the strength of one's identification to race. The Cronbach alpha for this scale in was .807. The mean and standard deviation in this study are presented in Table 1.

**Teacher-student racial similarity and dissimilarity.** Racial similarity and dissimilarity between teachers and students was considered as a dummy variable where similar race dyad was coded as '1' and dissimilar-race dyad was coded as '0'.

**Teacher-student classroom engagement.** A modified version of Frymier and Houser's (2016) *revised motivation and engagement scale* was used to measure teacher-student classroom engagement (see Appendix A). The scale consisted of 14 likert-scale items which was measured on a five-point scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*).

**Self-disclosure.** A modified version of Cayanus and Martin's (2008) *self-disclosure scale* was also used to measure its influence on the depended variable (see Appendix A). The scale was divided into three subscales for the convenience of analysis, such as, amount (1-4), relevance (5-9) and negativity (10-14). The scale consists of 14 likert-scale items which was measured on a five-point scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*).

**Instructor Enthusiasm.** A modified version of the *teacher enthusiasm scale* was used to measure the enthusiasm of the instructor, which was originally developed by Kunter, Frenzel, Nagy, Baumert and Pekrun (2011) (see Appendix A). The scale consists of four likert-items which was measured on a five-point scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*).

The survey also included the following demographic variables: students' age, gender, ethnicity, nationality, degree major, college year, and instructors' ethnicity

(instructor of the class which the student is taking this survey as extra-credit), gender, and approximate age. Table 1 provides the mean, standard deviation, and  $\alpha$ -value of the scales.

*Table 1: Descriptive Statistics*

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>No. of items</b>	<b><math>\alpha</math></b>
<b>Teacher-student classroom engagement</b>	49.50	8.613	14	.824
<b>Strength of racial identity</b>	24.32	6.08	8	.807
<b>Instructor enthusiasm</b>	17.06	3.017	4	.923
<b>Self-Disclosure (Amount)</b>	13.61	3.41	4	.831
<b>Self-Disclosure (Relevance)</b>	20.70	3.77	5	.913
<b>Self-Disclosure (Negativity)</b>	9.25	4.315	5	.893

### **Data Analysis**

For data analysis, moderated regression analysis was conducted using Macro-Model 1 process (Hayes, 2013). The independent variable for this study was teacher-student racial similarity and dissimilarity; the dependent variable was the teacher-student classroom engagement; and the moderator variable was the strength of racial identity. Both independent and moderator variables were mean-centered. To test the moderating influence of the strength of racial identity, a new variable, which was a cross product of the strength of racial identity and the dummy variable representing teacher-student racial

similarity and dissimilarity was created. Pick-a Point approach was used to probe the interaction where moderating influence of the strength of racial identification was tested at one standard deviation above and one standard deviation below mean strength of racial identification. High levels of racial identification corresponded to one standard deviation above mean strength of identification and low levels of racial identification corresponded to one standard deviation below mean identification.

## CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

The hypotheses proposed for this study were as follows:, **H1**- the effect of similarity and dissimilarity in racial identity between teacher and students on the level of classroom engagement will depend on the strength of social identification with race; **H1a**- under high levels of social identification with race, the similarity in the racial background between teacher and students will lead to a higher quality of classroom engagement compared to dissimilarity in racial background; **H2b**-: under low levels of social identification with race, similarity, and dissimilarity in the racial background between teacher and students will have no impact on the level of classroom engagement. The results of the analysis showed significant interaction effect for **H1** that the effect of similarity and dissimilarity in racial identity between teachers and students on the level of classroom engagement will depend on the strength of social identification with race ( $b = -.657, t = -2.03, p < .05$ ). See table 2 for more information about the moderated regression analysis.

*Table 2: Predictors of Classroom Engagement*

Variable	B	95% of Confidence Interval
Constant	50.285	45.841, 54.729
Teacher-student racial similarity-dissimilarity	1.361	-2.678, 5.400
Strength of racial identity	.402	-.129, .933



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<b>Strength of racial identity * Racial similarity-</b>	<b>-0.657*</b>	<b>-1.296, -0.016</b>
<b>dissimilarity</b>		
R <sup>2</sup>	.0702	
F	1.868	

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Note: N=114. \* $p \leq .05$

However, the conditional effects of racial similarity and dissimilarity which were assessed at one standard deviation above, at mean strength of racial identity and one standard deviation below mean strength of racial identity were non-significant. Hence, **h1a** and **h1b** were not supported by the results. See table 3 in the appendix B for more information.

## CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

The present study was specifically set out to investigate the moderating influence of the strength of racial identity on the relationship between teacher-student racial similarity and dissimilarity and their classroom engagement. The results from the analysis provided that, although the interaction effect was significant, the probing of the interactions through the Pick-A-Point approach revealed that the effect of racial-similarity/dissimilarity between instructors and students did not influence classroom engagement at high and low levels of racial identification of the students. However, the nature of that moderating influence of the strength of racial identity remained unexplained because the result did not provide support to hypotheses any further.

