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SPECIAL ISSUE ARTICLE

# Past Due! Racializing Aspects of Situated Expectancy-Value Theory Through the Lens of Critical Race Theory

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The authors take first steps in racializing Eccles and Wigfield's situated expectancy-value theory (SEVT). SEVT was initially developed to explain gender differences in motivation for and choice of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics majors and careers but has been mostly silent on issues of race and racism in motivation research. Thus, the authors focus on Black American adolescents' school experiences and reconceptualize three parts of the model: SEVT's conceptualization of the cultural milieu, its portrayal of the socialization of motivation in school and at home, and aspects of individuals' subjective task values, one of the key constructs in the model. To "break down silos" we connect SEVT to critical race theory by suggesting the cultural milieu "box" in the model be reimagined to include the impact of systemic racism and discrimination, power differentials, school segregation, and inequities in teacher quality and transience. Regarding racial socialization patterns within schools, we propose the notion of stage-culture-environment misfit, and evaluate teachers' beliefs, biases, and cultural (in)competence. We also connect SEVT to empirical research on racial-ethnic socialization, specifically how the parents of Black children prepare them for discriminatory experiences and foster healthy racial identities. Turning to individuals' subjective task values, we suggest expanding the perceived cost aspect of task value to include racialized opportunity cost. We also extend intrinsic and attainment aspects of task value through integrating the emergent literature on Black joy. We conclude by suggesting critical pragmatism as a possible broad framework in which motivation researchers from different perspectives can work together.

*Keywords:* situated expectancy-value theory, critical race theory, school socialization, parent ethnic-racial socialization, Black joy

Motivation researchers have long called for greater attention to diversity across cultures; however, within the field there remains the absence of empiricism and acuity of perspective needed to understand achievement motivation processes across diverse cultural groups. The current leading theories of motivation in educational psychology have not thoroughly considered how interpersonal discrimination and systemic racism impact diverse students' achievement motivation (Wigfield & Koenka, 2020). Further, these theories can be characterized as social cognitive, postpositivistic approaches that have not fully considered nor addressed calls for race-reimagining prominent motivation constructs (Kumar & DeCuir-Gunby, 2023; Kumar et al., 2018). Such oversights

reflect the unfortunate and dangerous omission of critical and cultural perspectives throughout the history of motivation theory and research.

We attempt to address these issues by leveraging critical race theory (CRT; Dixson & Anderson, 2018; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995) to critique and expand aspects of situated expectancy-value theory (SEVT; Eccles & Wigfield, 2020; see Figure 1), one of the so-called "big theories of motivation" (Liem & McInerney, 2018; McInerney & Van Etten, 2004). We chose SEVT in part because it was initially developed to examine an inequitable cultural phenomenon: why girls were less likely to choose and remain in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) majors and careers relative to boys. However, a discrete focus on gender differences has led to an obscuring and underemphasis of other cultural phenomena that impact diverse students' motivation, such as structural racism, subjugation, and unjust power dynamics that reinforce marginalized versus privileged racial and socioeconomic groups; topics on which SEVT has been silent historically. Thus, CRT allows us to move beyond merely attuning to diversity across racial-ethnic groups and provides a fundamentally different epistemological frame for interrogating overgeneralized and seemingly race-neutral perspectives in motivation research.

We leverage CRT to critique and expand four main aspects of SEVT. On the left side of the model, we unpack the historical foundations of a racially charged and power-imbalanced cultural milieu,

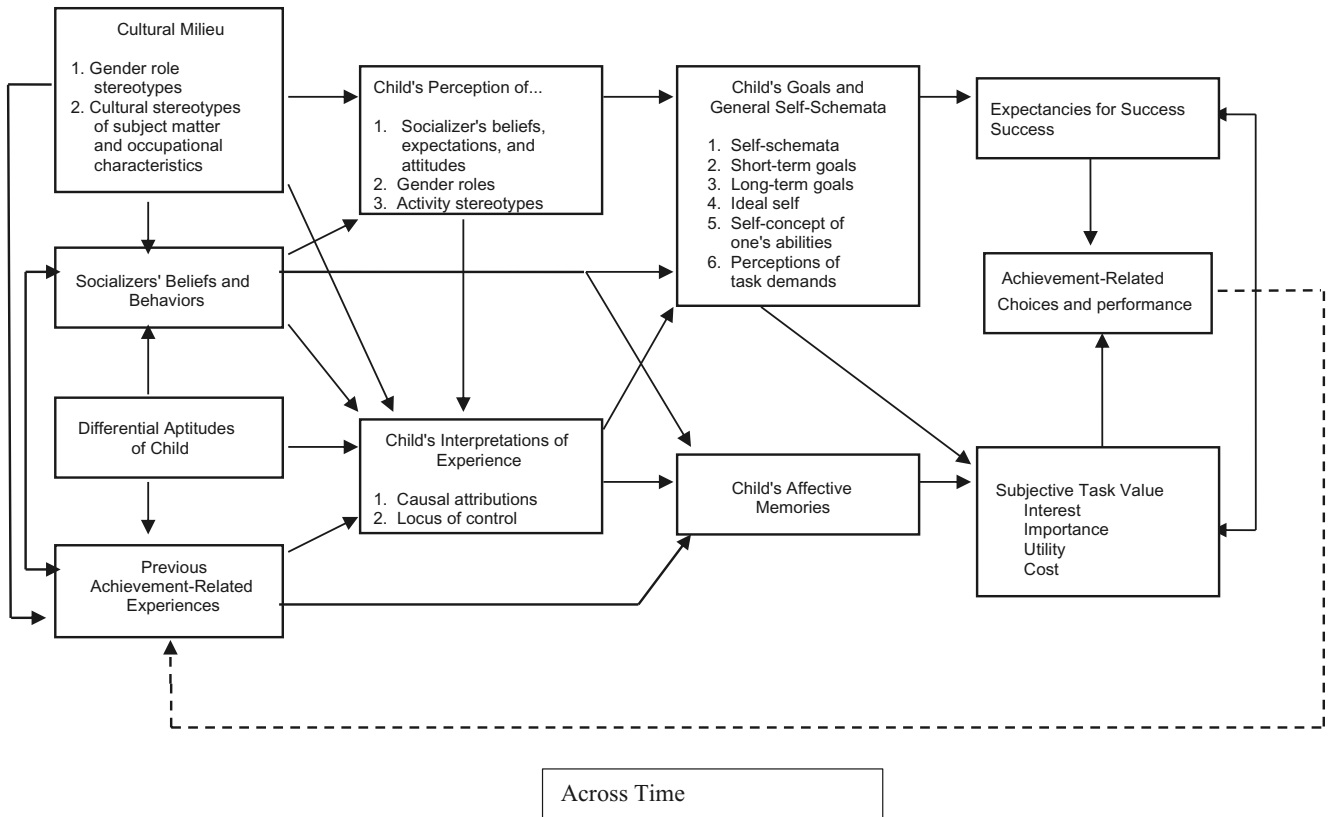
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**Figure 1**  
*Eccles and Colleagues' Expectancy-Value Model of Achievement Choice*



setting the contextual backdrop of inequitable systems and structures through which achievement motivation processes take shape. Second, we discuss school socialization patterns that implicitly teach children about the significance race, reinforcing subjugation of racially marginalized children through culturally incompetent teaching and biased curricula. Third, we underscore how such societal and school socialization issues lead to the necessity of parental racial socialization, as a means for families to prepare their children for school and social experiences pervasive with racialized stress and bias. We connect primarily to work by Hughes et al. (2006) and Neblett et al. (2021) on how parental racial socialization fosters healthy racial identity and other positive developmental outcomes. Fourth, turning to the right side of the model, we racialized two subjective task value (STV) constructs by (a) connecting and expanding the perceived cost aspect of task value to include work on racialized opportunity cost (ROC) and (b) reimagining intrinsic and attainment value through the lens of Black joy.

