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**Black Boys and Emotional Disturbance: Incorporating Black Feminist Thought into
Social-Emotional Learning**

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Social-Emotional Learning**

by

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Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of
The University of Texas at Austin
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements
for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

The University of Texas at Austin

August 2023

Abstract

Black Boys and Emotional Disturbance: Incorporating Black Feminist Thought into Social-Emotional Learning

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2023

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Black boys in the United States face a significant disparity in school suspensions and expulsions, accounting for 42 percent of the 2.5 million out-of-school suspensions in 2018, despite comprising only 5.6 percent of the student population. This pattern has persisted for nearly a decade, with emotional outbursts being the primary reason for disciplinary actions regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, or class. To address this issue, Social Emotional Learning (SEL) has been proposed as a solution, particularly for Black boys. The study sought to answer the following research question: How do principles from Black feminist thought/Black feminist texts shed light on teachers' understanding of SEL education with Black male youth? Findings suggest several recommendations. Incorporating Black Feminist Thought into the SEL curriculum can promote a comprehensive understanding of intersectionality. Additionally, using Black Feminist Thought to shape special education policies and practices, revising instructional methods, and integrating Black Feminist Thought into teacher education programs are crucial steps to address the disparities faced by Black boys and promote inclusive education for all students.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Black boys account for the majority of school suspensions and expulsions in the United States. Despite accounting for only 5.6 percent of the student population in 2018, Black boys accounted for 42 percent of all 2.5 million out-of-school suspensions in US public schools in 2018. (Beyond Suspension, 2019; Civil Rights Data Collection, 2014; Digest of Education Statistics, 2019; Tate, 2019). The disproportionate rates of suspension for Black boys have steadily increased from 2011-12, up into the 2019 academic year (Barnes et al., 2009; Beyond Suspension, 2019; Camacho & Krezmien, 2018; Cooley & Trimmer, 2001; Civil Rights Data Collection, 2014; Henderson, Klein, Gonzalez & Bradley, 2005; Rogers & Way, 2018; Tate, 2019). The high suspension rates stand in contrast to White students, who in 2018/19 made up 46% of the population but just 31% of school suspensions and 36% of expulsions, and Pacific Islander or Asian students accounted for 5% of the population and 1% of suspensions and 2% of expulsions population on the national level consistently since 2011 through 2018/19 (Beyond Suspension, 2019; National Education Statistics [NCES], 2022; Schaeffer, 2022). These data show that Black boys, more than any other race or ethnic group, accounted for the majority of school suspensions for nearly 10 years.

These national data are similar to data from Texas (Finan & Ash, 2020), as well as the school district of its capital, Austin, Texas, where Black students were six times more likely to be suspended than their White counterparts and four times more likely than their Hispanic peers in the 2018-19 school year, according to a report by the Austin American-Statesman (Finan & Asch, 2020). Their report found that: “In the 2018-19 school year, when the Austin district gave 2,599 out-of-school suspensions, 7.4% of the district’s Black students were suspended, compared

with 3.6% percent of Hispanic students and 1.5% of white students” (Finan & Asch, 2020, para 4) (see Figure 1).

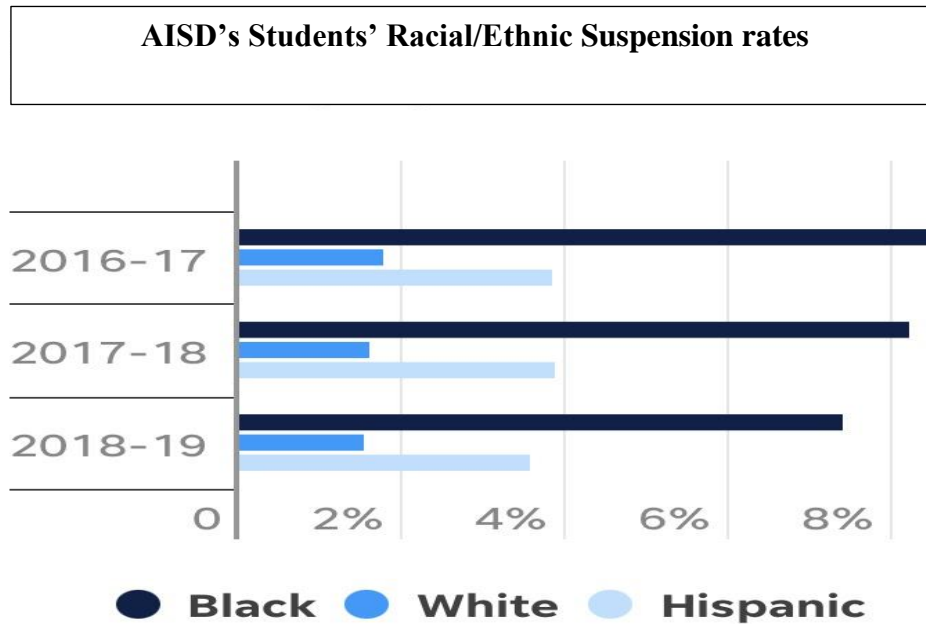


Figure 1. Austin Independent School District’ Suspension Rates (Finan, & Asch, 2020)

Figure 1 above demonstrates that the racial disparities for suspension that we see on the national level persist on the local level as well.

The racial disparities for student suspensions often begin with office referrals. Office referrals are disciplinary forms given to administrators when student behavior is either too severe to be addressed in the classroom, or the teacher has tried to discipline the student on his or her own without success (What is School Discipline Referral, 2017). In reporting data on referrals, the U.S. Department of Education labels referrals into 27 different categories, including violent and non-violent infractions (Kaufman et al., 2010). In 2010, the two most common infractions, according to data collected by Discipline Referral Data to Evaluate (2011), were fighting (29%) and emotional outbursts (17%).

Office referrals often lead to suspensions, and according to Beyond School Suspension (2019), the majority of suspended students each year are not suspended for violent or threatening behavior.

As many as 95 percent of out-of-school suspensions are for nonviolent misbehavior—like being disruptive, acting disrespectfully, tardiness, profanity, and dress-code violations . . . [for instance] in California, nearly half of the more than 700,000 suspensions statewide in the 2011–12 school year were for “willful defiance” (p. 33).

Thus, contrary to popular belief, the majority of students are being suspended for non-violent infractions, and this includes Black boys.

As noted, many of the non-violent problems noted above by the Beyond Suspension report (2019) leading to suspension are behavioral problems that are tied to an emotionally heightened state (being disruptive, profanity, acting disrespectfully, etc.). Belsha (2021) states that fighting is a direct cause of students’ unresolved feelings and emotions in school. Therefore, in the last ten years, schools have answered the ‘effect’ but not the cause--- children’s emotions.

Students across all racial and gender groups are experiencing emotional turmoil in school (Skahill & Desroches, 2019). Nall (2019) defines emotional outbursts as rapid changes in an emotional expression where strong or exaggerated feelings and emotions occur. “[Emotional outbursts are] when people are unable to control their emotions, their responses may be disruptive or inappropriate given the situation or setting” (Nall, 2019, para.1).

While most emotional outburst behaviors include non-violent events, there can be more extreme incidents that can be identified as explosive outbursts (EO) which manifest as aggressive and defiant events. Explosive outbursts by students occur across diverse groups such as race, class, and gender (Skahill & Desroches, 2019; Carlson & Singh, 2021). Furthermore,

students may explode at school, flying rages far beyond that of a temper tantrum, and escalate to screaming, throwing, furniture, verbally assailing others, and even physically assaulting staff and students or destroying property (Nall, 2019, para.1). Explosive outbursts often lead to school infractions.

When a student has demonstrated an extensive history of school infractions centered around explosive outbursts, they are often diagnosed with the disability of “emotional disturbance.” Emotional disturbance is defined as emotional symptoms, conduct problems, hyperactivity or inattention, peer relationship problems, and prosocial behavior (Mark & Buck, 2016). When a student is diagnosed, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires school districts to follow certain procedures in identifying a student with a disability by creating an individual education plan for that student otherwise known as IEP (Oelrich, 2012, p. 10).

Although emotional outbursts are seen across all races and genders in schools, research has found that students classified as being “emotionally disturbed” under IDEA (as having a disability) are more likely to be Black, and more particularly, they are more likely to be identified as Black males (Beyond Suspension, 2019; Losen et al., 2014; Mark & Buck, 2016; Oelrich, 2012). For example, a study of 17,705 children in California found that Asian students constitute 14% of emotional ‘disturbance’ infractions, White students (17%), multi-racial students (19%), Hispanic (20%), and Black students (25%) (Banta et al., 2014), which is for Black students far greater than their representation in the population.

Some advocates and policy makers argue that the real issue is how labeling of emotional disturbance is applied (Salhotra, 2021), as the term is disproportionately attached to Black students. During the 2018-19 school year, Black students accounted for 49% of students with ED

even though they made up less than a quarter (15%) of the public-school population. This pattern plays out across the country, too (Salhotra, 2021, p. 3). Salhotra (2021) states that labeling leads to the stigmatization of Black boys and further marginalizes them in school, affecting their academic careers. Black boys more than any other group are disproportionately affected by the labeling in schools (Oelrich, 2012). This labeling disrupts educational attainment and Black boys are on the back end of that stick.

Emotional disturbance out of any other health impairment is more likely to receive disciplinary actions in schools (Losen, et al., 2014; NCSER, 2006). According to the National Center for Special Education Research (2006), students with emotional disturbances are significantly more likely to have been suspended or expelled in one school year or over their school careers than youth in all other disability categories.

They [Emotional Disturbed] are 27 percentage points more likely to have received disciplinary actions in one school year and 32 percentage points more likely ever to have been suspended or expelled than those in the next most frequently occurring category—youth with other health impairments. More than three out of five youths with emotional disturbances (63 percent) have experienced disciplinary actions, including suspensions and expulsions, in one school year, with an average of seven disciplinary incidents.

