

The Influence of Positive Organizational Practices on School Climate in Middle School

Rachel Goldman

Contexts of Academic and Social Adjustment Lab

University of Michigan

Abstract

The present study investigated how positive organizational practices could be applied and used in a middle school classroom setting. We examined how homeroom practices, which provide opportunities for student engagement and autonomy in the classroom, was related to school climate, as well as how this relationship may be moderated by students' race and gender. Data were drawn from a subsample of a larger study of academic and socioemotional development in middle school ($n = 513$ in Wave 2, $M_{age} = 11.96$ years old ($SD = .93$), 46.8% female, 50.5% male, and 1.8% preferred not to answer). This study also explored whether race moderated the relationship between homeroom practices and school climate. We measured the relationship of homeroom practices and school climate both concurrently and longitudinally. Results indicated that homeroom practices were positively associated with and positively predicts school climate. Race but not gender significantly moderated the relationship between homeroom practices and school climate. Implications for future research and practice and in different classroom settings are discussed.

The Influence of Positive Organizational Practices on School Climate in Middle School

Middle school can be a difficult time for a developing adolescent. The middle school years are filled with changing friendships, physical characteristics, and academic interests (Kim et al., 2014). In addition, adolescence is the key stage where students are moving from childhood to adulthood, and are developing a keen sense of identity (Marcia, 1980). Because this is such a transitional time in the students' lives, it is of utmost importance that students feel at home and safe in their surroundings. Organizations and institutions – including religious institutions, athletic teams and clubs, family units, and school classrooms, among others – all socialize and shape and create the actions and lives of adolescents (Zimmerman, Welsh, & Posick, 2014 & Li et al., 2015). Instead of being a draining and stressful environment, middle school classrooms can be places with a positive atmosphere, an enjoyable place to learn and form relationships with students and teachers, so that the environment can have a positive impact on the lives of students. Given that students spend a large amount of time in the classroom, around 900-1000 hours per year (Hull, 2001), it is critical to understand the practices that help classroom time support positive well-being among youth.

Literature Review

Current research on organizations focuses on the impact of positive organizational practices within the contexts of organizations specific to adults, such as the workplace. This research looks at improving the climate within a workplace so that a worker's well-being is improved, which contributes to their ability to work more efficiently and productively (Cameron et al., 2011). Positive practices stem from positive "Big 5 Personality Traits," including conscientiousness, emotional stability, extroversion, agreeableness, and openness, and how these traits are related to happiness (Luthans & Youseff, 2007). Positive practices help humans utilize

these traits to promote well-being within an organization, as these personality traits have been shown to be related to other positive aspects among humans (Luthans & Youseff, 2007). As an extension of this research on positive organizational practices and the influence they have on adults, I examine how positive practices might improve school climate in middle schools. In addition, I explore how these practices influenced by the students' demographics, such as race and gender.

A school is a type of organization, and an incredibly influential one, on both the lives of students and teachers (Brand et al., 2003). Previous research has shown that positive organizational practices positively relate to aspects of organizational climate in adult (i.e., work) settings, such as employee retention, work environment, and personal influence (Cameron et al., 2011). In this thesis, I examined whether organizational (i.e., teaching) practices in schools supported positive experiences for students. In Cameron et al.'s (2011) study, an important aspect of positive organizational practices is how much autonomy an employee feels he or she has in his or her work, the amount that one is in charge of decision-making. In the current project, I examine homeroom practices, which involve the extent to which students are engaged in classroom rule-setting and how often they participate in class; these are ways that students can exert agency in their school environment. The program from which the homeroom practices are derived designed these practices to emphasize engagement, autonomy, and decision-making among youth in schools. Therefore, I expected that such practices would be linked to positive outcomes among youth (i.e., their views of the school's climate).

The current study differs from previous studies in that it applies a framework for understanding positive organizational practices that is traditionally used in businesses and for-profit organizations to examine how practices in a middle school classroom in the Midwest. This

study draws parallels between practices within an organization and teacher practices. Using a positive organizational psychology perspective, I examine how particular practices can promote *positive* outcomes in the classroom, instead of focusing on avoidance of negative outcomes, and how these processes might be influenced by the students' race and gender.

Positive Organizational Practices

Positive organizational practices play a leading role in research about organizational management. It derives from the field of positive psychology, where researchers have sought to achieve and study positive behavioral outcomes instead of avoiding negative behavioral outcomes (Steele, 2010). Positive organizational practices, often labeled as positive organizational scholarship, was developed to study the positive outcomes, practices, and attributes within organizations and the members of that organization (Cameron, 2008). The aim of positive psychology is to discover how individuals can "flourish," implying that the individual is at optimal level of behavioral functioning (Dutton & Sonenshein, 2007), or that individuals are performing and acting at the best level that they can achieve. In positive organizational psychology, the aim of the approach is to measure how organizations promote certain types of outcomes: researchers look at the outcomes that exceed expectations or expected performance. Some scholars have condemned organizational studies research as being too negative and assuming that organizations lack morality (Hackman, 2009). However, this position has been marginalized and is no longer widely held. Positive organizational psychology, in particular, is based on the assumption that actions guide happiness, that all humans have an inclination towards goodness for its intrinsic value and internal worth, and that organizations can support this process (Cameron, 2008).

Part of the credibility of this new field stems from the effect that positive organizational

practices has had on organizational change and performance (Harter, Schmidt, & Keyes, 2002). It has been found that this field of study has an actual effect on other aspects within an organization and its members, including positive affect, well-being, organizational citizenship and prosocial behavior, positive identity, engagement, psychological capital, and satisfaction (Harter, Schmidt, & Keyes, 2002). Cameron et al. (2011) demonstrated a chain of reactions within positive organizational practices in this way: “Positive organizational practices lead to positive affect in members of an organization, which then produces positive individual behavior and, in turn, creates effective behavior within an organization” (p. 268).