To explicate these foci, we limit our focus to the contemporary and historic schooling experiences of Black American youth, given the multifaceted and foundational legacy of anti-Black racism perpetuated throughout the history of American education that continues to shape how we educate and socialize Black children still today. This narrow focus is not meant to reinforce exclusion, but to refrain from social science trends that conflate the experiences of various historically marginalized cultural groups (e.g., underrepresented minority, Black Indigenous People of Color) as monolithic, despite their shared oppression historically. However, given our acute focus on Black American students, our analysis still centers comprehensive constructs

(e.g., power, cost, joy) that allow for avenues of application to other historically marginalized groups, although thoughtful care and knowledge of racial-ethnic nuance and history is necessary for judicious readers. First, we provide a brief overview of SEVT.

### Eccles and Wigfield's SEVT

Eccles, Wigfield, and their colleagues developed an expectancy-value model of achievement motivation, choice, and performance that has guided a wealth of motivation research over the last 40+ years. Through an array of writings (see Eccles, 1984, 2005, 2009; Eccles & Wigfield, 2020, 2023; Wigfield & Eccles, 2000, 2020), they have presented a comprehensive description of the model; thus, we review only a few key points here. First, Eccles and colleagues posited that the proximal predictors of individuals' performance and choice are their expectancies for success (ESs; i.e., beliefs about how well they will do on upcoming tasks within a domain) and STVs (i.e., reasons or incentives for doing the task).

Second, the theory proposes that individuals' ESs and STVs are directed by a host of other beliefs, emotions, and interpretations of their cultural and socialization experiences. They also propose that contextual influences and socializers guide children's developing ESs and STVs, for example, the cultural milieu in which they live and develop. Eccles and Wigfield (2020) ultimately renamed the model SEVT to emphasize how individuals' choices and actions are constrained by the situations in which they find themselves, and strongly impacted by the prevailing cultural systems within the historical eras in which

they live. They also noted that the boxes in the model contained illustrative constructs that could be elaborated to include a variety of other elements for understanding the development of motivation. To date, however, such elaboration and extensions have not occurred in any systematic fashion nor from a critical race perspective.

Much of the research based on SEVT has focused on the development and functions of students' ESs and their STVs (i.e., the right side of the model). While theoretical oversimplification is inevitable to some degree, this has meant the model's cultural, contextual, and socialization (i.e., left side) components have been underemphasized and understudied over time, thereby limiting opportunities to refine and nuance right-side components for discovering new insights through the theory. We believe applying a critical race lens to the cultural milieu and socialization components has the potential to afford cultural and contextualized interpretations of students' ESs and STVs in ways that can increase the theory's adaptability across cultures, as well as its sensitivity to issues of marginalization, subjugation, and (in)equity.

### **Reconceptualizing and Racializing the Cultural Milieu Box in SEVT**

As noted, Eccles-Parsons et al. (1983) initially developed their model to provide a framework for investigating the cultural, social, and psychological reasons why girls and women were underrepresented within STEM fields, an issue of social injustice. They discussed cultural norms regarding gender-role stereotypes and what academic subjects and occupations were appropriate for different genders, finding that such norms often led girls and women toward lower ESs in STEM and less likely to choose certain STEM occupations and fields (Eccles, 1984; Eccles-Parsons et al., 1983). However, this work has not been extended to other issues of social injustice, such as racial inequity within education or the intersection of multiple marginalized identities, reflecting a familiar trend of omission across motivation and psychological literatures (Strunk & Andrzejewski, 2023).

Through discussing the roles of race, racism, and systemic marginalization relevant to SEVT, we caution against the propensity to make false equivalencies between gender discrimination and racial discrimination. As intersectionality proponents have argued (Cole, 2009), although women/girls have historically been oppressed relative to men/boys, women from majoritarian cultures (e.g., middle-to-upper class White American women) still often share in and enjoy the benefits of white-privilege, economic, and social capital in ways that remain restricted from many people of color. Particularly in the United States, there remain racialized, social, and economic obstacles that can multiply marginalization for people of color in ways that are uniquely distinct from gender discrimination. Within recent decades White women in the United States have eclipsed both women and men of color in higher education attainment (Guynn, 2023; Kohn, 2013). Further, the average wealth of White American households (of which White women are mostly aggregated) is 10 times the size of Black American households, if not greater (McIntosh et al., 2020; P. Taylor et al., 2011). Thus, despite the unfortunate reality of gender discrimination in education and beyond, the omission and undersophisticated analysis of race and racism in motivation research is also deeply problematic.

While there have been some cultural considerations within SEVT research (e.g., mainly cross-cultural comparative work with Eastern

countries; Tonks et al., 2018; Wigfield et al., 2004), little-to-no SEVT research has investigated intranational diversity within the historical context of a nation (i.e., the United States) that has reified systemic oppression of certain subcultures (e.g., anti-Black racism) through its education systems and structures (e.g., inequitable school resources, racially biased school policies, curricular bias). Further, most cultural considerations within SEVT have taken an etic (vs. emic) approach through assessing cross-cultural (in)variance of factor structure and mean level differences in ESs and STVs. However, the complex meaning-making undergirding students' beliefs and values, as well as their cultural/contextual socializers, often gets lost within such approaches. Unfortunately, these issues reduce national culture to a monolithic set of experiences, which becomes especially problematic within diverse (even polarized) nations such as the United States where various subgroups hold uniquely distinct cultural values and where a history of white supremacy has systematically maligned the cultural values of racially marginalized groups. Thus, the cultural and socialization aspects of SEVT model must be reconceptualized to underscore how issues of power, subjugation, and disenfranchisement influence racially marginalized students' meaning-making of their school experiences as well as their motivational beliefs and values.

### ***What CRT Offers to Cultural and Socialization Aspects of SEVT***

CRT (Dixson & Anderson, 2018; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995) provides an important set of propositions regarding racial inequality to help unpack the significance of race in the cultural milieu and inform meaning-making around Black American students' motivational beliefs and values. In developing a CRT of education, Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) connected CRT legal scholarship (Bell, 1995; Crenshaw et al., 1995) to the U.S. education system, elucidating the impact and implications of a system centered around race, property, and privilege on the educational and social advancement opportunities for racially marginalized students. Ladson-Billings and Tate began with three seminal propositions: (a) race continues to contribute strongly to inequity in the United States; (b) which as a nation was and is built on property rights; and (c) the intersection of race and property continues to define and differentiate various racial-ethnic groups.