Almost three-quarters (73 percent) have been suspended or expelled during their school careers (NCSER, p.1., 2006).

On average, students with ED experience a suspension rate of 73% by the end of their academic careers, if they graduate (NCSER, 2006). Black males' experience with ED in schools at the secondary level is even worse. According to Losen et. al. (2014), the risk for suspension at the elementary school level is 4.1% and rises to 19.3% at the secondary level. "The 2-percentage

point gap at the elementary level increases fivefold at the secondary level to a 10-percentage point gap... Researchers have consistently found that getting suspended for school correlates with a dramatic increase in a student's risk for involvement in the juvenile justice system" (Losen et al., p.2, 2014).

Table 1

Table 1. National (K-12) suspension risk by race, disability, and gender 2011-12.

U.S.	American Indian/ Alaska Native	Asian	Native Hawaiian/ Other Pacific Islander	Black/ African American	Latino	White
Male	13%	3%	7%	20%	9%	6%
Female	7%	1%	3%	12%	4%	2%

Note: Retrieved from U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights Data Collection: Data Snapshot (School Discipline) March 2014.

The data displayed in the graphic 'snapshot' show that Black males with ED are more likely than any other group with disability impairments to receive an in-school or out-of-school suspension. Further, Black males at the secondary level are more inclined after multiple suspensions and expulsions to experience becoming involved with the juvenile justice system during their time in school (Table 1).

Scholars have identified three leading causes of incorrectly identifying Black males as having emotional disturbance (ED) (Oelrich, 2012). The first cause is a cultural misunderstanding between Black students and White teachers and administrators, and conscious and subconscious biases of teachers (Losen, et al., 2014; Oelrich, 2012). Losen et al. (2014) and Oelrich (2012) both agree that there is an over-simplification of ED definition of common behaviors associated with the term and can overlap with common and normal behaviors commonly associated with African American children in the classroom. "The current emotional

disturbance definition does not adequately address these cultural misunderstandings and biases” (Oelrich, 2012, p. 12). Lambert et. al. (2022) found that Black children classified with ED ranked the highest by White teachers as 'unable to learn'. Black ED students' classification of inability to learn and frequency of disciplinary punishment was higher, despite their overall classroom relationships being better than their white counterparts. Moreso, Black ED children's behaviors were perceived to be significantly worse than their racial counterparts by teachers, who have been shown to perceive behaviors of White students as 'normal' versus Black students as 'threatening' or 'disruptive' (Lambert et. al., 2022).

The second reason that Black students are disproportionately labeled as ED is the culturally insensitive procedures and assessments used to identify students with emotional disturbance (ED) (Lambert et al., 2022). (Cullinan & Kauffman, 2005; Losen et al., 2014; Oelrich, 2012; Salhotra, 2021). Given the fact that White students account for the majority of the student population in the United States, they simultaneously account for the majority of youth with serious mental and emotional symptoms. Yet among African American adolescents, emotional disturbance is overrepresented (Mark & Buck, 2016, p. 1575). The fundamental disconnect, according to activists and government officials, is how labeling is applied (Salhotra, 2021) as the concept is associated with Black students excessively.

A third reason for the over-representation of Black students identified as ED is that Black students are often taught by inexperienced teachers who are not trained in classroom instruction, management, and special education procedures that take their students' model social norms into account. Losen et al. (2014) establish that impoverished Black and Brown (ELL) students are more likely than their peers to be taught by novice teachers. Further, according to Lipman (1998), there is a heavy reliance on punishment among novice teachers to resolve student-teacher

and student-student conflicts for African American students. This could be why novice teachers more than their experienced colleagues refer Black boys for special education evaluations and why the exposure to novice teachers for Black boys contributes to the increase in their suspension and expulsion rate whether they are documented with a disability or not (Losen et al., 2014).

Ultimately, the result of discipline policies and suspensions related to emotional outbursts in schools and for ED students is the school-to-prison pipeline (Alexander, 2010). There is direct cause and effect that takes place within a school. A 2019 Beyond Suspension report showed that 73% of adolescent youth who dropped out with numerous school referrals for emotional outbursts infractions were arrested within five years of leaving school (Beyond Suspension, 2019). Based on federal data, in 2011–12, 50% of Black correctional facility prisoners were classified as having an extensive history of emotional outbursts in school (Losen et al. 2014).

Despite the causes, Lipman (1998) asserts that Black males' penalization and the disciplinary school policies that reinforce the outcomes for Black boys are injustice. "For African American students, especially males, punitive policies intersect with racist ideologies and the stigmatization of African American students' cultural identities" (Lipman, 1998, p.31). Second, she states that teachers' and administrators' lack of self-control and cultural and racial biases continue to be the leading cause of student pushout. Of these two factors, she writes:

One result is that African American students, especially males, are disproportionately suspended and assigned to behaviors disorder classes and otherwise excluded from school and the core curriculum... contributing to low achievement...[and] further stigmatizes and criminalizes African American students legitimating the need to control their behavior (Lipman, 1998, p. 31).

Lipman (1998) concludes, through observation(s) in the city of Chicago, that every Black boy who enters Chicago's Public Schools (CPS) can expect to be suspended at least once before the end of their academic career. In New York, parents and policy makers are stating this is not a reflection of the boys, but rather the lack of insight we have into the institutions themselves (Salhotra, 2021).

In fact, given the potential of discriminatory practices related to race, exacerbating the poor outcomes of Black students with ED, school personnel need to design and implement culturally appropriate academic and behavioral interventions that meet the documented needs of Black students with ED (Lambert et. al., 2022, p. 114).

SEL: A National Movement

At the same time that rising suspensions for outbursts are occurring for Black males, nationally there has been an increasing focus on Social Emotional Learning (SEL). Many districts nationally have adopted some form of SEL curriculum to foster caring relationships between teachers and students, cooperation and conflict reduction among students, a greater sense of school safety, and the development of social and emotional skills in students, teachers, and school leaders (Farmer & Adams, 2021). In 2018, 20 states adopted K-12 SEL competencies. As of 2020, all 50 states have adopted pre-K SEL competencies, while 43 states have adopted some form of SEL at K-12. These numbers indicate that there is an emerging trend of SEL implementation at the national level (CASEL: SEL Policy State Level, 2022).

Data indicates that SEL instruction is leading to more positive social behaviors, less emotional distress, fewer suspensions, and disciplinary incidents, increases in school attendance, and improved test scores and grades (CASEL: SEL Policy State Level, 2022; Durlak et al. 2011). As one example, a study conducted by Durlak et al. (2011) found that k-12 students who

participated in SEL programs experienced an 11% increase in their academic performance. Their study found that by connecting students' emotions to schools' routine educational practices, SEL programs were able to enhance students' connection to the school, classroom behavior, and academic achievement. The trend of SEL's positive effect on student outcomes continues to grow nationally. However, SEL interventions show the largest effect size when the intervention is designed with a specific context or culture in mind. This supports the idea that SEL is not a 'one-size-fits-all' intervention (CASEL: What Does the Researcher Say, 2022; Wigglesworth et al., 2016).

SEL has been specifically used to treat emotional outbursts as well as students labeled with an emotional disturbance. School psychologists often serve as the first line of professionals who identify and treat children and adolescents who identify with mental-emotional and mental health symptoms (Reddy, 2008). Their overarching job is to promote the child's academic and mental health success. Yet, most educators report they don't know how to effectively educate and manage children who are identified with behavior and emotional difficulties. "Many educators report that they lack the training and access to consultative services to effectively educate and behaviorally manage children with ED in general education" (Reddy, 2009, p. 133).

Farmer and Adams' (2021) study provided evidence that students classified as emotionally disturbed (ED) or who display ED symptoms can benefit from SEL instruction that is embedded within multitiered, positive behavioral support interventions. Merrell et al. (2008), developed and described the results of three pilot studies that evaluated social-emotional learning programs in increasing ED students' knowledge of healthy social-emotional behaviors and decreasing their symptoms of negative affect and emotional distress. Farmer and Adams' (2021) study highlights the potential value of working with students with ED on five skill areas, which

they call: social awareness, self-management, optimistic thinking, goal-directed behavior, relationship skills, and decision-making.

However, many have criticized the national SEL movement for failing to incorporate or acknowledge issues of race, class, gender, and sexual orientation. Ford (2020) states that Social Emotional Learning is ineffective for Black students when it is culturally blind. She explains further by stating, “The ‘educating the whole child’ mantra floats around many districts and is common...I 100% agree with the philosophy of holistic development but have found that culture is seldom central and fundamental to this body of work” (Ford, 2020, para. 4).

Indeed, although 1968 the earliest framework of SEL was introduced by Dr. James Comer (CASEL: Our History, 2022), school suspension and expulsion rates involving emotional outbursts have continued to rise for Black boys across Texas and the U.S. (Beyond Suspension, 2019; Civil Right Data Collection, 2014-19; Finan & Asch, 2020). These data suggest that efforts to promote social-emotional learning are not working or need further guidance (Jones, 2019).

One of the most widely adopted SEL curricula is CASEL or Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), which is a collaborative developed in 1994, to support school districts in implementing SEL and addressing the emotional crisis happening amongst students in K-12 (CASEL: Our History, 2022). In 2011 CASEL partnered with eight large school districts across the country to educate about 1 million students a year (NCLD, 2017), expanding to 20 districts by 2021 including cities in the state of Texas, such as Austin, Houston, Dallas, and San Antonio. CASEL developed a conceptual framework is a template to help districts facilitate the five core competencies of a social-emotional learning curriculum: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (Jagers et

al., 2019). Jagers et al. (2019) proposed that this framework be used at the district level to build foundational support and instructional planning for teachers, community members, and students in implementing a chosen SEL curriculum.