To measure positive organizational practices, Cameron et al. (2011) differentiated a variety of dimensions: caring, compassionate support, forgiveness, inspiration, meaning, respect, integrity, and gratitude. Cameron et al. (2011) noted that there was no overarching theory used to derive the list of positive practices, but rather that they were chosen because these practices had appeared in prior research, represented behavioral practices or activities, and possessed one or more positive connotations (Cameron et al., 2011). Cameron et al. (2011) created a study of the behaviors and attributes that characterize positivity in organizations, and to which outcomes these positive practices were associated. It was found that there was a statistically significant association between positive practices and work environment, managerial effectiveness, and employee retention (Cameron et al., 2011). It was also concluded that positive practices create positive affect within individuals in the target organization, such that it becomes self-reinforcing, fosters resiliency against negative and challenging obstacles, and possesses attributes towards the inherent tendency toward positive energy (Cameron et al., 2011).

To my knowledge, there is no current research using a positive organizational psychology framework in school classrooms. However, there are some recent studies on the relationship

between positive psychology and students in the educational system and the impact that positive psychology has on the school as an organization. Bradshaw et al. (2008) conducted a study on how positive behavioral interventions and supports reduce disruptive behavior problems in school to determine how training staff on school-wide positive behavioral impacts the staff members' perceptions of schools' organizational health. In Bradshaw et al.'s study, the emphasis was placed on the staff member's perceptions of organizational health (2008). We also want to be mindful of the development differences between adolescents and adults. Adolescent is a time of identity development (Marcia, 1980). Typically, adolescents view adults as role models, and the strength of the connection shapes the students' engagement (Futch Ehrlich et al., 2016; Engels, et al. 2016). For example, adults who have similar interests or personality traits may form stronger connections to adolescents (Futch Ehrlich et al., 2016). However, we viewed these homeroom practices as perhaps not employee and adult practices, but human practices, applicable to adolescents as well as adults.

Organizational health is also an important aspect of school climate, the dependent variable measured in this study. Research indicates that organizational health is linked with many indicators of student performance including absenteeism, academic achievement, school adjustment, and student satisfaction (Bevans et al., 2007). This finding relates to Cameron et al.'s (2011) conclusion that it is necessary to identify positive practices in organizations. Bradshaw et al. (2008) define a healthy functioning school, also called an *organizationally healthy school*, as having an ability to cope with destructive outside forces, warm and friendly interactions between staff and commitment to students, an emphasis on academics, collegial leadership from the principal, and the principal's ability to lobby for resources for the school. However, there is no

research on the students' view of school climate as a result of the positive organizational strategies, whether in the form of behavioral interventions and supports or in any other form.

In the current study, I connect positive organizational attributes to teacher practices and school climate. Cameron et al. (2011) lists caring, compassionate support, forgiveness, inspiration, meaning, respect, integrity, and gratitude as dimensions of positive organizational practices, and all of these attributes could also be useful for school-aged students to have. I denote teacher practices as positive under the same interpretational framework, representing the same dimensions such as meaning, compassionate support, inspiration, and respect. The reason for this is that the school setting of the current research was implementing a school-wide social-emotional learning approach, *Developmental Designs*, in which teachers were taught how to model and reinforce positive, prosocial behaviors in their interactions with students and between students.

Developmental Designs targets adolescent youth social, emotional, and academic growth. *Developmental Designs* places an emphasis on student decision-making within the classroom and teacher-student relationships, and is implemented to meet the need of adolescents by encouraging a safe, inclusive, and empathetic community ("About the Approach," n.d.). In part, *Developmental Designs* aims to create more positive relationships between the teachers and the students. In the homeroom practices scale of the student survey, specific questions, such as noting how often the participant "helped set classroom rules," "participated in advisory," and "led at least part of a class meeting" measure if students are building socio-emotional skills and taking part in the decision-making of the classroom. In the homeroom practices scale, teachers are working to bring out positive attributes of the students: creating an inclusive classroom and allowing students to have autonomy in setting goals and classroom rules. The current study will

thus use *Developmental Designs* practices to more specifically frame positive organizational practices in this school.

School Climate

Developmental Designs is designed to support positive student-teacher and student-student relationships, and the quality of these relationships is known to be important aspects of school climate. School climate is defined as the perceived environment of schooling at the classroom level (Brand et al., 2003). It is associated with objective features of the classroom environment, such as social interactions, instead of the actual practices set forth in the classroom (Brand et al., 2003). In previous research, school climate has been linked to greater commitment to academic achievement, as well as teacher support, student involvement in class activities, peer affiliation, rule clarity, classroom and school organization, instructional innovation, and student participation in decision-making (Brand et al., 2003). In the current study, I examine homeroom practices to evaluate both the extent to which students are involved in class activities and how much they participate in decision-making together during their homeroom period. In addition, schools with greater student perceived fairness and clearer rules, an aspect of school climate, tend to have lower student delinquency (Bevans et al., 2007). School climate impacts other outcomes, such as student adolescent development, identity formation, substance abuse, sexual risk, and internet addiction (Smith, 2016; Dongping et al., 2016).

Gender as a Moderator

The current study will examine how gender moderates the relationship between positive organizational practices (i.e., homeroom practices) and school climate. Previous research has found that children's gendered behaviors are associated with the quality of relationships (Kreiger & Kochenderfer-Ladd, 2013), which may play a part in a child's perception of school climate.

Previous research has also found that girls have a higher subjective well-being at school than boys (Furlong et al., 2013). In Furlong et al.'s study (2013), it was found that girls scored higher than males on average for gratitude, zest, and persistence. Studies also show that on average, girls tended to have a higher quality relationship with their teacher than boys do, suggesting that girls benefit more from classroom-based education (McCormick & O'Connor, 2015). However, girls improve the most in their math outcomes from a high-quality relationship with their teachers and boys improve the most in their reading outcomes from a high-quality relationship with their teachers (McCormick & O'Connor, 2015). In addition, it was found that gender moderated associations between perceived school support and youth academic engagement in a longitudinal study of recently immigrated Latin American adolescents (Green et al. 2008). Because gender is shown to have an influence in variables that are also related to school climate, I wanted to understand whether and how gender plays a part in the current study.

Race as a Moderator

The available research on educational teacher practices and race suggests differing conclusions regarding how race might moderate the relationship between positive organizational practices and school climate. On one hand, prejudices about students of color in the classroom not being able to achieve as high academically as White students may be externalized and in turn create lower-achieving students of color. For example, Wallace and Brand (2012) noted that many White, middle-class women teachers feel unprepared to teach students of color and have negative preconceived notions about these students' academic potential. Teacher expectations of student potential and implicit bias relate directly to student academic outcomes (Peterson et al., 2016). In other words, poor academic performance of Black and Latino students is partly caused by bias, or teachers' belief in lower degrees of academic performance by minority students,

and/or the self-fulfilling prophecy in which teachers' low expectations for minority students internalizes by the students, creating unsuccessful academic performance (Rosenbloom & Way, 2004).