The first proposition underscores how racism is part and parcel of American culture and its systems, which we further unpack below. Propositions two and three are also foundational given how for most of America's history Blacks were considered property and/or not deserving of individual rights and resources, with derivatives of such dehumanization still existing today (e.g., Blacks as undereducated, overincarcerated, over exoticized, economically marginalized). Through the intersection of race and property, property rights came to mean the continuation of white supremacy and that the cultural and colonizing practices of Whites became the key intellectual ideals driving school curricula and contemporary conventions of teaching and learning. Dixson and Anderson (2018) later expanded on this through the notion of "whiteness as property" which details how the types of curricula, practices, and policies within schools and districts largely reify whiteness versus promoting equality. Ultimately, Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) concluded that due to the universal oppression of Blacks in the United States and elsewhere, emancipation will only occur through first addressing

the question of race and thus racially marginalized students naming their own corporeality to communicate “the experience and realities of the oppressed, a first step on the road to justice” (p. 58). This ultimately has become the foundation for “counter narratives” and counter storytelling methodologies (Miller et al., 2020; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002).

Dixson and Anderson (2018) took stock of Ladson-Billings and Tate’s (1995) seminal article and discussed contributions CRT has made to the field of education since then. While optimistic by the expansion of CRT in education scholarship, they also noted that contemporary work suffered from a lack of clear definitions and parameters.<sup>1</sup> They proposed six fundamental ideas including: (a) rejecting ahistoricism; (b) considering how current educational inequities connect to the long and deep history of racial oppressions; (c) how current education policies perpetuate whiteness as normative; (d) the rejection of “the dominant narrative about the inherent inferiority of peoples of color and the normative superiority of white people” (p. 122); (e) moving toward policies and outcomes that redress racial inequities; and (f) the importance of the intersectionalities of race, gender, and class as mediators of the effects of race.

So, how do we leverage these CRT insights toward reimagining SEVT’s cultural milieu? First, we emphasize Dixon and Anderson’s (2018) notion of rejecting ahistoricism and thus examine the linkages between contemporary educational inequity and historical patterns of racial oppression. The role of history in understanding the evolution of cultural norms and expectations (which ultimately impact individual’s motivated beliefs and choices) have rarely been discussed by motivation theorists in general nor SEVT specifically. Given SEVT’s focus on how the cultural milieu impacts individual motivation, we must critically appraise historical foundations to understand from where and how current cultural milieus emerge. Second, we center Ladson-Billings and Tate’s (1995) views of systemic racism, where they surmise “... racism is not a series of isolated acts, but is endemic in American life, deeply ingrained legally, culturally, and even psychologically” (p. 52). These notions remind us that race is more than simple demarcations of group differences to acknowledge in our theories and empirical studies, rather race at its core is a social and political construct used to determine who gets to exercise power and guide decisions about how to allocate resources. Thus, race is a human-created construct meant for the sole purpose of perpetuating racism (i.e., power + racial prejudice = racism).

Overall, our aim is to elevate a discussion of race in SEVT beyond “recognizing diversity” or moderating for “racial differences.” Rather, we center the role of power in the social construction of race and racism (i.e., race as a construct to systematically elevate some and marginalize others) and that any analysis of Black American students’ achievement and motivation must recognize and acknowledge this. We begin with a CRT integration and analysis of SEVT’s cultural milieu by focusing on the racialized structures extant throughout the history of American education.

### ***The Racialized Structures of American Schools***

As an “American” cultural milieu, U.S. schools have socialized children around race in two predominant ways, both institutionally (e.g., through segregation, tracking, inequitable school resources, curricular bias) as well as interpersonally (e.g., through teacher bias, stereotypes about intellectual abilities, underrepresentation, and isolation;

M. Wilson & Matthews, 2024). Considering these present-day realities in light of CRT, we come into a clearer view that racial inequities are not simply happenstance, neither historically nor currently, but a manifestation of intentional design throughout U.S. education structures. Altogether, these issues throughout the history of American education have produced “first-class” versus “second-class” education experiences, organized largely around race and class (i.e., power). Given this, should we assume that ESs and STVs function in similar ways for students who encounter fundamentally disparate educational experiences in the United States? Likely not. Moving forward, we illustrate how a racialized cultural milieu has historically become enacted through institutional (e.g., school segregation) and interpersonal (e.g., teacher bias) patterns that relegate many Black American children into second-class education experiences.

**School Segregation.** De Jure segregation and exclusion from white schools was a hallmark of the Black American schooling experience for nearly a century prior to the 1954 Brown versus Board of Education decision, producing generations of underresourced, disenfranchised, and socioeconomically stifled Black Americans. However, despite the justice-oriented intentions of the desegregation movement that followed this landmark decision, the unintended consequences were not immediately in full view. Not only did Black American students have to leave learning environments where they had Black educators who affirmed their identities, cultural values, and intellect, but also they had to now integrate into schools where they were unwanted, underrepresented, alienated, and under-taught among predominantly White students, teachers, and staff. Throughout the evolution of segregation over time (i.e., from de jure to de facto segregation, Reardon & Owens, 2014), this tension persists today where many Black students and their families must decide between attending local public schools in community with racial-ethnic peers where the educational resources and instructional quality are typically diminished versus selecting into stronger education opportunities through magnet, specialized, or private schools where they are typically underrepresented and endure alienating racial stressors and psychological trauma among predominantly White students and educators (Oakes, 2008; C. M. Wilson, 2014). Regardless, a “second-class” learning experience prevails across both, albeit in different ways. These experiences have resulted in various typologies of Black American psychological responses, which can ultimately impact how they negotiate their ES and STVs (M. Wilson & Matthews, 2024).

**Teacher (In)Equality in Predominantly Black Schools.** The impact of historic (i.e., de jure) and present-day (i.e., de facto) segregation infiltrates all levels of students’ social and educational opportunities. Despite Black American students only making up 13% of the U.S. school population; nearly 63% of those students are consolidated into the poorest and lowest quality schools in the country (National Center for Education Statistics, 2023). Typically, these schools are nested within communities of concentrated poverty, tend to have less pathways to college (Klugman, 2013; Solórzano & Ornelas, 2004), and often struggle to recruit and retain the best teacher talent (Loeb et al., 2012; Ronfeldt et al., 2013). Thus, while the structural conditions (i.e., poverty, constrained resources) surrounding these

<sup>1</sup> At the time of the writing of this article, CRT has been under attack in many political settlements, perhaps most notably in Florida. Thus, its expansion has not led to widespread acceptance, particularly by White conservatives.

schools can present their own set of challenges, the most proximal element to student success (i.e., teacher quality; Darling-Hammond, 2000; Hanselman, 2019) is a formidable liability toward ensuring rigorous instructional opportunities for many Black American students (Darling-Hammond, 2001). Quasiexperimental evidence suggests students who have higher quality teachers are more likely to go to college, attend higher ranked colleges, earn higher salaries as adults, and less likely to have children as teenagers (Chetty et al., 2011, 2014). However, public schools with larger concentrations of Black students tend to have the highest teacher turnover rates (Hanushek et al., 2004), with student race and achievement as the strongest predictors of such turnover, even compared to teacher salary. Thus, beyond the initial challenges of Black American students experiencing a disproportionate number of transient, novice, and substitute teachers (Boyd et al., 2005; Hanushek & Rivkin, 2009; Lankford et al., 2002; Ronfeldt et al., 2013), negotiating the psychological and emotional toll of being unwanted and underserved can be discouraging, if not debilitating.