What is notable about CASEL is its move to bring more cultural inclusion into the thinking about SEL in its 2021 action plan. Indeed, like SEL, CASEL's framework had been criticized for failing to address or incorporate issues of race and culture, and gender (Jagers et al., 2019; Weissberg et al., 2020). In response to this critique, in 2021 Dr. Robert Jagers, who is Vice President of research for CASEL, lead an effort to revamp CASEL to be more culturally inclusive and incorporate gender, sexual orientation, culture, race, and other identities in their framework.

One of the key changes Jagers argues for is acknowledging the intersectional nature of identity in SEL efforts. Thinking intersectionally may change how teachers view their students and challenge the views of Black boys in particular. Therefore, intersectionality enables educators to have a distinctive perspective of kids, which can help to build safe, equitable, and supportive educational environments. Using this theoretical framework also aids in understanding the nature of issues. For teachers and school administrators working to understand their kids more thoroughly through fostering more equitable school communities, intersectionality serves as a fundamental framework of critical praxis in the SEL curriculum (Carey et al. 2018; Jagers et al., 2019). While CASEL is seeking to push school districts that are implementing SEL to acknowledge the need to address culture and intersectional identities, it remains to be seen what tools actual SEL curriculum providers will adopt.

SEL Black Masculinity, and Black Feminist Literature

As early as the year 2000, Black Feminist scholars Ferguson (2000) and hooks (2003) discussed the imperativeness to investigate the context(s) surrounding the emotions of adolescent Black boys, to consider their narratives, and to meet their socio-emotional needs in school to combat issues surrounding suspension, expulsion, and emotional outbursts and disability classification. When seeking school-based solutions for solving the 'Black male crisis' (Lynch, 2020), Black feminist scholars, both male and female, are creating an emerging body of literature addressing institutional change and advocating for the incorporation of Black feminist scholarship (Adu-Poku, 2001; Ferguson, 2000; Darling-Hammond et al., 2019; Harris, 2007; hooks, 2003; hooks, 2004; Jagers et al., 2019; Ladson-Billings, 1994; McCready, 2010; Morris, 2015; Nagaoka et al., 2015; White, 2006; White, 2010). When walking theory to practice, Black feminist authors and practitioners have begun to create a body of work that centralizes the importance of social-emotional learning of Black boys (Gayles, 2018; Davey, 2020; Ferguson, 2000; hooks, 2003; White, 2006). Some of the most important of these works are Gayles' (2018) *The Feminist on Cellblock Y*, White's (2006) *Black Feminist-Masculinity* (narratives and readings), and Ferguson's (2000) *Bad Boys: The Creation of Black Masculinity in Public Schools*.

What these scholars' works have in common is their approach that centralizes Black male experiences, recognizing that this experience is unique and based on gender and racial identity. In each of these pieces, the authors or documentary makers first work with participants to look into the unaddressed systemic procedures that contribute to negative experiences in schools. Second, through disciplinary processes, they receive the narrative views of Black males most harmed by educational malpractices in school. Third, Black Feminist authors focus on the individuals' emotional experiences.

As one example, Gayles' (2018) *The Feminist on Cellblock Y* is a documentary based on studies on Black manhood and their relationship with emotionality (Ferguson; 2000; Gayles, 2018; White, 2006). In the documentary, Gayles undertook an intervention in which Black feminist texts and focus group interventions among Black males produced discourse about shared undesirable experiences, leading to their disciplinary treatments. In this documentary, there are three components of intervention: reading a Black feminist text, narrative writing (journaling), and classroom discussion.

These texts and activities provide an example of how Black feminist theory and intersectionality can be used as a tool to improve social-emotional learning in Black boys by providing counter-narratives of Black boys' experiences that aren't traditionally heard. Second, these texts and experiments shed light on how improving staff relationships with Black males can be achieved by changing the policies governing such interactions. In conclusion, critical scholars are building upon the need for educational institutions to incorporate intersectionality.

Black feminist scholars have begun to attempt to address the emotional turmoil of Black boys transitioning to men. Black feminist scholarship, along with its existing and emerging body of work surrounding social-emotional learning and adolescent Black males, can facilitate discussion on social-emotional learning and the experiences of Black boys.

Present Study

To better explore the phenomenon surrounding Black male turmoil in schools, some scholars argue that "counter-narratives" about their lived experiences are crucial to improving SEL and making it more impactful (Jagers et al., 2019; Lynch, 2020; Ferguson, 2000; hooks, 2003; Tatum, 2012). I argue that this call for incorporating intersectionality into SEL efforts, coupled with Black feminist urgings to centralize race, gender, class, and sexual orientation, is

mutually compatible and mutually reinforcing for social and emotional learning for Black students—and has the potential to positively influence the rates of adolescent Black boys' suspension and expulsion for emotional outbursts. Furthermore, I contend that for SEL to be effective for Black boys in high school, classroom lessons require integration with Black feminist pedagogy, which provides space for teacher and student reflection around emotions, sexual orientation, gender, class, culture, love, self-agency, and school (Ford, 2020; Jagers, 2018).

This study was an Action Research project in which I collaborated with teachers to use Black feminist literature to expand and integrate an intersectional perspective into SEL. This study seeks to answer the following research question: How do principles from Black feminist thought/Black feminist texts shed light on teachers' understanding of SEL education with Black male youth? During the fall, one open-ended interview and two focus groups with educators working with Black boys diagnosed with ED were conducted.

Action Research (AR) is a research approach that aims to improve daily routines and solve problems while conducting research. It focuses on addressing specific issues in practical settings like classrooms, workplaces, programs, or organizations. Action researchers, driven by the desire for change, experiment with new techniques and interventions to document their impact on the identified problem. To ensure effective action research, it is crucial to exchange experiences and gather information about existing procedures within the organization before initiating inquiry or intervention, as emphasized by Merriam and Tisdell (2015).

During the fall of 2023, the study employed an Action Research methodology, with five teachers participating in one 45-minute open-ended interview and two focus groups. The goal of

the design was to conduct an intervention with teachers where they engaged with texts to broaden their perspectives related to intersectionality and SEL for Black boys with ED.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

As noted in chapter one, Black males are disproportionately referred to and suspended for emotional outbursts (Beyond Suspension, 2019; Civil Rights Data Collection, 2014; Tate, 2019). They are also disproportionately identified as emotionally disturbed and funneled into special education programs as a result (Beyond Suspension, 2019; Losen et al., 2014; Oelrich, 2012). In this chapter, I first go into the reasons scholars have identified for disproportionate referrals and suspensions. I then examine the reasons for the disproportionate identification of special education as emotionally disturbed. I look to SEL as a curriculum and research this. Lastly, I talk about Black feminist literature as a way to address the limitations of SEL.

Black Males Struggle Within the Educational System

Overall, Black males struggle within the educational system. In this section, I review four key reasons: teacher preparation, the reduction in counselors and the increase in SROs, special education's misidentification and misclassification, and a lack of cultural inclusivity in restorative practices.

Teacher Representation

One primary reason for Black males' struggles in the educational system, is their overall mistreatment in school. One key reason for this is as a result of the lack of teachers of color. Ahmad & Boser (2014) state that teacher representation matters because students of color need teachers who set rigorous standards for them and also can provide models of professional success. Teachers of color have demonstrated success in increasing the academic achievement of students of similar backgrounds (Achinstein, & Ogawa, 2011). According to the National Center

for Education Statistics (2017), children of color make up the majority of the population, while their teachers remain mostly white. In other words, pupils in American public schools are becoming less and less like their teachers (Digest of Education Statistics, 2017). "The Teacher Diversity Index" featured in a 2014 Center for American Progress report found that every state in the US has a higher percentage of students of color than teachers of color (Boser, 2011). While every teacher, regardless of race or ethnicity, should be able to teach all kids from all backgrounds, evidence suggests that pupils who are taught by instructors of color, particularly those from low-income and at-risk homes, perform better in school (Clewell & Villegas, 1998; Dilworth, 1990; Gay, 2002; Villegas & Lucas, 2004). Having teachers of color is essential to student classroom behavior and performance.

There are three main reasons why Black teachers get better results with Black students. First, teachers of color are seen as role models to their students, as they are used to seeing someone similar at home performing as an authoritative figure[s] (Clewell & Villegas, 1998; King, 1993; Villegas & Lucas, 2004). To expand, witnessing adult role models in positions of authority benefits Black children, particularly those who live and attend schools in underprivileged areas (Clewell & Villegas, 1998; King, 1993; Villegas & Lucas, 2004). According to some researchers, having an adult role model can help Black students feel more empowered (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Fryer & Torelli, 2010; Ogbu, 2004).

Second, teachers of color are more likely to have higher standards for students of color because they identify with the racial and gender barriers which students of color have to undertake, unlike White teachers who uphold the "self-fulfilling prophecy" phenomenon, where negative stereotypes perpetuate poor performance of Black students (Brophy, 1983; Ferguson, 2003; Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968; Steele & Aronson, 1995). Scholars argue that Black teachers

are more likely to have high expectations for Black students (Beady & Hansell, 1981; Ferguson, 2003). This can have a significant impact on Black students because they appear to be more receptive to teacher expectations than middle-class White teachers (Irvine, 1988; Kash & Borich, 1978; McKown & Weinstein, 2002).

Third, teachers of color with cultural similarities have less misinterpretation of students' behaviors in class, effectively lowering school suspension and expulsion rates (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Fryer & Torelli, 2010; Ogbu, 2004). As mentioned previously, in some cases, White teachers perpetuate the “self-fulfilling prophecy” phenomenon, in which negative stereotypes seem to perpetuate the poor performance of Black students and contribute to the cultural biases in teachers' interpretation of Black kids' behaviors (Brophy, 1983; Ferguson, 2003; Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968; Steele & Aronson, 1995).