As noted earlier, *Developmental Designs* was developed and guided by principles of mutual respect between the teacher and student, teaching through the lens of equity, and building community in the classroom ("The Missing Piece That's Absolutely Critical," n.d.). Therefore, students of color may benefit more from the positive homeroom practices, and the relationship may actually be positively moderated through using these practices in the classroom since they are specifically aimed to help students of color. In making a prediction, however, it is difficult to draw on positive psychology empirical literature from 1998 to 2014, as it does not study race in relation to positive psychology. In fact, research shows that only 57% of the empirical literature during that time reported racial and ethnic characteristics of participants (Rao & Donaldson, 2015). Because of the lack of studies that report relevant data and the uncertain nature of students of color's relationships with teachers, it was difficult to predict how race would moderate the model. Therefore, this aspect of the research is exploratory.

The Current Study

The current study examined the extent to which positive organizational practices, in the form of homeroom practices, influences students' perceptions of school climate. Because school climate is related to student's greater commitment to academic outcomes (Brand et al., 2003), potential parallels exist between the impact of positive organizational practices in organizations and in schools. In addition, students benefit from having positive relationships with teachers. Therefore, I hypothesized that the more students were exposed to positive organizational

practices, in the form of *Developmental Designs*' homeroom practices implemented by their teachers, the more positive their perceived school climate would be.

The current study also examined whether and how gender moderates the relationship between homeroom practices and school climate (see Figure 1). A student's daily life is influenced by the many identities he or she experiences. Gender is an important factor in determining one's experience of the classroom, as gender behaviors are associated to the quality of children's relationships (Kreiger & Kochenderfer-Ladd, 2013). As students in middle school can conform to behaviors that are seen as normal to their gender, and these behaviors influence the quality of relationships in the classroom (Kreiger & Kochenderfer-Ladd, 2013), gender may moderate the extent to which students' perceptions of positive homeroom practices influence their concurrent and longitudinal perceptions of school climate. The previous research shows that although teacher relationships benefit boys and girls, girls tend to have more positive relationships with their teachers (McCormick & O'Connor, 2015). Thus, I hypothesized that female students will recognize teachers' positive homeroom practices more easily through their relationship, and therefore the female students will have more positive perceptions of the school climate than the male students.

Race also plays a role in a student’s experience of a middle school classroom. The previous findings offer a non-conclusive view on the moderation of race in the homeroom practices and school climate relationship. On one hand, students of color are aware of teachers’ prejudices and negative perceptions on their assumed ability to succeed, which contributes to a negative teacher-student relationship for students of color (Rosenbloom & Way, 2004). On the other hand, *Developmental Designs*, which will be used in this study as the initiative to represent

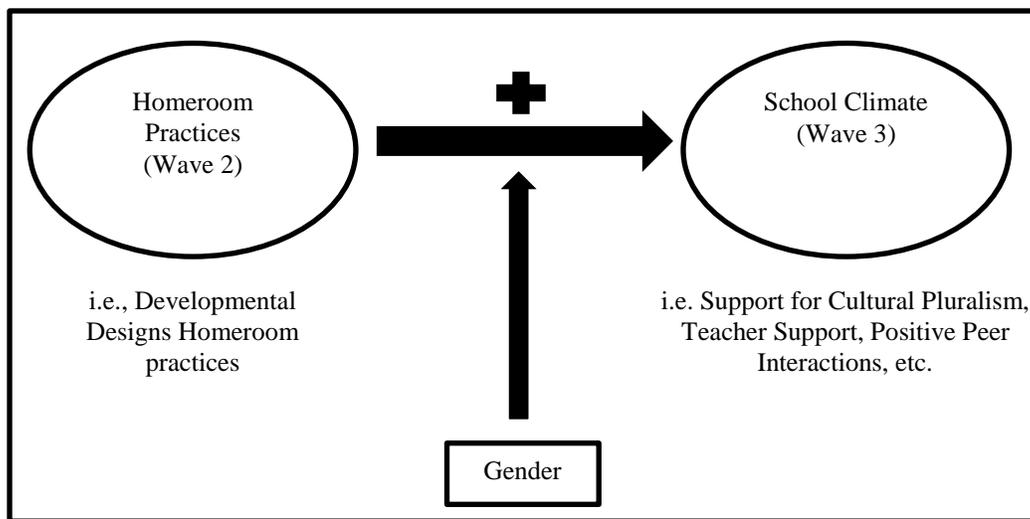


Figure 1. Homeroom practices and school climate relationship as moderated by gender. This figure illustrates our hypothesis for the relationship.

positive organizational practices, aims to improve the academic outcomes and school climate specifically for students of color. As race is left out of most positive organizational studies, rather than specifying hypotheses, I explored race as a potential moderator of the relationship between homeroom practices and school climate (see Figure 2).