It is important to note that there are various other inequitable school structures that disproportionately influence Black adolescents, such as the school-to-prison pipeline (for reviews see Mallett, 2016; Skiba et al., 2014), or an overemphasis on testing and accountability (e.g., No Child Left Behind, Race to the Top; see Darling-Hammond, 2007 for a review). These structures create a cultural milieu that can foster student distrust, disengagement, and a host of other psychological beliefs that impact their motivation. We have limited space to detail and unpack each of these within this article, yet we wanted to note them. It is also important to state that despite the challenges inequitable school structures pose we should not take a deficit view of their outcomes. Spencer (2008) and various others note that despite the risk factors described above, Black American youth also have and exercise various protective factors, social supports, and community cultural wealth that afford multiple opportunities and developmental pathways for health, achievement, resilience, and thriving; we discuss some of these later.

In summary, we suggest incorporating the following constructs into the cultural milieu box to better situate broad U.S. societal and political issues that shape Black American students' motivation, with avenues for application to other historically marginalized groups: **history of racism, systemic oppression; white privilege; prejudice and discrimination; power differentials; segregated schools; and teacher (in)equity.**

### **Racializing SEVT's Views of School and Parental Socialization**

Given these racialized sociocultural forces and the inequity they perpetuate, Black Americans and other racially marginalized students need culturally competent adults to help them confront the threat and stigma they face in ways that engender belonging, healthy identity development, critical consciousness, and achievement. Thus, we move now from these broad cultural systems to more particular ways Black students are socialized around race at school and by their parents at home.

#### ***School Racial Socialization and Motivation***

School socialization is a robust topic in motivation research that we cannot fully review in this article. In SEVT, it is included as part of the

socialization box, and Eccles, Wigfield, and their colleagues have discussed a variety of school and teacher characteristics that influence students' motivation. For instance, they have focused on the quality of teacher-student relations, finding that middle-grade teachers are more controlling and less trusting of students than elementary-grade teachers, their relations with students are less close and warm, and their grading practices are harsher (Eccles, 2004). As a likely consequence, they also found that students' motivation declined as they entered middle/junior-high school. However, despite the import of these patterns, this work is dated, insufficiently nuanced, and does not acknowledge how schools explicitly and implicitly socialize children about race.

Further, non-SEVT research clearly shows that teachers tend to exercise more control and punitive discipline (Okonofua et al., 2016; Skiba et al., 2016), and have lower academic expectations for Cherng and Halpin (2016) and lower quality relationships with racially marginalized students of color, particularly Black American students (e.g., Contreras et al., 2022; Downey & Pribesh, 2004). Additionally, it is these students who receive the least amount of social and academic support that are likely most susceptible to motivational obstacles (Gray, Hope, & Byrd, 2020; Gray, McElveen, et al., 2020). Thus, broad motivation declines documented during adolescence in prior research may more acutely point to inequitable instructional and social practices across the primary-to-secondary transition that uniquely impinge on the motivational health of racially marginalized youth. However, there is little empirical work that assesses this specifically.

As an extension of SEVT, Eccles and Midgley (1989) discussed the developmental mismatch between the needs of early adolescents and the nature of the schools they attend, coining stage-environment fit. Here, they propose that when adolescents are in environments that support their unique stage of development, they are more likely to experience positive social and academic outcomes. Unfortunately, in the case of many secondary schools the fit is not ideal, given secondary schools' tendencies for greater grade competition, less close teacher-student relationships, more teacher control (when adolescents typically desire less), and less student autonomy (when adolescents typically desire more) compared to the elementary grades. For many Black American students specifically, they are simultaneously navigating a developmental stage where they are beginning to forge their sense of racial identity as well as understand the stigma attached to that identity (i.e., being Black within a country that has systematically disenfranchised Black people since its inception). Cognitive and recursive perspective-taking abilities that typically develop during early adolescence afford them the capability to appraise racially biased social interactions with their peers and teachers. Thus, Black American adolescents may not only desire more autonomy and less control from teachers, as many adolescents do, but they are also contending against fundamentally racist (i.e., power + racial prejudice = racism) interactions and environmental patterns, leaving them with the added burden of navigating racial stereotypes, stigma, and stress. Thus, a model investigating identity-stage-environment misfit (Byrd & Chavous, 2011) may be more appropriate for understanding the developmental experiences of Black American adolescents across the primary-to-secondary school transition.

When applying a critical race perspective to school socialization—that is, rejecting ahistoricism (Dixson & Anderson, 2018) and acknowledging the intersection of race and property rights (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995—the notion of power becomes an essential

consideration that requires explicit centering and unpacking. The motive for power received considerable attention in social psychology during the 1970s and 1980s (e.g., Veroff, 1986; Winter, 1973) but less work has occurred recently and none of the major achievement motivation theories acknowledge it despite schools largely operating on power hierarchies, both explicitly (e.g., tracking, segregated schools) and implicitly (e.g., culturally biased teachers and curricula). Understanding the role of power helps us recognize how stereotypes and intergroup differences within the American educational system are not just happenstance nor the result of hired-wired group differences, but a function of social hierarchy, largely guided by white supremacy, that actively subjugates certain groups while privileging others (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Thus, the interactions between schools and students across different groups is not uniform nor even, but filtered through a prism of power that reinforces inequitable patterns (e.g., unequal social and academic opportunities, cultural incongruence between teachers and students, racialized stress in school settings). Next, we highlight how schools maintain power hierarchies that reinforce white supremacy through mechanisms such as teacher cultural (in)competence, teacher expectations, and culturally biased curricula.

**Teacher Cultural (In)competence, Expectations, and Biased Curricula.** The teaching force in today's United States remains largely White (~78%) and female (~73%), which fails to reflect the racial diversity of the Kindergarten-through-Grade 12 (K-12) student body (Schaeffer, 2021), especially within public education. Moreover, since the 1990s, quick certification teaching programs (e.g., Teach for America) have transplanted mostly White and inexperienced teachers into school districts consisting largely of students of color embedded within communities of concentrated poverty (Lapayese et al., 2014), further compounding the social and cultural incongruence between racially marginalized students and their teachers. Thus, the mostly White teachers who serve Black urban adolescents rarely live in or come from the communities in which they teach, which complicates their ability to traverse cultural, generational, and socioeconomic differences between themselves and their students. Therefore, in addition to the structural issues that concentrate many Black American students into underresourced schools, served by mostly underexperienced White teachers, they also tend to encounter a large proportion of teachers who come from entirely different life experiences and socioeconomic affordances than their own. These conditions can create a sociocultural rift between teachers and students, which warrants the importance of cultural competence as a non-negotiable skill for teachers who serve racially marginalized students.

Teacher cultural competence has an ample literature base in education theory and research; notably one of the three core components of Ladson-Billings' (1995, 2014) argument for culturally relevant pedagogy. Broadly conceptualized as a teacher's awareness of and skills for healthy interaction with students of diverse cultures, several other prominent scholars have also advanced the topic, including but not limited to Banks (2015), Cochran-Smith (2004), Delpit (2006), Gay (2013, 2018), and Irvine (1990, 2003). The greater cultural competence teachers possess, the better they know their students (e.g., backgrounds, interests, assets, and challenges) and the more likely they are to exercise that knowledge in ways that cultivate classroom conditions that maximize diverse students' learning opportunities, academic performance, and healthy identity development (Cochran-Smith, 1995, 2004; Delpit, 2006).