Cultural biases in teachers' interpretations of Black kids' behavior can have long-term ramifications for student success (Skiba, & Noguera, 2010). Literature finds that Black students are more likely to be disciplined (e.g., suspended from school) than other students (Children's Defense Fund, 1975; Diamond, J. B., & Lewis, A. E., 2019; McCarthy & Hoge, 1987; McFadden, Marsh, Price, & Hwang, 1992; Skiba, Michael, Narda, & Peterson, 2002). According to a recent study from the National Center for Education Statistics (2017), Black students were more likely than any other student group to receive out-of-school suspensions as punishment as recently as 2011-2012.

While teachers of color benefit Black students, however, there is an issue of retention in the teacher pipeline. Students of color enroll in college at a considerably lower rate than White students. Furthermore, each year, only a small number of students of color enroll in teacher preparation programs. Teacher candidates from minority groups do worse on licensure exams,

which act as passports to teaching certification (Boyd, Goldhaber, Lankford, & Wyckoff, 2007).

Further, teachers of color are far more likely than their white counterparts to leave the profession. For instance, The University of Chicago at Illinois (UIC) Urban Education program with a concentration in elementary education has developed an initiative called "Call Me Mister" to reduce the number of young Black professionals who do not obtain teacher certifications but instead obtain paraprofessional licenses as a result of not passing their edTPA exam or discontinuing the teaching program altogether (Sadovi, 2018).

Ingersoll and May (2011) also found that over the past couple of decades, the turnover rates among teachers of color have been significantly higher than among White teachers. They found that during the 2012-2013 school year, minority teachers had a turnover rate of over 19 percent, compared to 15 percent for nonminority teachers, undermining recruitment attempts. The organizational conditions in schools, according to Ingersoll and May (2011), have an impact on minority teacher exits. Teachers of color are more likely to teach in schools with less favorable organizational conditions than white teachers, resulting in disproportionate losses of teachers of color. Furthermore, it would be oversimplifying to label these underserved schools as "undesirable." It's crucial to remember that retaining teachers, especially minority teachers, necessitates conditions that encourage teacher autonomy and connectivity. Schools with higher degrees of faculty input into schoolwide decisions and schools that offer more autonomy for teachers regarding classroom issues had substantially lower levels of turnover (Ingersoll & May, 2011). Those who quit perceived lack of respect for teaching as a profession, low pay, and poor working conditions as reasons for leaving. Many people feel that the absence of minority teachers is due to a lack of recruiting or intake; however, Richard Ingersoll and Henry May (2011) suggest that this is not the case. The problem is one of retention.

Decrease in Counselors, Increase in SROs

One leading cause of the school-to-prison pipeline is that counselors have been replaced by police officers in schools predominately comprised of Black and Brown students. The lack of counselors is significant because school counselors are crucial to helping students—particularly low-income students—develop social-emotional skills, secure financial aid, and gain access to higher education (Beyond School Suspension, 2019, p. 51). However, some have argued that with the lack of funding to support underserved schools, districts use alternative measures to ensure funding another way--- misdiagnoses of Black students as having emotional disturbance (ED) leading to their ability to receive special education funding. Although this has not been proven, statements that are supported by empirical data have been made (Barshay, 2019).

According to CRDC data, 1.6 million students attend a school with a sworn law enforcement officer (SLEO) but not a school counselor, and by the 2015-16 academic year, schools reported having more than 27,000 school resource officers (SROs), compared to 23,000 social workers. Hispanic, Asian, and Black students were all more likely than White students to attend a school with an SLEO but not a counselor (Beyond School Suspension, 2019, p. 11). “Kids from suburban white America—they don’t get arrested for cursing out a teacher, throwing a book . . . these are the things they go to the counselor for;” whereas, Black, Hispanic, and Native American students face harsh disciplinary actions for similar infractions (Beyond School Suspension, 2019, p. 37). For equivalent infractions, American students suffer severe disciplinary procedures" (Beyond School Suspension, 2019, p. 37). Counselors have been replaced by police officers in schools with a majority of Black and Brown children, which is one of the main causes of the school-to-prison pipeline. According to the data, socioeconomic

considerations play a significant effect in deciding the type of discipline a student would receive. Furthermore, kids of color account for the majority of students in the ten largest school districts in the United States, and many of them come from low-income families; these students are the most likely to benefit from school counselors (Beyond School Suspension, 2019). However, this is not the case for ten of the largest public-school districts in the United States.

In an investigation of the ten largest public-school districts, investigative journalists found that four (New York City, Chicago, Miami-Dade, and Houston) have far more SROs and police than school counselors. New York City—the largest public school system—has approximately six officers and three counselors for every 1,000 students. Houston, Texas provides only one counselor for every 1,175 students, compared to one security officer for every 785 students. None of the largest ten school districts meet the American School Counselor Association’s recommendation of one counselor for every 250 students (Beyond School Suspension, 2019 p. 50).

Advocates argue that one reason for a rise in student interactions with law enforcement is that many high-security schools do not have school counselors or other school guidance personnel on staff. Dennis Parker, then-director of the ACLU’s racial justice program, argued that the high ratio of SROs compared to counselors “reflect[s] an approach to school discipline and school safety that is ultimately counterproductive (Barnum, 2016). The lack of counselors is significant because school counselors are crucial to helping students—particularly low-income students—develop social-emotional skills, secure financial aid, and gain access to higher education (Beyond School Suspension, 2019, p. 51).

Special Education Misidentification and Misclassification

There is a long history of Black boys being disproportionality misclassified in special education (Alexander, 2010; Beyond Suspension, 2019; Oelrich, 2012). Currently, African American students, particularly African American male students, are disproportionately identified as having emotional disturbance (p. 9).

Research has shown that when students do not perform well academically, do not behave according to teachers' cultural expectations when teachers do not know what to do with students due to cultural mismatch, and if they are African American students, teachers are more likely to refer them for special education (Williams, 2008).

The problem of the disproportionate representation of students of color in special education is directly tied to the failure to plan and deliver teaching that fulfills the educational requirements of students of color in general (Blanchett, 2013). Black pupils have been disproportionately labeled for decades. Before the 1950s, the dominant attitude regarding this group was that they should be educated not for equal citizenship, but for lower-ranking positions (Skiba et al., 2008). Even after the Brown vs. Board of Education ruling in 1954, several educational practices, such as placing pupils in special education and sorting them by aptitude, continued to divide minority students from others. Court challenges arose in the 1960s and 1970s, disputing whether discriminatory educational policies that resulted in racial isolation of minority children were a violation of the Constitution's Equal Protection Clause and Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

Even though concerns about discriminatory practices prompted studies in the 1970s and 1980s, these early studies did not provide insight into the mechanisms that promote racial inequalities in the identification of special education pupils. Later studies concentrated on the elements that contributed to the situation (Skiba et al., 2008). One key way that African

American pupils are misclassified in special education is now commonly referred to as emotional disturbance (ED). "Even though the majority of young people in the United States are Caucasians, and the majority of young people with serious emotional problems are Caucasians. African American youths are overrepresented in serious emotional disturbance" (Mark & Buck, 2016, p. 1575). The true issue, according to advocates and policymakers, is how labeling is administered (Salhotra, 2021). "Black students are disproportionately associated with the word. Even though Black children made up less than a quarter (15%) of the public-school population during the 2018-19 school year, they accounted for 49 percent of pupils with ED" (Salhotra, 2021).

Emotional disturbance is more likely to result in disciplinary action in schools than any other mental health condition (Losen, et al., 2014; NCSE, 2006). Because racial discrimination exacerbates the poor results of Black kids with ED, school personnel must develop and implement culturally appropriate academic and behavioral treatments that address the established needs of Black students with ED (Lambert et. al., 2022, p. 114). To summarize, the educational system misunderstands Black kids, necessitating a reform of the current definition of emotional disturbance (Oelrich, 2012), as well as a curriculum that appropriately addresses cultural misunderstandings and emotional needs of Black students in the classroom.

Social-Emotional Learning

The Child Study Center at Yale School of Medicine pioneered social-emotional learning (SEL) in the 1960s. Professor James Comer established the Comer School Development Program in New Haven, Connecticut, where he focused on the education systems of low-income African American communities, particularly at two elementary schools in New Haven, Connecticut, where academic performance was dismal. Dr. James Comer established a program

in 1968 to promote the "whole child" as an educational approach. After a decade, both schools witnessed a decrease in behavioral issues and academic performance that outperformed the national norm (CASEL: Our History, 2022).

Social-emotional learning (SEL) is a type of education that incorporates social and emotional skills into the classroom. Self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relational skills, and responsible decision-making are the five core components of socio-emotional learning. Self-awareness is the ability to understand one's feelings and cultivate a positive self-concept. Self-management is defined as the ability to control one's own emotions and behaviors (i.e., intrinsic motivation and setting personal goals). The ability to be aware of other people's emotions and social settings is known as social awareness. Relationship skills are described as the ability to form and maintain relationships. Finally, SEL emphasizes the ability to make responsible decisions as a means of solving problems and holding oneself accountable. These key concepts assist students in living socially and emotionally healthy lives both in and out of the classroom (What Is SEL, 2021). Finally, SEL provides kids with the foundation they need to improve their academic performance by reducing social and emotional stress. These ideas and skills have now been applied to the classroom and are known as CASEL.

The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) is a nationwide education organization that helps school districts implement social-emotional learning initiatives. CASEL is a non-profit organization whose mission is to help people understand and control their emotions, set, and achieve positive goals, feel and exhibit empathy for others, build and sustain meaningful relationships, and make responsible decisions (Jagers, 2018, p. 62).