Method

Participants

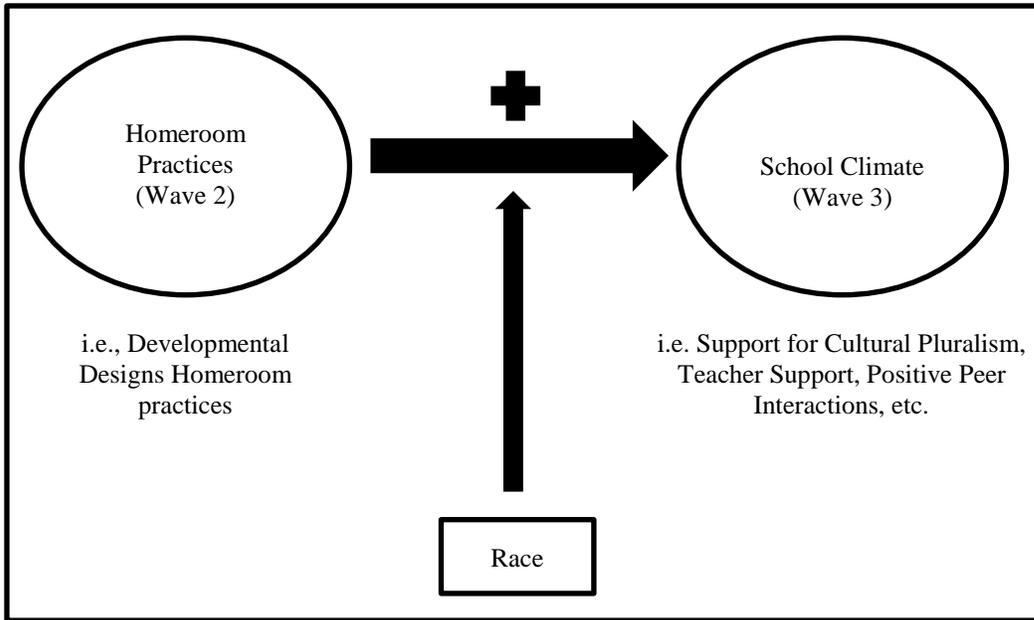


Figure 2. Homeroom practices and school climate relationship as moderated by race. This figure illustrates our hypothesis for the relationship.

Data were taken from Wave 2 and Wave 3 of a larger longitudinal study of social and identity development among youth in ethnically diverse middle schools in the Midwest. Of the original 513 participants in Wave 2, 46.8% self-identified as girls, 50.5% self-identified as boys, and 1.8% preferred not to answer. We reduced the original 513 participants in Wave 2 to 451 students, because only 451 students took both surveys. Those 451 students were the analytic sample, which we used to run the analyses. Of the analytic sample, 47.5% self-identified as girls, 50.6% self-identified as boys, and 1.3% preferred not to answer. In addition, 8.6% of the overall sample identified as Asian/Pacific Islander, 28.6% as African American/Black, 13.3% as

Latino/Hispanic, 1.1% as Native American, 30.2% as White, 5.8% as Other, and 8.0% as Multiracial/Biracial. Grade distribution of the sample was relatively equal; 33.5% of participants were in the sixth grade, 35.0% were in the seventh grade, and 31.5% were in the eighth grade.

Missing data. To assess missing data, Little's MCAR test was conducted and was not significant, $\chi^2 = 77.737$, $df = 64$, $p = .116$, which suggests that the missing data are missing completely at random. We then used listwise deletion to remove all participants who were missing information on any of the variables of interest (i.e., homeroom practices, school climate, gender, race, or grade level), as well as those participants who did not complete the Wave 2 ($n = 62$) and Wave 3 ($n = 62$) survey.

Procedure

Data collection was part of a larger study examining the academic, social, and emotional developments at four Midwestern middle schools implementing *Developmental Designs*, a social emotional learning initiative. Data for this study are drawn from the school at which homeroom practices and school climate data were collected, given the school's interest in the climate among its diverse population. The students were asked to complete a survey regarding homeroom and other practices grounded in *Developmental Designs*, school climate, social competencies, friendships, ethnic-racial identity, motivation, and engagement in school. Surveys were self-administered during the homeroom period. Per the IRB protocol, a passive parental consent (i.e., "opt-out") procedure was used; youth assent was obtained immediately prior to the survey. Specifically, the cover sheet asked for students' assent and explained the confidentiality of the survey; it also provided instructions for completion. Once they were done with it, students placed their survey in an envelope, which they then sealed and placed in a box. Once all surveys were placed in the box, the teacher sealed the box. The boxes were then collected by an external

consultant who de-identified the surveys before providing them to the research team. Because the study assessed educational practices, was conducted on behalf of the schools, and data were de-identified prior to being shared with the university research team, it was determined to be Exempt by the University of Michigan IRB (PI: Robert Jagers).

Measures

School climate. School climate was measured using Brand et al.'s (2003) Inventory of School Climate-Student (ISC-S) scale, which included items designed to evaluate dimensions of school climate that had been found in previous research to be related to students' adjustment in education. The original scale was then reduced to a 50-item pool with 10 distinct dimensions of school climate: disciplinary harshness, negative peer interactions, positive peer interactions, structure and clarity of rules and expectations, student commitment to achievement, teacher support, instructional innovation, student participation in decision making, support for cultural purism, and safety problems (Brand et al., 2003). We used 11 items from a larger 50-item survey, including questions such as "Students really enjoy their classes" and "Students enjoy working together on projects in class." We used selected items from the subscales teacher support, positive peer interactions, and support for cultural pluralism of the larger school climate survey. Two additional questions were created and implemented into the School Climate scale: "Boys and girls are treated equally in this school," and "Students are treated well at my school regardless of whether they are rich or poor." Responses were measured on a 5-point Likert scale, from 1 (*Strongly Disagree*) to 5 (*Strongly Agree*). Items were coded such that higher values on this scale indicate higher school climate.

Homeroom practices. Homeroom practices were measured using items related to Developmental Designs, an initiative that the middle school is taking to create positive

relationships, social skills, and academic efficacy in their students (“About the Approach,” n.d.). There is no designated scale related to Developmental Designs, so the Homeroom practices construct was designed by the researchers involved in initial data collection to capture students’ reports of their exposure to Developmental Designs practices during their daily homeroom (See Appendix A). Items were prompted with the statement “In homeroom, how often have you:” to create a sense that each item continues this sentence. The item “Participated in advisory” exemplifies *Developmental Design*’s goal of creating inclusive learning communities; “Led at least part of a class meeting” describes how students are building socio-emotional skills; and “Set goals for myself for the school year” and “Checked on my progress in reaching the goals I set for this year” describe how *Developmental Designs* aims to promote self-regulation and motivate students to achieve academically. The item, “Helped set classroom rules” measures norms regarding rules; “Practiced new routines for doing things in class” measured how teachers use developmentally appropriate practices and content; and “Met individually with my teacher” measures how teachers are intervening with struggling students. Responses were measured on a 5-point scale, ranging from 1 (*Never*) to 5 (*All of the time*).

Covariates. The school provided students’ grade level as 6th, 7th, or 8th at the beginning of Wave 2. Students noted their gender as male or female, with the option not to answer (which was then coded as missing data). In the demographic portion of the survey, students chose as many options as desired in 7 ethnic/racial groups: Asian/Pacific Islander, African American/Black, Latino/Hispanic, Native American, White, Other, and Multiracial/Biracial, with the Other category as an opportunity for students to write-in a response.