Conversely, culturally incompetent teachers likely place their own cultural meaning systems and worldviews on students who have limited lived experience within those perspectives. Ultimately, this results in a rift between teacher expectations and students' cultural ways of thinking and being. However, most notable to emphasize is how a culture of white supremacy within U.S. schools (a) normalize teachers' biased expectations of racially marginalized students while also (b) rendering them tacit, preventing teachers from even perceiving the gap between their expectations and their students' cultural ways of thinking and being (or if they do, it is in deficit-oriented ways). Thus, the issue of teacher cultural incompetence is not solely a reflection of intrapersonal proficiencies, but teachers' embeddedness within systems that also do not prepare them well for such competencies and reinforce cultural dysconsciousness. Altogether, teachers' cultural incompetence and biased expectations within the context of white supremacy creates insidious learning conditions for Black American youth, which likely results in interpersonal conflict that harden their conceptions of racial stigma and elevate racialized cost.

Teachers' cultural (in)competence can also impact the expectations they hold for their students. Jussim et al. (2009) provided a comprehensive review of this work, concluding that teacher expectancy effects can positively or negatively impact students' performance in the direction of the expectancy, finding effect sizes ranging from 0.4 to 0.6. for Black students specifically. The expectation gap between Black and non-Black teachers for Black students can range from 30% to 40% (Gershenson et al., 2016); reflecting how Black students can experience negative classroom interactions to a greater extent when their teachers are not Black. This becomes especially disheartening when considering how many Black American students can go through their entire K-12 career without having a Black teacher (Milner & Howard, 2004).

Parallel with biased teacher expectations are culturally biased curricula, which also reinforce a predominantly White and Western perspective despite growing cultural diversity across the United States. Through an analysis of varied textbooks and curricular materials, A. L. Brown and K. D. Brown (2010, 2015) and K. D. Brown and A. L. Brown (2010) have shown that Black American people and events receive minimal and distorted coverage that undervalue their intellectual and social contributions, omit acts of violence against them, and present overly simplistic portraits of racism as the fault of certain actors (i.e., bad individuals doing bad things) versus as also structural and endemic (i.e., part of the cultural milieu). More recent work corroborates these general findings, while also revealing that low-power descriptors were more likely to be associated with Black people in curricular texts and that politically conservative school districts were more likely to adopt textbooks that have less powerful representations of Black people (Lucy et al., 2020). Clearly, this indicates that Black American children have limited opportunities to see themselves and their people reflected in a positive light within school texts. Yet, even more consequential, culturally biased curricula also nurture White American students' implicit notions of white supremacy that stifle opportunities for them to develop cultural competence. Such students grow into future educators, policymakers, and service professionals who carry biased beliefs and underdeveloped cultural competence for recognizing and addressing opportunity gaps that impact people of color. Given these challenges and the ways U.S. schools have implicitly and explicitly taught children about race, Black families' racial

socialization has become a necessity for supporting their children to navigate the racial stressors and tensions they are likely to face along their education journey.

In summary, we suggest adding the following to the school socialization influences considered by SEVT: **identity-stage-environment misfit; power differentials; teacher cultural (in)competence; negative teacher expectations; and biased curricula favoring power-dominant norms and ways of knowing.**

### *Parental Racial Socialization*

Parental socialization research underscores how minoritized parents teach their children about race, discrimination, and prejudice to help them navigate and cope with the continuing problem of systemic racism in the United States and globally. Such racial socialization is intended to promote positive identity development among Black children and adolescents within social and cultural contexts that have historically marginalized them. Hughes et al. (2006) posited four dimensions of ethnic-racial socialization: cultural socialization, preparation for bias, promotion of mistrust, and egalitarianism. Cultural socialization concerns how parents (a) teach their children about race-ethnicity and (b) instill racial-ethnic pride, which supports a positive sense of racial identity. Preparation for bias involves how parents prepare their children for the racial discrimination they are likely to experience. Through a promotion of mistrust, parents teach their children that members of other races should not be trusted, whereas teaching egalitarianism emphasizes that different racial groups should be thought of as equal.

Racial socialization researchers have largely grounded their work in positive youth development perspectives, and so have examined how racial socialization relates to the five Cs of positive youth development (Lerner et al., 2005): competence, confidence, character, caring, and connection, along with other outcomes (Evans et al., 2012). Umaña-Taylor and Hill (2020) reviewed the role of the racial socialization dimensions on various child outcomes, finding strong evidence that racial socialization positively relates to Black youth's competence, character, and connection to others, and that instilling racial pride relates to youth developing a strong racial identity.

The findings on preparation for bias, derived across 69 studies, have shown mixed results. Some found positive effects on Black youth's healthy adjustment (D'Hondt et al., 2016; Sanchez et al., 2018), while others showed links to depression and stress (Dotterer & James, 2018; Nelson et al., 2018). Still others showed null results (Atkin et al., 2018; French et al., 2013). Parental promotion of mistrust between the races was associated with negative child outcomes, like depression (Dunbar et al., 2015); however, some studies showed null effects (Huynh & Fuligni, 2010). Finally, parents' promotion of racial egalitarianism was positively associated with their adolescents' self-esteem, identity development (e.g., Villegas-Gold & Tran, 2018), and academic expectations (Trask-Tate et al., 2014); however, such studies are relatively sparse.

Neblett et al. (2021) built on this work, proposing a model of ethnic-racial socialization that also integrated cultural orientation, defined as ethnic minority youth's orientation toward both "mainstream" culture and their own ethnic culture. They showed that orientation toward one's own ethnic culture was positively related to self-esteem and academic engagement overall, but these findings vary across racial-ethnic groups. They also propose that cultural orientation and racial-ethnic socialization and identity serve as

protective factors against racial discrimination. These constructs/processes also relate to youth's development of competence, as well as healthy attributions for the racially biased challenges they face (see Graham, 2020). Neblett et al. (2021) also note how these processes, and their influences, are likely cyclical and bidirectional between caregivers and youth.

When considering a cultural and educational milieu positioned on a power axis designed to elevate white cultural values while marginalizing racial minorities (Dixon & Anderson, 2018; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; G. Taylor et al., 2023), the need for parents of Black children to prepare them to navigate these social conditions becomes imperative. Parental racial socialization should be positioned within the socializers' beliefs and behaviors box of SEVT and can moderate the impact of inequitable social and educational systems (i.e., the milieu) on their children's perceptions of themselves and their interpretation of their experiences (i.e., the child perception and interpretation boxes). Further, we stress the role of parental racial socialization on Black children's healthy racial identity development and underscore how it can be protective in buffering the impact of discrimination on academic outcomes and socioemotional health (see Wong et al., 2003). In summary, we suggest adding the following to the parent socialization model in SEVT: **parent teaching about race and ethnicity; promoting ethnic pride; preparing children for bias and discrimination; power differentials; and promotion of mistrust.**

### **Connecting Cultural and Socialization Practices to Students' STVs**

Our discussion so far has critiqued and expanded the left-side cultural milieu and socialization aspects of SEVT. Moving to the right side of the model, we leverage left-side insights to racialize STVs, with specific extensions to perceived cost, intrinsic, and attainment values; due to space limitations, we do not discuss utility value. We chose STVs for two reasons. First, space limitations did not allow for a comprehensive analysis of all right-side components, such as ESs. Thus, we chose targeted areas of critical race integration and illustration. Second, STVs are arguably the most culturally and situationally determined right-side components and have been shown to predict student choice (Gaspard et al., 2020; Meece et al., 1990).