Since 2016, The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), one of the leading SEL organizations, has grown from eight states to over 30 states and one US territory, representing over 11,850 school districts, 67,000 schools, 2 million teachers, and 35 million students from preschool to high school (CASEL, 2019a). Today, all 50 states in the United States have SEL standards/competencies for preschool, 11 states have expanded preschool standards to early elementary, and 18 states have K-12 standards. More than 200 pieces of legislation citing SEL were submitted in 2019 alone, demonstrating a strong political commitment to extend SEL to schools (Shriver & Weissberg, 2020).

Jagers et al. (2019) propose that CASEL be used at the district level to build foundational support and instructional planning for teachers, community members, and students. They further describe how the Five Core Competencies of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making are facilitated in places including the classroom, family, home, and school to achieve better student outcomes that improve student attitudes about self, others, and tasks, and ensuring fewer conduct problems and higher graduation rates (Jagers et al., 2019).

CASEL's implementation of SEL training appears to result in more positive social behaviors, less emotional distress, fewer suspensions, and disciplinary issues, increased school attendance, and improved test scores and grades, according to several studies (Durlak et al, 2011; Jagers, 2019; Shriver & Weissberg, 2020). According to Durlak et al., (2011), K-12 pupils who engaged in SEL programs improved their academic achievement by 11 percent. Their research discovered that by integrating students' emotions into schools' regular instructional methods, they were able to improve students' school engagement, classroom behavior, and academic accomplishment.

Despite its achievements, CASEL, as the leader of the SEL movement, has been subjected to a barrage of attacks in recent years. Many have criticized the national SEL movement for failing to include or acknowledge race, class, gender, and sexual orientation concerns. Many argue that SEL shouldn't be a "one-size-fits-all" intervention and that it needs to be tailored to incorporate issues of race, class, gender, and sexual orientation (CASEL: What Does the Research Say, 2022; Jagers, 2019; Wigglesworth et al., 2016).

According to Ford (2020), when Social Emotional Learning is culturally blind, it is useless for Black kids. "The 'educating the whole child' phrase circulates many districts and is prevalent," she continues. I completely agree with the holistic development theory, but I've found that culture is rarely core and important to this body of work" (Ford, 2020, para. 4). Ford (2020) isn't the only one, as Jones (2017) notes:

SEL programs are colorblind and do not recognize important differences in the race-based and cultural experiences of students.... therefore, colorblind racism has led to the assumption that program strategies are universal in many interventions, risking the growth of disparities in behavioral health and academic achievement (Jones, 2017, para 4).

Jones argues that, as a result, colorblind racism has led to the belief that program tactics are universal in many interventions, potentially increasing behavioral health and academic success inequities (Jones, 2017, para 4). Furthermore, as Joshua Starr (2019) points out, although "much of the programming has been aimed at Black and Brown kids in urban areas," the SEL movement has "been controlled by White scholars and reformers" thus far (Starr, 2019, para. 6).

Changes in CASEL's SEL program

CASEL's vice president of research, Rob Jagers, pushed for establishing foundational support and instructional preparation for teachers, community members, and students at the district level using CASEL, the widely used framework for SEL initiatives. CASEL was redesigned in 2019 in response to complaints that SEL failed to address race, gender, sexual orientation, and class issues (Jagers, 2019). Furthermore, valid worries have developed regarding the limiting of SEL to the point where it would become yet another educational innovation utilized to benefit children from affluent homes while highlighting potential inadequacies and the need to remediate historically marginalized students (DePaoli et al., 2019; Jagers et al., 2018). As SEL evaluations on report cards become another way of grouping and labeling pupils along racial/ethnic, gender, and social-economic lines, disparities may deepen. Scholars have correctly called for research on how improving schools is dependent on both adults and children increasing their social awareness of several challenges. racial and cultural groups, improving abilities in building trustworthy relationships across identification boundaries (e.g., age, race/ethnicity, ability status, sexual/gender identity; Gregory & Fergus), and promoting perspective-taking regarding how structural disparities and everyday racism affect well-being.

Supporting critical thinking about how systemic inequities and everyday racism affect people's well-being can be done through CASEL's program. Furthermore, according to Jagers et al. (2019), SEL changes can be operationalized in ways that position students and instructors as co-learners involved in the critical analysis of injustices and the development of collaborative solutions that promote personal and collective well-being and thriving. They argue that some programs (for example, Facing History and Ourselves) and techniques (for example, project-based learning) contain such promise and provide possibilities for meaningful, authentic student-student and student-teacher partnerships. That is, provided that teachers do not bring racial

prejudices to these programs and continue to reinforce concepts that have negative consequences for Black children.

To achieve equitable outcomes for all student groups, Jagers et al. (2019) advocated for a new CASEL lens whereby schools include equity-focused tactics in their (SEL) action plans. While the CASEL framework developed by Jagers et al. (2019) is a good starting point, it needs to intentionally and out-right vocally include race, class, culture, and gender as important instructional topics when reviewing the SEL curriculum. CASEL must be culturally responsive to be truly equitable. Cultural responsiveness is the process of gaining an understanding of the importance of students' backgrounds (including historical context) and then incorporating their practices and values into the curriculum, instruction, and school environment (Rose et al., 2020).

In the case of CASEL's SEL movement, which is responding to an epidemic of school suspensions, misidentification, and over-identification of emotional disturbance, curriculum, and training must be adapted to the values and behaviors of Black males. The purpose of cultural responsiveness in the classroom is to improve the ability to satisfy students' needs so that healthy student-teacher relationships may be fostered, and academic engagement can be maximized. When working with Black male students, teachers, and their male students may disagree over how Black boys should act in a classroom so that it reflects "appropriate" school settings.

Black Feminist Thought

Black Feminist Thought provides a potential avenue for making SEL more inclusive of black male perspectives and experiences. Black feminist writings emphasize the need for incorporating a place for Black people to express their emotions and provide them permission to do so (Collins, 1995). Collins (1990) coined the term Black Feminist Thought. She states that

Black feminism centers on the experiences of Black women, understanding their position on racism, sexism, classism, and other social and political identities (Collins, 1990). Although Black Feminist Thought centered on the experiences of Black women and the understanding of their positionality in the world, it was not exclusive to gender.

According to Collins (1990), Black feminist pedagogy outlines learning practices based on Black women's historical experiences with race, gender, and class discrimination, as well as the effects of marginalization and isolation. Collins outlines seven tenets of this approach.

The first, outsider-within, refers to Black women's experiences that keep them, outsiders, in oppressive environments. However, as Collins points out, the Black woman's insider-outsider status provides her with a unique perspective on social, political, intellectual, and economic realities. As a result, despite their marginalization, Black women can give feminist and social ideals a more nuanced perspective.

The second, intellectual activism, entails discovering, reinterpreting, and criticizing the ideas of subgroups within the larger collectivity of historically silenced Black women's voices. Collins' (2000) attention goes beyond Black female academics, claiming that all forms of work can be reinterpreted through Black women's social thought, challenging the term "intellectual" and enabling poetry, music, and other forms of social thought to be considered relevant.

The third tenet, the matrix of domination, refers to the structural organization of oppression intersections. It describes how "structural, disciplinary, hegemonic, and interpersonal domains of power resurface across a variety of oppressive forms" (Collins, 2000). The matrix of dominance is made up of various intersecting oppressions such as race, gender, socioeconomic status, age, and sexuality, among others. Collins' matrix of domination operates across four domains: structural, disciplinary, hegemonic, and interpersonal. The structural domain organizes

power and oppression, the disciplinary governs oppression in an attempt to maintain it, the hegemonic legitimizes oppression, and the interpersonal domain regulates individual interactions and consciousness (Collins, 2000). Although all Black women are within the matrix of domination, the differences in the intersections of oppression make the experiences and perspectives of Black women differ.

The fourth tenet is balancing intellectual activism, which challenges the supposed separation of the personal and professional because it runs against Black communities' natural value systems, which include many facets of community, familial, and religious life. Being purposeful about not separating personal and professional is part of not subscribing to academic frameworks constructed around a White, male worldview as objective facts that all academic participants must conform to. Even when there are differences, Black women draw on their racial community, gender identity, and intellectual backgrounds. As a result, balancing intellectual activism entails not separating one's ego and emotions from one's work, as well as having difficult relationships with superiors (Collins, 1989).

The fifth tenet, controlling images, focuses on stereotypical depictions and negative and stereotypical images of Black women. In her critique of controlling images, Collins (2000) looks at the mammy, the welfare mother, and the jezebel. According to Collins (2000), the mammy works to make defeminized Black women and all oppressive factors against them appear natural, the welfare mother works to make economically unfit Black women and all oppressive factors against them appear natural, and the jezebel works to make hypersexual Black women and all oppressive factors against them appear natural.

The sixth tenet, or the power of image, recognizes that image manipulation has an impact on young Black girls. *The Power of Image on Black Girls* goes beyond the surface to use image

management and awareness to combat the widespread, normalized perception of characters and ideals in the media that are shown as representations of and for young Black girls. Understanding and interpreting the images and meaning behind such imagery in their ideas and positions regarding media depictions is aided by knowing these frameworks. By digging underneath, the surface visuals, this framework can be used to counter the common, normalized perception of characters and ideas in the media that are shown as representations (Jacobs, 2016).

The final tenet, self-definition, is defined as "the ability to name one's own reality." According to Collins (2000), Black women's resistance to controlling images is a crucial stage in practicing self-definition. The rejection of the dominant group's concept of Black women and the imposition of their own self-definition by Black women demonstrate a "collective Black women's awareness." Collins (2000) underlines the importance of creating safe spaces for black women, where their sense of self-identity is not injured by further objectification or silence. Collins' call for self-definition is peppered with affirmation.

Collins states that these seven concepts are vital when transitioning from Black Feminist Pedagogy to activism. These seven concepts highlight the stories, implications, and experiences of Black women as they navigate systems of oppression within their political, social, economic, and emotional lives (Collins, 1990).