Analysis Plan

The current study examines concurrent and longitudinal associations between homeroom practices and school climate, as well as the extent to which such associations are moderated by students' race and gender. I first examined the means, standard deviations, skewness, kurtosis, and bivariate correlations of primary study variables. Then, using multiple hierarchical regression, I examined whether Wave 2 homeroom practices was associated with Wave 2 school climate, whether Wave 3 homeroom practices was associated with Wave 3 school climate, and finally whether Wave 2 homeroom practices predicted Wave 3 school climate. I used race and gender as moderating factors for each of these models.

Results

Preliminary Results

The variables of interest (i.e., homeroom practices and school climate for Wave 2 and Wave 3) were normally distributed. There was neither skewness nor kurtosis values over the absolute value of 2, indicating that the data is neither skewed nor kurtotic. Descriptive statistics for students' homeroom practices values and students' school climate values are shown in Table 1 and Table 2, respectively. Table 1 and 2 list the means and standard deviations for all study variables at Wave 2 for the sample population. Homeroom practices in Wave 2, homeroom practices in Wave 3, school climate of Wave 2, and school climate in Wave 3 were all around the midpoint, ranging from 3.09 to 3.80 (See Table 1).

Primary Results

The current study involved multiple regression analyses of students' perceptions of homeroom practices predicting their concurrent and longitudinal perceptions of school climate, as well as how this relationship was potentially moderated by students' race and gender. Specifically, I examined three regression analyses. I explored the relationship of school climate

as predicted by grade, gender, race, homeroom practices, and the interaction between race and homeroom practices and of gender and homeroom practices. We performed these analyses both as concurrently, at Wave 2 and at Wave 3, and longitudinally, with Wave 2 predicting Wave 3. Results for all the models are presented in Table 6.

At Wave 2, the relationship between school climate and grade, specifically eighth grade, was significant ($b = -.25$, $se = .07$, $p = .001$), meaning that eighth graders reported lower values of school climate as compared to sixth graders (the omitted group). The relationship between school climate and homeroom practices at Wave 2 was also positive and significant ($b = .24$, $se = .09$, $p = .008$), meaning that students who reported high levels of homeroom practices also reported higher levels of school climate. However, none of the relationships between school climate and gender and school climate and race at Wave 2 were significant (see Table 6).

At Wave 3, the relationship between school climate and grade, specifically eighth grade was significant ($b = -.27$, $se = .08$, $p = .001$), meaning that eighth graders reported lower values of school climate, as compared to sixth graders (the omitted group). The relationship between school climate and homeroom practices at Wave 3 was also significant ($b = .25$, $se = .09$, $p = .007$), meaning that students who reported higher levels of homeroom practices also reported higher levels of school climate. However, the relationship between school climate and gender was not significant at Wave 3. Only one racial difference was found; there was an association between students who identified as Asian/Pacific Islander and school climate ($b = .30$, $se = .12$, $p = .014$), meaning that these students reported more positive school climate than African American students (the omitted group).

We also performed a longitudinal analysis determining the prediction of school climate in Wave 3 determined by how students scored other variables in Wave 2, after accounting for

school climate at Wave 2. The relationship between homeroom practices at Wave 2 and school climate at Wave 3 ($b = .21$, $se = .09$, $p = .013$) was significant, meaning that students who reported higher levels of homeroom practices at Wave 2 reported more positive school climate at Wave 3, after taking into account their school climate at Wave 2. Students' perceptions of school climate at Wave 2 also predicted students' reported perceptions of school climate at Wave 3 ($b = .49$, $se = .05$, $p = 0.000$). Again, the relationship between students who identified as Asian/Pacific Islander and school climate was found to be positive and significant ($b = .30$, $se = .11$, $p = .007$). Being Asian/Pacific islander was also found to moderate the relationship between homeroom practices and school climate ($b = -.41$, $se = .11$, $p = .007$). Specifically, for Asian/Pacific Islander students, the relationship between homeroom practices and school climate was less positive than the relationship for African Americans. In addition, the White X homeroom practices interaction was significant ($b = -.21$, $se = .10$, $p = .038$), which indicated that the association of homeroom practices and school climate was also less positive than that for African Americans. All other analyzed relationships were found to be not significant (see Table 6).

Discussion

The findings support our original hypothesis, such that more positive views of homeroom practices – which were used to reflect positive organizational practices – significantly predicted more positive views of school climate. This trend was consistent both concurrently in Wave 2 and Wave 3, and also longitudinally, with Wave 2 homeroom practices positively predicting students' perceptions of school climate at Wave 3. Our findings are consistent with previous research in a number of ways. First, an important aspect of homeroom practices is for a student to have a positive relationship with their teachers (“About the Approach,” n.d.). This is indicative

of positive school climate because students feel that their teachers support them and want them to succeed. Also, in Cameron et al.'s (2011) study, researchers found that positive practices produce positive affect in employees, improving organizational effectiveness. Positive practices include caring for other people, providing compassionate support, providing forgiveness, giving inspiration to one another, understanding the meaning of work, and respecting and appreciating those around you (Cameron et al., 2011). Similarly, homeroom practices may create positive affect in students, which underlies a more positive school climate.

Another reason for these findings may be the Developmental Designs initiative implemented into the school. School climate includes a broad spectrum of factors, including the quality of the relationships among students, the quality of relationships between students and teachers, the extent to which students feel physically and emotionally safe in school, and the presence of clearly stated rules (Kim et al. 2014). The Developmental Designs initiative aims to increase the quality of relationships both between students and peers and students and teachers, as the initiative is based on being more culturally responsible and inclusive. Developmental Designs aims to foster these positive relationships, which explains the positive relationship and prediction of homeroom practices and school climate.

Homeroom Practices and Gender

One of my hypotheses – that gender moderates the relationship between homeroom practices and school climate – was not supported. This finding was counterintuitive, as past research led us to believe that female students have better relationships with their teachers than their male peers and benefit more in some subject areas from that relationship (McCormick and O'Connor 2015). Recent work has also shown that children who have early, close relationships with teachers are more likely to display academic achievement (McCormick and O'Connor

2015). However, although school climate is related to academic achievement (Brand et al. 2003), there is no evidence that the association between gender, teacher relationship, and academic achievement is connected to gender and school climate.