### *Racializing Perceived Cost*

Beginning with the perceived cost aspect of STV, Eccles-Parsons et al. (1983) distinguished between three types: opportunity cost (i.e., what one has to give up to engage in something else; becoming a history major by necessity means other majors cannot be chosen), effort cost (i.e., deciding if the effort needed to succeed on an activity is worth it to the person), and psychological cost or how doing poorly on an activity affects the individual psychologically. More recently, new dimensions and measures of perceived cost have emerged, garnering novel attention in SEVT research (e.g., Flake et al., 2015; Gaspard et al., 2017; Perez et al., 2014).

However, the research on perceived cost has also suffered the omission of critical race perspectives. A key exception is Venzant Chambers' work on ROC, which uncover the challenges many racially marginalized students face in American schools (Tabron & Venzant Chambers, 2019; Venzant Chambers, 2022; Venzant Chambers & McCready, 2011). They defined ROC as the "options



that are foregone and the losses that result from those foregone options when students of color pursue academic success” (Venzant Chambers & Huggins, 2014, p. 191). As a catalyst for ROC, they point to mainstream-white cultural values and institutional racism that guide what is and is not valued in schools. Thus, ROC underscores a clash in tiered value systems, whereby students from disenfranchised backgrounds must choose to engage one value system and disengage others, with consequences (i.e., costs) on both sides of that decision.

Tabron and Venzant Chambers (2019) proposed a conceptual model that illustrates both institutional and individual factors that determine the development of ROC. The institutional factors are (a) a school climate of respect and acceptance, (b) how schools foster engagement across diverse groups (e.g., open forum discussions about race), (c) whether school policies reinforce inequities (e.g., tracking, racially biased discipline practices), and (d) the relational quality among teachers and students. These institutional factors are filtered through intersectional factors (i.e., holding multiple marginalized identities) and capacity factors (i.e., personal resilience and interpersonal support received) to ultimately impact three forms of ROC. First, psychosocial costs are the personalized costs students experience from having to forfeit aspects of their cultural identity to achieve success in school environments where they likely experience isolation or alienation. Next, representational costs are the challenges of attending schools where they are minoritized, tokenized, and thus likely shouldering the burden of “representing” their people group and debunking racial-ethnic stereotypes. Third are community costs or feeling separated from one’s family or community due to pursuing academic success.

Altogether, ROC puts into conversation with one another the role of power dynamics within school systems, personal identity factors, stereotypes, and the mental/emotional toll of navigating misaligned value systems. This is essential work that begins to address the oversights of SEVT notions of perceived cost, which have been inattentive to power-tiered cultural systems, cultural histories, and how various -isms intersect to impact motivational beliefs and values. Further, SEVT notions of cost are largely task-centered (i.e., engaging one task means forfeiting the opportunity of engaging a different task) in ways that are often divorced from perceived costs that come from identity-context misalignment (i.e., simply existing in an academic space where one’s identity is marginalized exacts its own cost). This is a crucial oversight by SEVT that ROC is more sensitive to, given that students with marginalized identities bring those identities wherever they go independent of the tasks they choose to engage.

However, ROC is not without its own limitations. First, the ROC model details the institutional and individual factors that facilitate costs without providing a detailed process model of how institutional elements become internalized into individual beliefs, values, emotions, and actions. In contrast, SEVT outlines the various pathways of internalization processes, which allows for an analysis of various points of divergence and variability regarding how individuals make meaning of cultural experiences in ways that inform their motivation. Second, the ROC model was developed based on the interviews of high achieving Black undergraduates at predominantly White universities (Tabron & Venzant Chambers, 2019). Thus, how the model relates to K-12 contexts, diverse achievement profiles, and Black students within homogeneously Black schools is less clear.

Given the limits of both models, Seals (2016) linked and expanded concepts across ROC and SEVT. He provides a ROC-based analysis

of STVs, focusing primarily on identity, intersectionality, and their impact on task values. He also connected different aspects of value to Steele’s (1997) stereotype threat and the costs that can accrue from resisting negative group stereotypes. Based on his analysis, Seals suggested adding a new box to the SEVT model, entitled social psychological aspect of choice and performance, that accounts for the trauma racially marginalized students face in school that he argues is a product of students’ achievement-related choices and performance but also has a reciprocal effect on the cultural milieu. Altogether we agree with these racialized critiques of SEVT, but also offer additional considerations and extensions.

Although SEVT positions perceived cost as a right-side component, we argue for the ubiquity and internalization of cost throughout the model for students who hold socially marginalized identities. In line with ROC, racialized cost is first ignited by inequitable structures within the cultural milieu but becomes internalized over time (moving from left to right in the model) as students experience those structural and interpersonal inequities, receive reinforcers from key socializers in their lives, and make decisions in response to those inequities and socializers, whether conscious or unconsciously. Experiences within the cultural milieu exact a cost on students (e.g., trauma, subjugation, restricted opportunities). Consequently, parental decisions regarding how to prepare their children for cultural bias and where to send them to school exact an additional layer of psychosocial and community cost for them and their children. Next, children’s interpretation of the cultural milieu, socializers’ beliefs and behaviors, and previous achievement-related experiences exact an additional cost where students begin to negotiate goals and self-schemata for themselves in ways that build-in representational and psychosocial costs. These cost-laden goals and self-schemata ultimately inform their STVs, including their opportunity, effort, and psychological costs (i.e., seminal SEVT costs; Eccles-Parson et al., 1983). Thus, we propose that perceived cost for racially marginalized children is not just a right-side internal calculus regarding whether the individual wants to invest time and energy into x-task at the expense of y-task, but a fundamental element of every phase of the SEVT model and closely linked with one’s racial-ethnic and achievement identities. These issues further compound for students holding multiple and intersecting marginalized identities.

### *Reconceptualizing Intrinsic and Attainment Values Through the Lens of Black Joy*

Beyond understanding the role and impact of perceived cost, we also argue for a more thorough integration of identity, joy, and their linkages within SEVT. Unfortunately, education research has persistently focused on Black American students’ school challenges and the negative consequences of their motivation. Such an overfocus on challenges can perpetuate deficit notions, limiting our capacity to perceive Black students’ assets and thriving. Thus, it is not lost on us that in discussing racialized cost, even when framed from a critical race perspective, we reemphasize Black struggle and pain at the expense of Black joy and flourishing. Thus, we aim to reconceptualize intrinsic value (i.e., how much the person enjoys an activity) and attainment value (i.e., importance of the activity and its connection to identity) through the lens of research literature on Black joy in schools.