There might be several reasons why the results lacked support to explain the hypotheses. First, this study initially aimed to survey students in the on-going face-to-face classes where students could reflect on their day-to-day engagement experience with the faculty. However, as a part of the safety measures for Covid-19 pandemic, which forced all institutions and establishments to impose social distancing, all the face-to-face classes in the university campus were closed and transferred to online. Hence, to answer the questions about their classroom engagement, participants were asked to recall a recent face-to-face/in-person class they had taken. Recalling information from memory rather than from an ongoing live experience could have influenced the responses. Second, the research population lacked an adequately proportioned racial diversity. A huge majority of the participants were white (78.1%), where only 10.5% were black and 7% were Asian. In various ways, that could have contributed to the results. Mostly because White

people, in general, are less likely to think about their race (Moon, 2016). The case is especially true for the young white individuals who do not find their own experiences as racially influenced as people other races find theirs (Foster, 2009). In some cases, young white people were found often diverting the race-discussions to feminism, homophobia, and body shaming issues, etc. (Rich & Cargile, 2004). Given the predominant white presence in participants, it would not be surprising if their responses in the racial-identity related questions influenced the results. In addition to that, 75.9% of the participants reportedly had a white instructor which produced a disproportionately higher number of white-white dyads between the instructor and students compared to other racial dyads. This discrepancy might have contributed to the results as well. Hence, the population size turns out to be a limitation for this study. This study recruited participants from only one midwestern university campus. Consequently, the data sample came out relatively small. Although it helped recruiting students from various types of classes, recruiting from several academic institutions would provide more insight into the findings. Besides, faculty race was much less diverse in this research. Out of one hundred and fourteen participants, 75.9% of the participants were taught by white instructors, while only 3.6% of the participants reported having a black or African American instructor, and some 3.6% reported having an Asian instructor. A larger sample, on the other hand, might be able to include more racial entities. Despite the limitations, this research may generate several future topics to study. The present study focused on the strength of students' racial identity and its impacts on the oral/verbal and nonverbal acts of classroom engagement. Future research can extend the area of focus for the strength of

identification, for example, examining how instructors' strength of identity play a role in the engagement. It would also be interesting to seek more insight into how that impacts students' learning, motivation, and enthusiasm, etc. Second, this communication-based research narrowed down the focus of classroom engagement to specifically behavioral side of engagement while student's emotional and psychological engagement is also an insightful area to explore. Previous research showed the significance of the instructor's race on the student's emotional engagement and attachment in the classroom (Finn & Voelkl's, 1993). Future studies may investigate the emotional and psychological engagement inviting communication psychology into the scholarship of classroom engagement.

## CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

The purpose of the study was to understand how the strength of racial identity impacts the nature of engaging behavior (i.e. classroom participation, paying attention to the teacher, complying with instructions, turning in assignments, attending classes, etc.) of students with their instructors in the classroom. This paper argued that because one's strength of social identification determines the level of belongingness to an identity, how an individual engages in interaction will depend on the strength of her/his identification with the identity he/or she was born with. Although the results showed that the moderating effect of the strength of racial identity was significant, there was not enough evidence to support the effect at high and low levels of identification, or the nature of the influence. However, the strength of racial identification can still present a vast area of focus for future study. Especially in the time when the ideas and perceptions about race are changing in a faster pace. The questions that were raised and requires further investigation include the nature of teacher-student interaction under the influence of the strength of racial identity. A larger number of participants from face-to-face classes where students will not be required to rely on their memory will resolve the issue in future cases. In addition, future research may consider including the psychological aspects in student engagement which will extend the focus into a cross-disciplinary study.

## APPENDICES

### Appendix A Measurement Scales

#### Strength of Racial Identity Scale

Please answer how much you agree or disagree with the statements below. (5= strongly agree; 4= somewhat agree; 3= Neither agree nor disagree; 2= somewhat disagree; 1= strongly disagree).

<b>1. If people talk ill of my racial identity/racial group, I will consider it as a personal insult.</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2. I am interested in what others think about my race.</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>3. If someone praises my racial identity/racial group, I will consider it as a personal compliment.</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>4. If a story in the media criticized my race, I would feel angry.</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>5. When I talk about my racial identity to people who are not members of my racial group, I use the words 'we' or 'us'.</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>

<b>6. I am proud of my racial affiliation.</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>7. I prefer to closely associate with the members of my racial group rather than those who are not.</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>

### **Teacher-student Classroom Engagement Scale**

These items correspond to students' classroom engagement. Please respond to one of the options by reflecting on your classroom engagement for the class that you are taking this survey as extra-credit. (5= strongly agree; 4= somewhat agree; 3= Neither agree nor disagree; 2= somewhat disagree; 1= strongly disagree).