Another possible explanation for the lack of gender moderation in the relationship between homeroom practices and school climate is that perceptions of school climate may be less influenced by student gender than subject area, and may not be as related to and influenced by teacher relationship as academic outcome. Hamre and Pianta (2001) and Silver et al. (2005) found that negative teacher-student relationships impacted girls more negatively in areas of math achievement than boys, yet negative teacher-student relationships impacted boys more negatively in areas of reading achievement than girls. Therefore, perhaps school climate is the moderating variable between teacher-student relationship and academic achievement, instead of teacher-student relationships influencing both academic achievement and school climate separately. In addition, the McCormick and O'Connor (2015) study focuses primarily on negative relationships, yet we are choosing to view this relationship through the perspective of positive psychology.

In addition, previous research that supported our original hypothesis has shown stronger gender differences in school-specific well-being for girls than for boys. However, the well-being measurements presented in the Furlong et al. (2013) study, specifically gratitude, zest, optimism, and persistence, do not necessarily have to relate to school attitudes, but rather to characteristics and personality traits of students. For example, a student may be optimistic about the outcome of a friendship, yet may not be optimistic about academic success, even though optimism is positively related to academic success (Furlong et al., 2013). Even though school climate may influence a student's well-being, and school-specific well-being differs by student gender, the

pairs of variable associations do not influence each other. In other words, the relationship between gender and school-specific well-being does not influence the relationship between gender and school climate.

Currently unaddressed confounding variables may have also influenced the role of gender in our current model. For example, in middle school, friendships are generally between same-sex students (Braun & Davidson, 2016). In addition, feminine activities are devalued in the current society, even if one happens to identify as a girl (Braun & Davidson 2016). Therefore, although a girl's perception of school climate may have been positively influenced by the teacher-student relationship, it may have also been negatively influenced by the lack of mixed-sex friendships or by the devaluing of feminine activities in the classroom.

Other studies have researched the impact of gender and friendship within schools. In a negative peer relationship, girls' psychological adjustment and self-esteem are more negatively affected than boys, yet some studies found similar adjustment patterns between the two genders (Kingery, Erdley, & Marshall, 2011). However, it should be noted that girls go through puberty earlier than boys, which is related to hormonal changes (Steinberg, 2008). As a result, girls tend to rely more on friends for emotional support and attitudes about their self-esteem, and are more likely to be affected stress-wise from problems in peer relationships (Kingery et al. 2011). These findings are related to the current research because students who are accepted by their peers receive emotional support that facilitates emotional support in the classroom (Kingery et al. 2011), and students relate how they feel about emotional support in the classroom under the school climate variable (Brand et al. 2003). However, like the current study, Kingery et al. (2011) found no significant gender differences.

Homeroom Practices and Race

Although we did not have a hypothesis regarding the moderating influence of race in the relationship of homeroom practices and school climate, we included it in the model because *Developmental Designs* aims to influence the lives of students of color. For the most part, our results showed no significant moderation by race, except for in longitudinal relationships between homeroom practices and school climate as moderated by the demographics Asian/Pacific Islander and White. The relationship between homeroom practices and school climate for Asian/Pacific Islander and White students were less positive than the relationship between homeroom practices and school climate for African American students.

The potential explanations for these findings are varied. On one hand, research shows that many white and middle class women teaching students of color feel unprepared to work with students of different ethnicities, specifically behavioral and cultural differences (Wallace & Brand, 2012). In other words, students of color not only have to adhere to academic standards, but also to hegemonic white standards. In addition, teachers may also possess preconceived ideas, implicit stereotypes, and biases about the academic potential of students of color (Wallace & Brand, 2012). Low expectations from teachers are a form of discrimination, and poor academic performance by students of color may be caused by this perceived bias from the students who the teachers have of these students of color (Rosenbloom & Way, 2004). Because of this, students of color may have a more difficult time forming relationships with teachers who have real or perceived biases against their race or ethnicity, which can contribute to these students' overall view of school climate. In addition, the school classroom is a common place for students of color to experience discrimination. A study by Rosenbloom and Way (2004) measured the perceived discrimination from the point of view of students of color. Latino and Black students reported teachers as uncaring and ineffective, while Asian American students

viewed the teachers as caring and fair (Rosenbloom & Way, 2004). However, Asian American students reported more discrimination from their peers (Rosenbloom & Way, 2004). These differential findings between Latino/Black students and Asian American students may account for the significant findings in our study.

On the other hand, *Developmental Designs* is an initiative that aims to make the classroom an inclusive space for all and overall impact school climate, among other variables. *Developmental Designs*, which is the initiative that the homeroom practice scale derived from, is a relationship-based approach to learning that encourages teachers and students to be culturally responsible within the context of adolescent and identity development (“About the Approach,” n.d.). *Developmental Designs* includes initiatives to create a more culturally accepting classroom, mutual respect between students and peers and students and teachers, building a community within the classroom, and student autonomy in decision-making (“About the Approach,” n.d.). Although students of color may be disadvantaged in their relationship with their teacher because of discrimination and preconceived ideas about academic potential, the *Developmental Designs* initiative aims to counteract those forces of discrimination with an intentionally inclusive classroom. Therefore, African American students in this study, in particular, may actually benefit more than White students in *Developmental Designs* classrooms, as the positive organizational practices in the form of homeroom practices hopefully work to directly benefit students of color. Thus, these practices appear to enhance school climate among students traditionally disenfranchised by school (i.e., African Americans), as compared to White and Asian/Pacific Islander students, who traditionally experience schools as more inclusive places for their groups.

Limitations and Future Directions

Any interpretation of this work and its potential contributions to academia should be understood within the context of specific and relevant limitations of the study. For example, it should be noted that the study took place within the context of one school in the Midwest, neglecting to study any other schools or locations in the nation, and therefore limiting the generalizability of the results. The study sample is comprised of middle school students who have transitioned to a different school in sixth grade, limiting the results to only potentially be applicable to students who change schools from elementary to middle school. For example, a student's transition to a new school may be influenced by the amount of overlap in friendships between fifth and sixth grade made possible by the amount of students who transfer with them from one school to the next, another potential limitation of this study. Other indications that may explain the relationship between homeroom practices and school climate include students who have a more positive affect overall are more likely to rate both positively, or that there is another confounding variable not measured in our study. The lack of accounting for all possible confounding variables is another limitation in our study. In addition, though the overall sample size was adequate for the analyses conducted, it is important to keep in mind the small sample size of some of the racial groups when understanding the generalizability of the results in the study. Some of the groups were too small to definitively compare them with the larger groups. In addition, the current analyses concentrated on only the "homeroom practices" portion of the *Developmental Designs* implementation. *Developmental Designs* is also incorporated into subject classes, yet using homeroom practices was the only way to ensure that students were talking about the same teacher between Waves 2 and 3. A related limitation of this study was that we only looked at perceptions of school climate within the homeroom classroom, yet positive organizational practices may play out differently in other classroom settings.