Black joy is a topic gaining momentum among critical education scholars. Given its recent emergence, there are varying conceptions on its substance; however, a few intersectional themes cut across

various definitions. They are Black joy as (a) affective and agentic, (b) communal and collective, (c) excellence and brilliance, and (d) refusal and resistance. Drawing on both the affective-agentic and communal-collective themes, K. D. Brown and A. L. Brown (2021) describe Black joy as “an affective feeling of joy and elation” that is “an inheritance of living a deep, soulful, and collective humanity” (p. 156). Affect celebrates the bold expression of generative emotion throughout one’s learning and life, whereas agency involves the freedom of being unapologetically oneself (Adams, 2022; Edwards & Reynolds, 2024). These themes often clash with the cultural tendencies of U.S. classrooms that elevate cognition over emotion (despite research suggesting positive emotion can enhance cognition; Linnenbrink-Garcia, 2006) and a history of using schools as spaces to admonish racial minorities to assimilate to white cultural ideals versus cultivating the freedom to be themselves. Second, communalism and collective identity have been longstanding pillars of a Black American ethos (Boykin et al., 1997). Communalism is a commitment to interdependence in a way that fosters collective identity that transcends individual privileges and achievements. Such an ethos stands at odds with the orientation of most U.S. classrooms, which center individual self-reliance and exceptionalism. Despite this, research shows that communal learning opportunities (i.e., learning activities that support the health of the group/community over individual success) are preferred among Black youth (Sankofa et al., 2023) and predict their classroom engagement (Gray, Hope, & Byrd, 2020; Gray, McElveen, et al., 2020). Further, within predominantly White universities, Tichavakunda (2021, 2022) found involvement in ethnic affinity groups played a role in Black joy on campus, as these groups provide opportunities for racial identity development, collective purpose, belonging, and recreation.

The third theme of excellence and brilliance (Adams, 2022) positions Black people as intellectual contributors in society while also viewing individual accomplishments as part of a broader Black tradition of excellence. Thus, communalism and excellence intersect in ways that challenge deficit narratives that attempt to divorce Black culture from intellectualism (Cokley, 2015). Finally, Black joy also exists within a legacy of refusal and resistance (Edwards & Reynolds, 2024), meaning it embodies affect and agency, communalism and collectivism, and excellence and brilliance despite the ubiquity of racism and history of dehumanization in schools and society. In fact, cultivating and sustaining such assets within the inhospitable contexts of oppressive systems makes joy especially joyful, given how it represents thriving within white supremacist structures (especially schools) that were designed to restrict it and exclude them. Accordingly, Bettina Love (2019) speaks of joy as the “nourishment that is needed to be dark and fully alive in White spaces, such as schools” (p. 120).

While we relate Black joy to intrinsic/attainment value, clearly there are culturally influenced elements that render it qualitatively distinct. Much more than the natural enjoyment of an academic task (i.e., intrinsic value) or the importance of the task as self-defining (i.e., attainment value), Black joy contains elements of recognizing and affectively celebrating one’s personal power (e.g., Agency  $\times$  Brilliance) as part of and derived from a broader tradition of power and pride (e.g., Brilliance  $\times$  Collective Identity) and as an act of refusal to the confines of oppressive structures and anti-Black narratives (e.g., Agency  $\times$  Brilliance  $\times$  Resistance). Thus, despite superficial similarities to STVs (i.e., intrinsic, attainment, and cost), Black joy exists as a counternarrative to them in ways that not only celebrate

people over performance tasks but also reclaim power from educational institutions that have positioned them as powerless. Cruz (2017) evokes this counternarrative quality of Black joy when she says, “we exist in an antiblack world that is set up to ensure that we do not survive, [thus] to choose life and to enjoy aspects of that life is a radical act.”

K. D. Brown and A. L. Brown (2021) and Gray et al. (2018) among others have advocated for schools to provide opportunities for Black students to experience joy through recognizing their experiences, identities, and agency, as well as providing affirmation and nourishment through curriculum, instruction, and positive portrayals of their racial-ethnic group. In a practice-oriented guide for teachers, teacher educators, and school leaders, Muhammad (2023) critiques instructional practices that overly focus on the development of performance skills but are disconnected from the meaning, purpose, identities, and culture that are primed to cultivate joy alongside learning. Joy is not limited to temporary engagement in concrete tasks (e.g., “I enjoyed yesterday’s learning activity”), but is transcendent beyond tasks, topical domains, or even the individual self (see collective elements of Black joy described above). Thus, Muhammad argues that teaching and learning must also move beyond an overfocus on skills and performance to connect learning to transcendent purpose, critical social awareness, liberation, and knowledge of cultural history and heritage. In this way, teaching for joy is more than just culturally responsive guidelines for supporting Black children, but a teaching and learning ethos by which all children can thrive.

More concretely, Muhammad (2023) proposes a model of culturally and historically responsive education that includes five “pursuits” (i.e., identity, intellect, skills, criticality, and joy). Through an instructional framework centering students’ histories, identities, literacies, and liberation she describes classroom and curricular practices that educate the whole child and cultivate opportunities for joy and identity, among the other pursuits. She notes how curriculum that fosters opportunities for joy must elevate the beauty in humanity, explore various forms of art, create space for play, imagination, wonder, and freedom, and center the joy and genius of historically marginalized people. Likewise, curriculum can engage identity by affording opportunities for students to explore their own cultural identities from a positive perspective, learn about the cultural identities of others different from them, explicitly center the joy and genius of people of color, and be free of damaging misconceptions about cultural groups. Many of these suggestions generally align with recommendations from motivation research over the last two decades, such as employing meaningful and relevant tasks/activities, providing students autonomy over at least some of what they learn, and infusing curriculum with variety and humor to make learning fun (see Wigfield et al., 2019). However, noticeably absent in motivation literatures are discussions of historicism, cultural pride, self and social awareness, critical action toward liberation, and the cultivation of transcendent joy beyond the temporary enjoyment of learning tasks.

Parents also play a role in socializing their children in ways that can lead to more joyous education experiences (see Costigan et al., 2017 for parenting practices that foster positive development in ethnic minority children). The purpose of parents’ racial socialization is not only preparation for bias but also to develop their children’s understanding of their racial and collective identities as a way to foster racial pride, self-acceptance, sociopolitical awareness, and joy. Thus, elucidating the relationship between racial identity and intrinsic/attainment value may not only provide insight toward

reducing cost for racially marginalized youth, but for generating joy as well. We hypothesize that for Black American adolescents, racial identity is likely intimately related to attainment value and should be a forward-looking consideration for SEVT researchers. This is particularly important given the wealth of research that shows positive relationships between racial identity, academic outcomes, and psychological adjustment for Black youth (e.g., Byrd & Chavous, 2011; Neblett et al., 2021). Some have attempted to make connections between Black students' collective identities and their attainment value (e.g., Matthews, 2018) but much more investigation is needed here. Overall, racial/collective identity may mediate parental racial socialization practices and moderate school socialization patterns on students' attainment values.

### Breaking Down Silos and the Potential of Critical Pragmatism

The focus of the special issue the current article is nested within is "breaking down silos" in motivation research; that is, connecting theories, constructs, and/or research in different areas of the field (or beyond) that have rarely been written about together. Here, we attempted to do so by (a) filtering the cultural milieu and school socialization aspects of SEVT through the lens of CRT, (b) incorporating aspects of racial socialization research into SEVT's parent socialization model, and (c) making racialized extensions to right-side STVs by discussing racialized costs and Black joy. Given the nature of this collaboration and the special issue focus on breaking silos, we also want to acknowledge the challenges and learning opportunities each of us has experienced searching for common ground while also respecting one another's unique expertise. In effect, our working together might be an example of breaking down silos. We also present our own positionalities regarding our engagement in this work (see Table 1).

We both acknowledge that writing this article presented unique difficulties that exceeded our expectations. Beyond navigating work preferences, writing particulars, and communication styles, aspects of our own identities were "caught up" in the paragraphs of this article (for different reasons and in different ways), which at times presented conflict when either of us challenged the ideas or contributions of the other. At times we both struggled with feeling misunderstood but prioritized discussing those frustrations with one another in ways that sought continued learning versus centering the desire to be right. Given our differences in life experience and perspectives, we also understood, and worked to acknowledge at the outset, that discomfort would likely be a consistent part of our work together but that the learning potential for us and potentially the field, could far exceed that discomfort.