<b>1. I volunteer when I know the correct response or answer.</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2. I express my personal opinion in class.</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>3. I ask follow-up questions until I fully understand something.</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>4. I ask questions that solicit the teacher's opinions about the content.</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>5. I say as little as possible during class.</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>6. I avoid participating in class discussions.</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>

<b>7. I don't volunteer in class even when I know the correct response or answer.</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>8. In class I give instructor my complete attention when they are speaking.</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>9. I maintain eye contact with people who are speaking in class.</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>10. In class I respond nonverbally to let my instructor know that I am listening.</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>11. I avoid looking at the instructor in my class.</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>12. I sink down in my chair during class so that I am not noticed by the instructor.</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>13. In class I prefer to sit in the back of the room.</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>14. I maintain an attentive posture when the instructor and students are speaking.</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>

Note: Items 5, 6, 7 and 11, 12, 13 are reverse coded for data analysis.



### Self-disclosure Scale

These items correspond to instructor's **self disclosure** in classroom. Please respond to one of the options by reflecting on the same in-person/on-campus/face-to-face class that you chose for the previous questions. (5= **strongly agree**; 4= **somewhat agree**; 3= **Neither agree nor disagree**; 2= **somewhat disagree**; 1= **strongly disagree**).

<b>Amount</b>					
<b>1. My instructor often gave their opinions about current events.</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2. My instructor often shared their dislikes and Likes.</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>3. My instructor often presented their attitudes toward events occurring on campus.</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>4. My instructor often gave their opinion about events in the community.</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Relevance</b>					
<b>5. My instructor used their personal examples to show the importance of a concept.</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>

<b>6. My instructor used their own experiences to introduce a concept.</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>7. My instructor provided personal explanations that made the content relevant.</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>8. My instructor provided personal examples which helped me understand the importance of the content.</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>9. My instructor linked current course content to other areas of content through the use of personal examples.</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Negativity</b>					
<b>10. My instructor's disclosures, on the whole, were more negative than positive.</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>11. My instructor revealed "bad" feelings about themselves.</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>12. My instructor revealed undesirable things about themselves.</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>13. My instructor usually disclosed negative things about themselves.</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>

<b>14. My instructor told some unflattering stories about themselves.</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>
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### **Instructor Enthusiasm Scale**

These items correspond to **instructor's enthusiasm**. Please respond to one of the options by reflecting on the same in-person/on-campus/face-to-face class that you chose for the previous questions. (5= strongly agree; 4= somewhat agree; 3= Neither agree nor disagree; 2= somewhat disagree; 1= strongly disagree).

<b>1. The instructor of my class taught with great enthusiasm.</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2. The instructor of my class enjoyed teaching us new things.</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>3. The instructor of my class enjoyed interacting with students.</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>4. The instructor of my class was full of dynamic energy when they taught</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>

## Appendix B: Tables and Figures

*Table 3: Moderating Effects of the Strength of Social Identification with Race on the Relationship Between Racial Similarity and Dissimilarity and Classroom Engagement Using Pick-A-Point Approach.*

<b>SRI</b>	<b>Effect</b>	<b>se</b>	<b>t</b>	<b>p</b>	<b>95% of CI</b>
<b>-5.3274</b>	4.8593	3.0280	1.6048	.1117	-1.1489, 10.8675
<b>-.3274</b>	1.5761	2.0693	.7617	.4481	-2.5297, 5.6820
<b>6.6726</b>	-3.0203	2.4858	-1.2150	.2273	-7.9527, 1.9122

Note. Conditional effects were assessed at 1 standard deviation above mean strength of racial identity, at mean strength of racial identity, and at 1 standard deviation below mean strength of racial identity. SRI = strength of racial identity; *SE* = standard error; CI = confidence interval; LL = lower limit; UL = upper limit.

## Appendix C: Consent Form

You are requested to participate in a research study on students' classroom behavior conducted by Md Enamul Kabir, under the guidance of Dr. Deepa Oommen from the Department of Communication Studies at Minnesota State University, Mankato. This survey should take about 10 minutes to complete. The goal of this survey is to understand your classroom experiences, and you will be asked to answer questions about that topic. If you have any questions about the study, please contact Dr. Oommen at (507) 389-2367 or [deepa.oommen@mnsu.edu](mailto:deepa.oommen@mnsu.edu).

Participation is voluntary. You have the option not to respond to any of the questions. You may stop taking the survey at any time by closing your web browser.

Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your relationship with Minnesota State University, Mankato, and refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits. If you have any questions about participants' rights and research-related injuries, please contact the Administrator of the Institutional Review Board at (507) 389-1242.

Responses will be anonymous. However, whenever one works with online technology, there is always the risk of compromising privacy, confidentiality, and/or anonymity. If you would like more information about the specific privacy and anonymity risks posed by online surveys, please contact the Minnesota State University, Mankato IT Solutions Center (507-389-6654) and ask to speak to the Information Security Manager.

The risks of participating are no more than that are experienced in daily life.

You will receive extra credits (1 point) for the participation. However, the research will also help in advancing knowledge pertaining to classroom communication and will help you to reflect on your classroom experiences. Submitting the completed survey will indicate your informed consent to participate and indicate your assurance that you are at least 18 years of age. Please print a copy of this page for your future reference. If you cannot print the consent form, take a screenshot, paste it to a word document and print that.

IRBNet ID #: 1567690

Date of Minnesota State University, Mankato IRB approval: 3/23/2020

Do you agree to participate?

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