Regarding the conceptualization of gender and race, the study only explored the relationship between homeroom practices and school climate as moderated by gender label, without the variability acknowledged of gender identity. Gender was only identified by “girl” or “boy.” Because each person has a different experience based on their identity and combinations of identities, a limitation of this study was that we did not break down identity categories further by different and gender. Similarly, I explored moderation by racial self-label but did not examine racial *identity*.

To build on this study, one should incorporate a larger sample size from multiple schools to broaden the generalizability of the results. These future studies could incorporate the moderation of friendship in the relationship between homeroom practices and school climate, to look at other factors that may hold significance in addition to grade level. One may also choose to measure the implementation of positive organizational practices within the context of subject courses, both concurrently and longitudinally, because positive organizational practices may hold different significance in other types of classroom settings. Future studies should perform the analysis over a longer period of time, to see if there are any significant relationships between years. One may also differentiate between all possible identities when looking towards the moderation of gender and race in the present relationship to see if there are other forces at play beyond the binary we have identified in the current study.

Conclusion

Teacher classroom practices contribute to all aspects of a students’ experience in the classroom, which could be summed up by a student’s perception of school climate. Consequently, understanding how positive practices contribute to these perceptions of school climate is important to improve students’ experience at school, further contributing to academic

performance, motivation, and classroom relationships. The current study aimed to explore the relationship between these positive practices and school climate in the context of the homeroom classroom, and how student's demographics, race and gender, moderates this relationship. It was found that homeroom practices significantly both relates to school climate and predicts school climate, and the moderation of race was negatively significant for Asian/Pacific Islander students and White students, as compared to the moderation of race for African American students. The moderation of gender was not significant in the relationship between homeroom practices and school climate. This study allows for future research on positive teacher practices in other classroom settings, and a more thorough analysis of moderation by friendship or specific racial identities, in addition to future studies with a larger sample size. This study creates motivation for teachers to incorporate positive and inclusive practices into the classroom, so that students may have more positive perceptions of school climate.

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Appendix A*Homeroom Practices Subscale Questions*

Please pick the response that best fits what you think.

In Homeroom, how often have you:

1. Participated in advisory
2. Led at least part of a class meeting
3. Set goals for myself for the school year
4. Checked on my progress in reaching the goals I set for this year
5. Helped set classroom rules
6. Practiced new routines for doing things in class (examples)
7. Met individually with my teacher

**Students answered from the options: 1 (Never), 2 (Once), 3 (A few times), 4 (Many times), 5 (All of the Time)

Appendix B

Table 1

Overall and Race-Specific Study Variable Means and Standard Deviations

<u>Variable</u>	<u>Asian/PI</u>	<u>Black</u>	<u>Latino</u>	<u>White</u>	<u>Multiracial</u>	<u>Other</u>	<u>Total</u>
W2 Homeroom Practices	3.53 (.65)	3.39 (.69)	3.23 (.79)	3.23 (.75)	3.20 (.81)	3.31 (.71)	3.31 (.73)
W3 Homeroom Practices	3.29 (.75)	3.14 (.73)	2.88 (.70)	3.03 (.73)	2.99 (.63)	3.38 (.75)	3.09 (.75)
W2 School Climate	3.92 (.73)	3.78 (.59)	3.76 (.70)	3.75 (.66)	3.81 (.46)	4.08 (.60)	3.80 (.64)
W3 School Climate	4.01 (.73)	3.67 (.76)	3.71 (.64)	3.78 (.53)	3.65 (.66)	3.79 (.69)	3.75 (.65)

Table 2

Overall and Gender-Specific Study Variable Means and Standard Deviations

<u>Variable</u>	<u>Girl</u>	<u>Boy</u>	<u>Total</u>
W2 Homeroom Practices	3.27 (.73)	3.33 (.74)	3.30 (.74)
W3 Homeroom Practices	3.01 (.68)	3.14 (.81)	3.09 (.75)
W2 School Climate	3.78 (.61)	3.84 (.65)	3.81 (.63)
W3 School Climate	3.76 (.62)	3.74 (.68)	3.75 (.65)

Table 3

Bivariate Correlations among Primary Study Variables

<u>Variable</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>
1. W2 Homeroom Practices	--			
2. W3 Homeroom Practices	0.56**	--		
3. W2 School Climate	0.40**	0.35**	--	
4. W3 School Climate	0.37**	0.39**	0.56**	--

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Table 4

Bivariate Correlations among Primary Study Variables and Gender (Girl)

<u>Variable</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>
1. W2 Homeroom Practices	--			
2. W3 Homeroom Practices	0.55**	--		
3. W2 School Climate	0.39**	0.30**	--	
4. W3 School Climate	0.32**	0.31**	0.52**	--

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Table 5

Bivariate Correlations among Primary Study Variables and Gender (Boy)

<u>Variable</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>
1. W2 Homeroom Practices	--			
2. W3 Homeroom Practices	0.58**	--		
3. W2 School Climate	0.40**	0.40**	--	
4. W3 School Climate	0.41**	0.46**	0.59**	--