In the course writing of this article, we sought to resist oversimplified notions of integrative work. Beyond taking "a little of this" theory and "a little of that" theory for integration, we maintained a clear-eyed view that motivation and critical education theories come from and exist in different, even conflicting, epistemological traditions that make integration difficult, even risky. The postpositivistic orientation of SEVT, and similar motivation theories, in addition to its establishment and norming around White middle-class populations and advancement by mostly White scholars may render it resistant to embracing methods (e.g., counter stories, critical ethnographies, dialogic methods) and philosophical goals (e.g., reveal unjust power imbalances; work toward the liberation of marginalized

**Table 1**  
*Author Positionality Statements*

	Jamaal Sharif Matthews
	<p>I am a middle-aged Black man, son of a single mother who raised me in Harlem, New York City. She thought critically about the schooling experiences she wanted me to have that would position me for social advancement without threatening my sense of self in the process. Coming from a poor and disenfranchised Black community yet navigating predominantly white learning spaces since childhood, I ultimately found myself at an elite graduate institution studying theories of motivation that elicited simultaneous feelings of fascination and disconnection. My career as a social scientist has been a perpetual process of learning and unlearning. On one end, my learning involved assimilating and navigating white culture for means of survival and the hope for thriving. On another end, this process of assimilation spawned unhealthy self-denial and cultural erasure that required an 'unlearning' and persistent questioning of white-normed values, practices, theories, methods, and science. In a sense, the integration of the theoretical frames of this article reflects an integration and interrogation of multiple frames of my lived experiences as a student in predominantly white schools and now as a scholar in a predominantly white discipline. I am also appreciative to the second author for his courage and invitation to collaborate on this work as well as beholding the ways we have both grown conceptually and compassionately through this process.</p>
	Allan Wigfield
	<p>I am an older white male who has done research on children and adolescents' motivation for nearly 50 years. For 40 years I have worked closely with Jacquelynn S. Eccles in the testing and refining of expectancy-value theory. This gives me a great dept of knowledge of the theory and research on it but may limit the ways in which I understand/react to critiques of the theory. With Eccles and other colleagues, I have examined gender differences in children's developing expectancies and values but have not looked systematically at the development of expectancies and values in other groups such as the Black adolescents we consider in this article. This was a conscious decision made in part because my life experiences as a white male limits my understanding of the school and career experiences of groups experiencing the systemic racism and discrimination still inherent in many aspects of life in the United States, including of course the education system.</p> <p>I am the parent of biracial children who themselves experienced various forms of discrimination, particularly in middle school, which increased my sensitivity to issues around discrimination and the importance of connecting those experiences to research on motivation. I appreciate the first author's willingness to work with me on this article; the processes of talking through the issues, joys, and challenges we faced were quite meaningful. I would not have taken this article on without Jamaal's interest in collaborating on it.</p>

people; challenge so-called "neutral" and ubiquitous assumptions) that critical paradigms (CRT included) privilege. Conversely, CRT and the broader critical paradigm rarely advance the type of linear modeling, deductive logic, and neat conceptualizations apt for survey methods and experiments that psychologists tend to privilege and view as benchmarks of scientific rigor. Thus, psychologists and scholars from other post-positive traditions are more likely to eschew (if not outright reject) a critical paradigm.

Given these issues, we pondered many questions. Should (and can) critical and post-positivist approaches be integrated/de-siloed? If so, is there mutual bi-directional benefit? What elements of SEVT and CRT are lost through their integration, and does that loss help or hurt, and for whom? Why has the motivation community stalled for so long in adopting critical perspectives, and does that say something about the community or the nature of the field's ontology, epistemology, and axiology? Will this piece move the needle for motivation researchers? How will critical education scholars receive this piece, given that despite our (the authors') social differences and experiences, we

both still identify as psychologists? And various other questions, none of which have neat nor fully satisfying answers.

In our attempt to honor and grapple with the epistemological underpinnings of different theoretical approaches, we adopted a critical pragmatist (Kadlec, 2006; sometimes conflated with critical realist;<sup>2</sup> Lawani, 2021) perspective. As previously mentioned, a critical paradigm is geared toward an active, researcher-engaged transformation of unjust systems and structures toward the liberation of marginalized people (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017; Martens, 2015). Conversely, a pragmatic paradigm rejects the positivist “objective truth” orientation, the interpretivist notion that all reality is socially constructed, or any mono-paradigmatic orientation. Instead, pragmatism aspires for practical and pluralistic approaches that allow for the best combination of methods most appropriate for studying the immediate phenomena at hand, thus uniting diametrically opposed orientations to advance research that best serves people for thriving. However, pragmatism has also been critiqued for a myopic focus on individual beliefs and behaviors and its absence of moral imperatives regarding unjust systems (Elder-Vass, 2022; Kadlec, 2006; Lawani, 2021). Thus, extending pragmatism through a critical realism lens allows for an examination of the interaction of systems, structures, and situations.

Critical realism argues that reality is neither fully objective (positivism) nor fully subjective (interpretivism) but stratified, mediated, and emergent; thus, critical realism seeks to uncover underlying structures and mechanisms that shape social phenomena for the purpose of addressing social problems. Given the multiple layers of reality, it also acknowledges that some elements of reality can be studied objectively whereas others are rarely ever visible, but tacit. Overall, through merging pragmatism and critical realism, a critical pragmatist approach analyzes the interaction between social structures and human agency, which allows for a complex and politically oriented analysis of social phenomena at structural, cultural, and agentic levels. Further, this orientation acknowledges that researcher understandings and interpretations are fallible, given how they operate within unique (and often siloed) contexts that blind them to certain realities. This acknowledgement should push motivation researchers to not only identify the assumptions behind their research designs but also to question those assumptions with an understanding that there are realities that exist independent of their perceptions (i.e., things they cannot see nor fully understand given their context, background, experiences, and identities); thus, openness to alternative explanations, evidence, and partnerships (such as this one) is imperative. In this vein we see critical pragmatism as one pathway forward in uniting theory from opposing paradigms (e.g., SEVT and CRT), and for breaking silos in motivation research.

SEVT and similar achievement motivation theories (Liem & McInerney, 2018) have provided significant contributions to the field. However, without critique, reassessment, and reversioning, these well-established frameworks run the risk of stagnation and reifying the status quo, which rarely benefits, much less affirms, socially marginalized groups. Critical pragmatism, and criticality in general, helps reorient our perspectives beyond simply confirming hypotheses and establishing generalizability, which although important the motivation community has perhaps become too enamored with. It reminds us that our work is also to interrogate and challenge longstanding assumptions, recognize and resist inequitable power dynamics in motivation science that marginalize or render invisible certain groups, and enact a motivation science that ultimately leads to human flourishing across diverse peoples. These are attainable goals, but they require an explicit paradigm and mindset shift. We hope this article represents a first step in

facilitating such a shift; however, we also recognize that many questions linger. Our hope is that this article will stimulate both discussion and research on these topics and we look forward to joining those activities.

<sup>2</sup> While we recognize that pragmatism and critical realism are not interchangeable terms, unpacking the subtle nuances between them is not the goal of this article.

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