Connecting Black Feminist Pedagogy to SEL

As early as the 1970s, Black Feminist writings showed the five basic competencies for transformative social and emotional learning (Collins, 1986; Morrison, 1987; Shange, 1976). Through naming and managing emotions (hooks, 2003), comprehending, and diagnosing trauma (DeGruy, 2005; Shange, 1976), or grasping the rationale behind what drives emotional problems for students in educational settings, these Black feminist texts are an expression of culture,

agency, belonging, and involvement (Ferguson, 2000; Morris, 2015). These writings, taken together, can help us understand how culture shapes one's identity and perception of the world around them, particularly for adolescent Black boys navigating school systems (Harris, 2007; hooks, 2003).

Black feminist texts provide a promising way to see the experiences of Black men, especially Black males in schools. For example, one text by a Black feminist author, bell hooks (2004), *The Will to Change: Men, Masculinity, and Love*, aims to 'liberate' participants by helping them get a better understanding of their situation so that they can take action. In this book, hooks (2003) argues that men can find a space within Black Feminist pedagogy to understand better the tools they need to articulate their experiences and feelings. Black Feminist texts bring light to counter-narratives, and this is important because it fights against the dominant cultural narrative that Black boys are emotionally disturbed.

Black feminist writings hold two benefits as a tool for SEL curricula, particularly for black male students. First, Black feminist texts provide the intersectionality needed to make race, gender, class, and sexual orientation inclusive from an educational standpoint. In and out of the classroom, Black feminist texts help Black males comprehend their positionality within each of these frameworks. In addition, Black feminist literature gives Black males the tools they need to recognize and comprehend the emotions they feel as they navigate these parameters (hooks, 2003; White, 2006).

Second, Black feminist literature equips instructors with a culturally relevant template for better understanding and guiding their students. Black Feminist texts emphasize a place and permit Black people to be expressive of their emotions (Collins, 1995). Black feminist texts capture emotions and depth to address larger issues that are intimately related to what is going on

at home and school. Black Feminist text's ethic of caring suggests that personal expressiveness, emotions, and empathy are central to the knowledge-validation process. Under the idea of SEL, Black Feminist texts are not only promising for instructors but also the education of *all* students' social-emotional curriculum--- more specifically for Black male students.

Indeed, as noted before, while Jagers et al., (2019) have argued for integrating culture, identity, agency, and belonging into SEL (particularly CASEL), Black feminist scholars have previously articulated a framework that can offer a powerful way to do this. Black Feminist literature would enhance CASEL's SEL elements' five pillars of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (Jagers et al., 2019). Black feminist literature aids in the development of self-awareness in Black boys. Black feminist literature teaches Black boys how to manage themselves when navigating racist and prejudice environments. Black feminist literature teaches Black boys how to be aware of themselves and how they will be perceived, therefore allowing them to navigate in a way that does not jeopardize their safety. In addition, relationship skills are required. Black feminist texts provide Black boys with honest talks about what the social, political, and economic landscape looks like for Black men and how it has impacted them historically, in addition to emotional resources. As a result, the last of CASEL's tenet, responsible decision-making, is inclusive of Black feminist literature due to its capacity to assist Black boys in navigating the world with emotional awareness.

Yet, while these principles show promise, few studies have examined how these principles might work in practice with the SEL curriculum. While there are several studies of integrating Black feminist pedagogy for Black girls (Nyachae, 2016; Lane, 2017) few have studied how this might be applied to SEL curriculum for Black males. In my project, as I will

describe in chapter 3, I will examine the following research question: how do principles from Black feminist thought/Black feminist texts shed light on teachers' understanding of SEL education with Black male youth?

Chapter 3: Methods

Black males struggle within the educational system. Chapter two discussed four key reasons: teacher preparation, the reduction in counselors and the increase in SROs, special education misidentification, and misclassification, and a lack of cultural inclusivity in restorative justice practices. This study is an action research project, which initially began as participatory action research (PAR), in which I worked with teachers to draw on Black feminist texts as a way to expand SEL frameworks to incorporate texts that are inclusive of intersectional perspectives (intersectionality), for teachers trying to learn the best practices to teach Black boys who display “symptoms” of emotional disturbance (ED). The study involved one open-ended interview and two focus groups during the fall, working with social-emotional learning (SEL) educators who taught Black boys identified as having ED or displaying associated symptoms, according to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act’s (IDEA) current standards (Beyond Suspension, 2019; Losen et al., 2014; Mark & Buck, 2016; Oelrich, 2012).

As explained in Chapter 2, while the principles of Black feminist pedagogy show promise for expanding the understanding of Black boys who display symptoms of emotional disturbance (ED), few studies have examined how these principles might work in practice with social-emotional learning curricula. While there are several studies on integrating Black feminist pedagogy for Black girls (Nyachae, 2016; Lane, 2017), few have studied how this might be applied to the SEL curriculum for Black boys. In my project, I examined the following research question: how do principles from Black Feminist Thought/Black feminist texts shed light on teachers’ understanding of SEL education with Black male youth?

Action Research Project

As mentioned in the previous section, this study was originally intended to be a Participatory Action Research project. PAR (Participatory Action Research) is a method of investigation that has been utilized since the 1940s. It entails academics and participants collaborating to better understand and alter a problematic situation (Wright, 2015). *PAR* (Participatory Action Research) is a research method in which researchers and participants work together to better understand and change a problem (Blair & Minker, 2009; Wright, 2015). PAR is context-specific, generally focusing on the needs of a specific group; it is an iterative cycle of study, action, and reflection; and it frequently aims to 'liberate' participants by helping them get a better understanding of their situation so that they can take action.

I originally planned to use Participatory Action Research (PAR) methods to create a documented blueprint that would serve as an instructional guide, co-facilitated with teacher participants, to help to address intersectionality within the SEL curriculum. This document would also work to reduce the number of Black boys who are suspended and expelled from school while remediating the stigma associated with their association with ED behaviors.

I came to two conclusions when conducting the study. First, the research project had a deadline and would deviate from the initial schedule that the research committee and I had established and agreed upon. Second, it would take more time, effort, and valuable knowledge to create an instructional blueprint that would give teachers across the country advice on how to employ Black feminist text principles incorporation in SEL to guide their instruction with Black boys who exhibit ED symptoms. This work could not be rushed, if this work was to be done effectively, and it was not possible under the teacher participants' school semester schedules and my own, to co-facilitate during the fall semester.

In consultation with my dissertation supervisor, it was decided that the transition from Participatory Action Research to *Action Research* (Stringer, 2007) methods, would be a better fit for this study due to time constraints. Given that AR demands both researchers and participants to "take action," under the pretext of "creating" or "doing action," I conducted an intervention with teachers where they engaged with texts to broaden their perspectives related to intersectionality and SEL. As I switched from Participatory Action Research to Action Research, the overall objective of the study remained constant. Due to their similar procedural methodological approaches, both research procedures were not only compatible and complementary to one another but also congruent with the research purpose and its intended outcome(s) (Wright, 2015).

Action Research (AR), which is similar to Participatory Action Research (PAR), is centered on implementing improvements and [re]solving issues in people's daily routines while doing research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Action research's objective is to, "address a specific problem in a practice-based setting, such as a classroom, a workplace, a program, or an organization" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015, p. 4).

Action researchers (AR) are individuals who are driven to affect change in their workplace, community, or family, according to Merriam and Tisdell (2015). Additionally, the researcher chooses to 'experiment' with the context by documenting what is said, what is possible, and what happens once a new technique or intervention is used to address the problem at hand (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Merriam and Tisdell (2015) identified two conditions that must be met for effective Action Research. They must first exchange experiences, soliciting old procedures that are already in use or have been developed within an organization before inquiry or intervention.

To better identify and draw conclusions about the most practical solutions to present practice-based problem(s), it is also important to document an ongoing process that identifies newer, more creative, and effective solutions that can or will be put into practice.

Study Design and Methods

This study used an Action Research strategy over the course of two months during the fall, when five teachers were requested to engage in one 45-minute open-ended interview and two focus groups.

Setting

I selected five teachers from one charter school from a major city in the state of Texas that incorporates SEL into their curriculum and serves a diverse student population. According to Merriam (2009), one way to find contacts is to start with a key individual who is thought to be knowledgeable by others and then ask for referrals from that person. "Initial informants were found through the investigator's own personal contacts, community, and private organizations" (Merriam, p. 19, 2009). In this case, in the state of Texas, I developed professional relationships with the charter school leader, whom I have worked with in the past as a consultant.

The school site, which I called PAMI, is a school that serves large concentrations of Black students. It is known for serving students who have been marginalized from traditional public schools due to disciplinary issues, and whose parents have sought alternative schooling that can provide a conducive learning environment that honors culture, race, and critical learning skills. This school, which will be kept anonymous for the duration of the study, has a 54 percent Black male enrollment.

Purposive and convenience sampling were used to select both the participants and the study's setting. Purposive sampling is the process of selecting respondents based on what they can contribute to the researcher's understanding of the topic under investigation (Merriam, 2009, p. 19). Purposeful sampling is a qualitative research approach for identifying and selecting settings that represent the phenomena being studied (Patton, 2002). This necessitates locating and identifying members of the target community who are informed or experienced about a particular topic of interest (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011).

In addition to knowledge and experience, Bernard (2002) and Spradley (1979) emphasize the importance of availability and willingness to participate. Convenience sampling is defined as the selection of participants based on the researcher's accessibility due to their closeness to the researcher (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2018). Because of the researcher's +5-year professional relationship with the administration, faculty, and institution chosen for the study, convenience sampling was also adopted. "Sometimes we choose a case to analyze because it is geographically and instantly accessible to us—a type of convenience sampling" (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2018, p. 28). Furthermore, the professional relationship between the participants and myself as the researcher, as well as purposive and convenience sampling, matches AR's conceptual framework because it centers on prioritizing knowledge of the context. In other words, both the participants and the setting are appropriate for the target population. Recalling the purpose of this study, this project addresses the subject of Black males' emotionality in schools. When Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2018) state that "being close to people most influenced by your study with a small sample group is essential," The key feature of qualitative sampling for researchers is working with small samples of people nested in their

context and studied in depth, as opposed to quantitative research projects that aim for larger numbers of context-stripped cases and seek statistical significance (Miles et al., 2018, p. 27).