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level

Table 6

Results of Linear Regression of School Climate and Homeroom Practices

<i>Study Variable</i>	<u>School Climate</u>								
	Wave 2			Wave 3			Wave 2 Predicting Wave 3		
	b	SE	p	b	SE	p	b	SE	p
Intercept	3.85	.07	.000	3.76	.08	.000	1.92	.21	.000
Seventh Grade	-.07	.07	.359	.02	.08	.01	6.11	.07	.999
Eighth Grade	-.25	.07	.001***	-.27	.08	.001***	-.11	.08	.145
Gender	.03	.06	.661	-.08	.07	.208	-.05	.06	.387
Asian/PI	.03	.11	.788	.30	.12	.014*	.30	.11	.007**
White	.00	.08	.996	.15	.08	.075	.08	.07	.292
Latino	.01	.10	.944	.10	.11	.343	.07	.09	.440
Other Race	.30	.12	.015	.02	.14	.869	-.04	.12	.780
Homeroom Practices	.24	.09	.008**	.25	.09	.007**	.21	.09	.013*
School Climate (W2)	--	--	--	--	--	--	.49	.05	.000***
Multiracial	.08	.12	.511	.04	.12	.755	-.02	.11	.842
Gender X Homeroom Practices	.05	.08	.543	.08	.09	.371	.08	.08	.273
Asian/PI X Homeroom Practices	.18	.17	.287	.10	.15	.496	-.41	.15	.008**
White X Homeroom Practices	.05	.11	.641	-.103	.11	.336	-.21	.10	.038*
Latino X Homeroom Practices	.05	.13	.697	.01	.16	.940	-.01	.13	.902
Other Race X Homeroom Practices	.07	.17	.698	.17	.19	.344	-.09	.17	.615
Multiracial X Homeroom Practices	-.04	.15	.772	.09	.19	.612	-.03	.14	.804
R ²		.186			.162			.376	
ΔR ²		.005			.011			.021	

Note. PI = Pacific Islander. * $p \leq .05$. ** $p \leq .01$. *** $p \leq .001$.

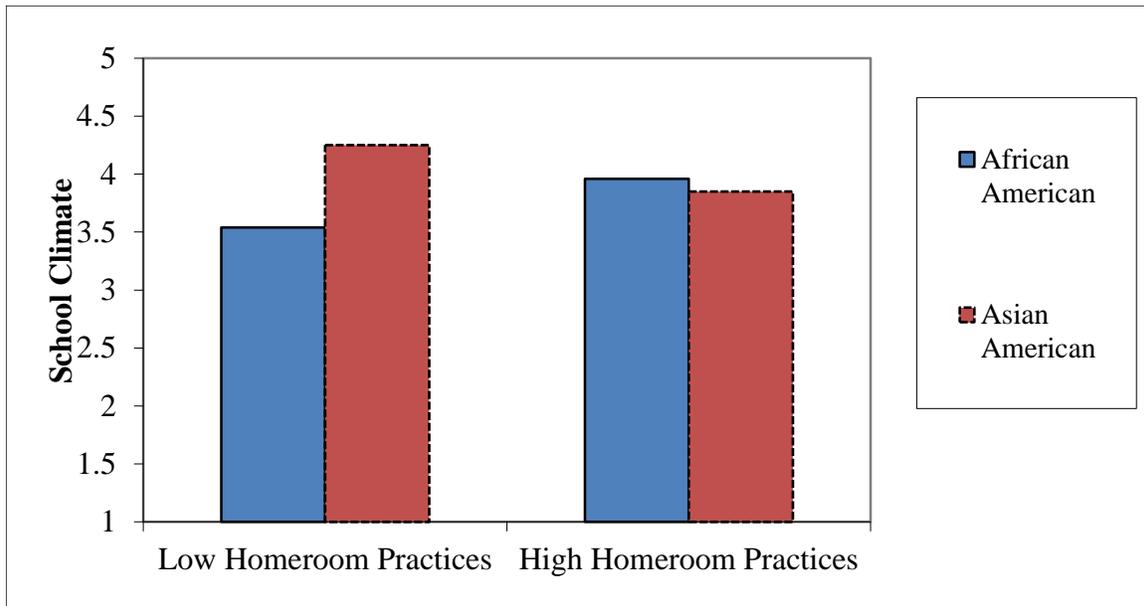


Figure 3. Means of Asian American X homeroom practices interaction and African American X homeroom practice interaction (W2) as they relate to school climate (W3). It appears that HP is "equalizing" the school climate differences between AAPI and Black students.

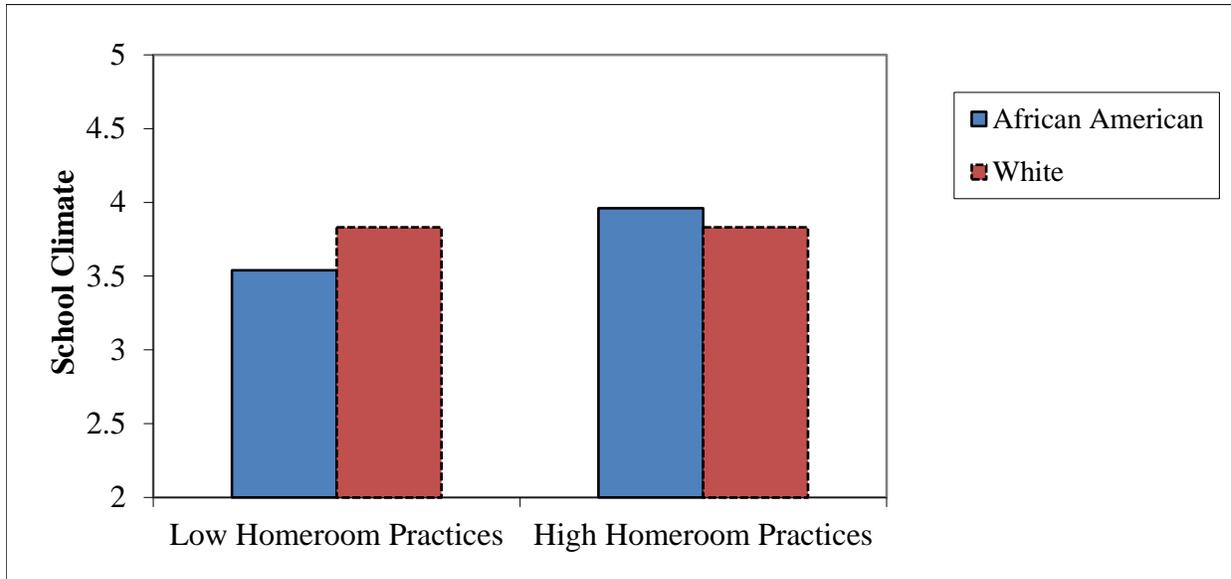


Figure 4. Means of White X homeroom practices interaction and African American X homeroom practice interaction (W2) as they relate to school climate (W3). It appears that HP is "equalizing" the school climate differences between White and Black students.