Participants

For this study, five teachers were chosen. Teachers were recruited based on the recommendation of the superintendent. I sought teachers who were trained in SEL and worked as SEL instructors or incorporated SEL into their curriculum for at least 2–3 years. Participants with at least five years of experience at this school were considered. The reasoning behind this decision is that to be considered an expert, teachers should have had approximately 5 to 6 years of teaching experience (Cuban, 2010). I sought teachers who had experience working with black male students and, if possible, teachers who work with black male youth who are identified as ED. I sought out teachers who taught at the high school level. I chose this age group because adolescent Black boys account for the majority of school suspensions and expulsions in the United States (Beyond Suspension, 2019; Civil Rights Data Collection, 2014; Tate, 2019).

Considering that diversity of participants improves study conclusions that relate to the distinct cultures we live in, I chose a diverse group of teachers based on gender, class, and race. Since teachers sometimes lack cultural understanding of their students that are different from themselves, as described in Chapter 2, sampling teachers of varied genders, ages, and backgrounds is essential (Clewell & Villegas, 1998; King, 1993; Villegas & Lucas, 2004). While my sample size was small (five participants), according to Miles et al. (2018), in qualitative studies, a small sample size can be beneficial in ensuring that rich data is captured and assessed throughout the analysis.

Table 2. Participant Overview

Participant	Age range	Race	Gender	Position	Experience (Years)
Ms. R	25-30	Black	F	3 rd Grade Teacher	5 years+
Principal J	30-35	Black	F	Principal	5 years+
Mr. B	50-55	Black	M	8 th -12 th Lead Instructor & Administrative Assistant	12 years+
Mrs. H	30-35	Black	F	Administrative Associate	8 years+
Mr. T	25-30	Black	M	Math Teacher	5 years+

Methods

I conducted one round of interviews and two focus group meetings to study a phenomenon, in this case, teachers recognizing and discussing how Black feminist texts in SEL may be leveraged to assist the mental and emotional richness of Black males classified with signs of ED. The first interview was to understand the teachers' background and experiences, and then before the second and third groups, I asked the teachers to read two excerpts from Black feminists' texts, and thus those focus group interviews centered on discussing how those texts might inform their instruction in SEL. Unlike a series of one-on-one interviews, participants in a focus group get to hear each other's responses and make additional remarks beyond their original responses when they hear what others have to say, according to Patton (2002). Participants, on the other hand, were not required to agree or reach any type of consensus. It's also not required for people to disagree. The goal was to collect high-quality data in a social setting where

participants could assess their perspectives in light of those of others (Patton, p. 386, 2002).

Crowe (2003) describes how focus groups are often used to generate culturally relevant content.

Interview One

The first interview was used to learn about the instructors' backgrounds as well as the situations in which they teach. It also focused on their SEL training and work with boys who have been classified as ED, as well as how effectively the SEL curriculum has benefited them (or not) in working with Black males. According to Seidman (1998), when people's actions are viewed in the context of their own lives and the lives of those around them, their actions become more meaningful and intelligible. "There is little chance of delving into the meaning of an experience without context" (Seidman, 1998, p. 11). Because this study attempts to determine how, or if, Black feminist texts surrounding Black male emotionality can aid Black males with ED, Seidman's (1998) attention to context is critical.

Seidman (1998) adds that in the first interview, the interviewer must place the participant's experience in context by asking him or her to explain as much as possible about himself or herself in light of the current issue. In addition to understanding their history and background, teachers who have previously taught social-emotional learning at their school were asked to discuss their first experiences working with SEL in their schools with Black boys, specifically adolescent Black boys in this case. Because the focus of the interview was on the participants' past experiences in school and any other situation involving social-emotional learning and Black boys with a history of emotional disturbance, I explored how they felt SEL has worked thus far, and what the strengths or limitations of that program are. This positioned their engagement in the professional growth of SEL within the framework of their lived

experiences. The duration of each open-ended interview was no more than 45 minutes.

Following the interview, each participant was asked to read key excerpts from Black feminist texts. Each participant was asked to reflect on the reading(s) in each focus group discussion.

Focus Groups

During this process, there were a total of two focus group meetings. Before the first focus group discussion, I asked teachers to read chapters 3 and 8 from the Black feminist text, *We Real Cool: Black Men & Masculinity* (2003). I chose these two chapters for the following four reasons: One is that it refutes the stereotype that Black boys are intellectually inferior to their white counterparts. Second, it asks teachers and school officials to reconsider their conscious or unconscious racial and gender biases toward Black boys who are subjected to school policies and regulations. Third, it revisits the idea of Black boys using their intelligence to question the school environment and authorities who perpetuate systemic racialized injustices and misclassification. Finally, the chapters examine how culture may be included in a socio-emotional learning curriculum that is favorable to long-term learning for Black boys beyond high school.

Teacher participants were asked to respond to how or if they identify with how Black feminist texts encourage teachers to facilitate emotional learning for Black boys trying to understand their feelings and the environment around them. Questions asked included: "What part of the selective chapter do you think might be helpful when teaching Black boys with ED? What common practice do you see the text using that you would consider using during SEL instruction? Or what does the selected chapter highlight, or fail to highlight, when working with Black boys who exhibit symptoms of ED? How does this reading impact your views of such students?"

The first focus group discussion was with all the teachers in a room discussing the readings and how those readings and their principles may be applied and integrated into SEL. Second, we explored how and what the readings offered as new perspectives on working with Black boys. Teachers were encouraged to reflect on what they learned from the text and how they felt the text highlighted intellectual activism and self-definition during their focus group discussion. I informed teachers that the purpose of the second focus group meeting was not only to discuss the newly assigned reading (Morris, 2019) but also to develop an instructional blueprint that would provide teachers with suggestions on how to use CASEL to inform their instruction with Black males who exhibit ED symptoms. However, as mentioned above, due to time constraints, this blueprint was not attainable for this project.

Second Focus Group

Before the second focus group, I again asked the five participants to read two more excerpts from the Black feminist text, *Pushout: The Criminalization of Black Girls in Schools* (2015). The chapters used from the book were Chapter 1: Struggle to Survive and Repairing Relationships, and Chapter 5: Rebuilding Connections. These final chapters were chosen for four primary reasons: First, these chapters introduce important scholars to whom instructors can turn to learn more about the many elements of Black American identities and the conditions that they encounter. Second, the topic of intersectionality is introduced and explored in this chapter, thus placing this thesis in the context of the Black American educational experience. Third, these chapters discuss how a child's life outside of school has a direct and indirect impact on their learning. Finally, *Pushout* (2015) employs anecdotal field research to propose six themes that might be used as solutions to address the issues of violence in schools: educating Black children

about healthy relationships, building strong student-teacher relationships, establishing productive connections between schools and their communities, de-emphasizing student discipline and surveillance, and making school credit recovery processes available for girls.

First, participants were invited to reflect on the meaning of their experience(s) with Black feminist writing in their final meeting as a focus group. According to Seidman (1998), the goal of 'meaning' is to address the intellectual and emotional connections between the participants' work and their encounters. The participant outlined the 'linkages' required to address concerns with Black males who exhibit ED symptoms during SEL instruction. As a result, I asked the following questions: "Given what you've said about your experience teaching SEL to Black boys with ED before reading the texts, how might you see a difference in the way Black boys' behavior and responses to social-emotional learning if facets of Black feminist texts are implemented in their learning experience?"; and "Given what we've discussed in this project, where do you see yourself going with SEL instruction in the future, now that you've read readings from Black feminist texts about Black boy emotionality?"

Following the debriefing on Morris' (2015) work and its link to SEL, the second focus group meeting spent the first 30 minutes discussing the newest assigned text (Morris, 2015). Following that, teachers described what they believe are the 3–5 most important aspects of Black feminist literature that should be included in SEL training. Then we worked together to examine how these proposals differ from place to place and if they're adaptable to teachers of different backgrounds and genders.

Second, we went through the concepts and themes that are necessary to comprehend Black boys with ED symptoms. For instance, we compared comparable concerns, if not typical, among Black males who had symptoms of ED with those expressed by Morris' (2015) anecdotal

experiences of Black girls. After discussing additional themes that may occur in kids' lives in or outside of school, we discuss how language such as intersectionality can be utilized to rethink and/or return to school-wide district practices that are not indicative of successful outcomes. Through journaling, tailored instruction, and instructional resources that name, identify, and explain children's thoughts, feelings, and logic behind their unacceptable conduct, among other techniques, teachers examined teaching strategies to grasp students' intersectional perspectives.

Third, each of us provided a personal proposal of suggestive material that provides insight into how to appropriately prepare for Black males who exhibit emotional disturbance signs. Finally, all participants were asked to consider new alternative approaches that are likely to occur in the classroom.

Field Notes

I audio-recorded each interview and focus group, and after each, I took field notes. According to Merriam (2009), the most common practice for capturing interview data is audio recording. "This practice ensures that everything said is preserved for analysis" (p. 23). I use Otter.ai, which is an audio recorder and transcription app that allows me to directly transfer both the recording and its transcription into Dropbox and Google Drive. This app allowed me to format the interview transcript and facilitate analysis. For analysis, at the top of each transcribed interview, I listed identifying information as to when, where, and with whom the interview was conducted. Each identity was assigned a pseudonym for confidentiality.

During the transcription of both the interview and focus group meetings, I added line numbers down the left-hand side of the page. Beginning with the first page and numbering sequentially to the end of the interview or meetings. In addition, I color-coded each speaker to keep the analysis process organized.

Observational field notes, according to Merriam (2009), should be highly descriptive. In observational fieldwork, the participants, the location, the activities, or behaviors of the participants, and what the observer conducts are all detailed. By very detailed, I mean giving readers enough information to make them feel as if they are there, witnessing what the observer sees. Merriam provides an example:

The four tables in the conference room were moved together to form a neat square with three chairs per table. Materials for the meeting were in the blue notebook covers and placed on the tables, three to a table, one in front of each chair. In the center of each table was a pitcher of water and three glasses (Merriam, 2009, p. 131).

Taylor and Bogdan (1984) recommend paying attention to the wide-angle and narrow-angle lenses described by participants while recalling data. That is, the researcher must observe and describe the setting as well as how the participants react to or within it. I was sure to pay attention to the participants' nonverbal cues. In cases where participants felt uncomfortable or hesitated to answer a question or engage in dialogue, I was sure to infer questions like, "I notice that, when discussing 'subject', you hesitated to give an answer. Can you explain why that is?" Nonverbals that participants give that transmit interpretative messages or feelings are examples of smaller angles and data for analysis. Taylor and Bogdan (1984) discuss paying attention to what's not said as a way to gain rich qualitative data.

According to Merriam (2009), keeping note of these "hunches" is critical for coding and data evaluation. In summary, "As you prepare your data analysis, keep track of your thoughts, musings, hypotheses, and hunches" (Merriam, 2009, p. 174). These 'hunches' were remembered by writing them down on a separate notepad and noting the time stamp next to the written remark in my notes, which I later returned to for further examination.

Coding & Data Analysis

Merriam (2009) defines data analysis as "the process of making sense of data." Collecting, reducing, and interpreting what others have said, as well as what the researcher has seen and read, are all part of the process of making meaning. "Making meaning comes as a result of organizing descriptive accounts, themes, or categories that cut across the data "(Merriam, 2009, p. 176). The primary methods of data analysis are collecting data (e.g., field notes, transcribing interviews), identifying data units, also known as codes, developing categories that arise as 'emerging themes,' seeing which themes emerge regularly, and seeing how these themes communicate with one another when effectively seeking to answer the research question (Merriam, 2009).

The goal of data analysis was to uncover data segments that may answer or contribute to an answer to the topic under investigation: How do principles from Black Feminist Thought/Black feminist texts illuminate teachers' knowledge of SEL education with Black male youth?

The first stage after transcribing interviews, according to Merriam (2019), is to identify data units. "A data unit can be as simple as a word [or phrase] used to describe a feeling or experience" (p. 177).

I made sure that each unit of data satisfied three criteria. One, it is heuristic, which means that the unit of data (i.e., a word or phrase) is relevant to the study and encourages the researcher to look beyond the specific piece of data. Second, the unit must be able to stand by itself. Merriam (2009) states that the tiniest amount of information about something that can be interpreted can be done so without any more information. Third, each piece of data contains "repeated regularities in the supplied data."

After that, I grouped these pieces of information into buckets, which are formally called categories or themes. According to Merriam (2009), the researcher should be open to anything during the initial round of coding, which is formally known as open coding. To ensure data management, Merriam (2009) relies on Creswell's (2007) guidance that categories or developing themes should be limited to no more than twenty-five categories and decreased to five or six codes. "In any case, the number [of categories] should be manageable. The fewer categories, the higher the level of abstraction, and the easier it is to communicate findings to others. Work with twenty-five to thirty categories early in the data analysis" (Merriam, p. 187, 2009).

When analyzing my first transcript, I limited the first transcript to a small number of codes (i.e., fifteen codes) to ensure that a broad net was cast when transferring the first set of codes onto the second interview transcript. This was done after exhausting units of data that either partially answered or answered an aspect of the research question, either through color-coding or highlighting.

According to Merriam (2009), seeking repeatable data units (codes) and minimizing data codes should be repeated from transcript to transcript. "Remembering the list of categories, you took from the first transcript and checking to see if they're present in the second set" (Merriam, p. 180, 2009). Merriam (2009) goes on to add that a different set of remarks, terminology, and notes should be included in the second transcript. This list should be compared to the first transcript to check if any new codes appeared or were perhaps overlooked between the two transcripts.

I went over the third, fourth, and fifth interview transcripts in the same way. I kept a running list of these groupings, also known as axial codes, tied to separate papers or memos throughout the process of producing "master codes" for the first round of coding interview

transcripts. Axial codes are descriptive codes that are derived from analysis and reflection on the larger context and its meaning (Merriam, 2009). "Axial coding, also known as analytical coding, is a type of coding that goes beyond descriptive classification and involves analysis and reflection on meaning" (Merriam, 2009, p. 180).

Merriam (2009) emphasizes that this first 'master list' should be lengthy but condensed to no more than twenty codes throughout. I used Guba and Lincoln's (1981) four recommendations for establishing final categories and themes to ensure saturation of data when creating the final master codes from the first round of interviews.

All data transcription was done by hand with the help of Otter.ai. The goal was to sort, retrieve, and reorganize emerging themes and subcategories, allowing me to link between and among codes for final analysis.

Reliability and Generalizability

To ensure reliability and generalizability, I used three of Merriam's (2009) triangulation strategies: members' checking, reflective journaling, and peer review. According to Merriam (2009), triangulation is defined as using multiple investigators, sources of data, or data collection methods to confirm emerging findings. I discussed my reflections with the participants frequently during the study to make sure the codes and definitions of phrases like "soul murdering," "cycle of damage," and the expression "When Black males are in pain, we are all in pain" were true and worth discussing when dealing with Black boys who display symptoms of ED. I recited the definitions of the codes from the text that were highlighted and discussed by the participants throughout the intervention. Second, I looked into the teachers' opinions and prior teaching experiences during the interventions to determine whether or not the definition of the codes in the text matched up with those experiences and new insight given by BFT.

According to Merriam (2009), ethically performing qualitative research is the first step toward ensuring validity and reliability. Furthermore, to make an impact on the field's practice or theory, the researcher must give insight and draw conclusions that are credible to readers, practitioners, and other researchers (Merriam, 2009). Lincoln and Guba (2000) define being 'sufficiently authentic' as staying faithful to the practitioners while seeking to extend a new conceptual thought or method of thinking. To put it another way, I always questioned whether the conclusions were trustworthy enough to be incorporated into the curriculum, school policy, or legislation. I took part in this by continually examining the data, conversations, and conclusions to draw three conclusions. One was information given during our meetings in line with the body of literature on Black males, ED, and SEL. Second, during the intervention process, were the majority of teachers in agreement with the conclusions? Three: How do their experiences and results relate to—or line up with—my own, plus ten years of educational experience, working with the same demographic?

Internal validity, according to Merriam (2009), is determined by how closely the findings match reality. Merriam (2009) goes on to say that "one can never completely capture reality" since we as human instruments have biases and past experiences that influence our judgment (Merriam, p. 214, 2009). As a result, it is critical to understand that validity is a goal rather than a product that is rooted in the research's goals and circumstances, rather than an environment apart from the project.

For this study, I used triangulation to combine data from several sources. To verify validity and reliability, I compared data from previous observations recorded in field notes with transcribed interviews to see if the meanings were consistent. In addition, I conducted a 'member

check,' in which I inquired if the preliminary findings gained from both the interview and the focus groups were accurate representations of the message that the participant meant to convey.

I checked twice for no more than fifteen minutes with each participant. Once following the initial intervention. Immediately following our last intervention meeting. After school hours, I met with each instructor to review the key results from both their contribution and the overall intervention. To get confirmation that my findings were in line with what they wanted to communicate to the public and to find out if anything was missing, I employed peer review. Two of the five participants included further commentary in their responses.

Mr. T went back to the initial intervention. He cited the line again: "Black boys need supportive systems to effectively minimize emotional outbursts". Mr. T mentioned that he felt that the idea of teacher empathy might need more focus after reading *Pushout* (2015) in the second intervention and learning about the various intersectional perspectives of Black boys and Black girls. He stated:

I like what you got. That's for sure. One thing I think also could have gone further is this discussion around teacher empathy, especially after reading *Pushout*. Intersectionality made me think further about in what spaces are we choosing to meet our students. Is the issue, money, gender, class, race, or culture? To keep things short, I think you can push forward this thought about putting ourselves in the shoes of a person that no matter what we do, we are deemed as "blank". If these boys are 6, 7, 8, and 13, and don't feel they have no real power to change how they are perceived, they will give into what we as adults are trying to make them out to be. That's all (Mr. T).

Mr. T's "member's checking" recommended not altering any findings but instead potentially presenting a notion around a Black feminist work using intersectionality to re-emphasize

teachers' sensitivity or lack thereof. Ms. R. was the second teacher who gave a suggestion. Ms. T revisited her notion that Black boys in elementary need Black men who share their reflection and gender. She says,

Something that I think Durrell you didn't emphasize enough is the total number of Black men who are present here at PAMI. I mean it has to be emphasized that these boys have access to a Black male superintendent, who knows so much about his students, but Black boys' experiences, and a vice superintendent who is also a man and also very active in the city's Black community (Ms. R).

During our "member checking," Ms. R continues by stating that Black boys, particularly those in elementary school and their primary grades, require teachers who are not only Black males but Black men who also prioritize teaching Black boys about mental wellbeing.

I think in that part where you talk about Black boys in sports or academics is fair. But what I feel is missing is that Black men need to present in those spaces and Black men need to help Black boys prioritize mental wellness when navigating these spaces without an adult that will advocate for them (Ms. R).

Using triangulation to member check, and receive peer revisions was used to ensure that my message was aligned with the participants' experience reading and discussing Black feminist texts surrounding Black boys, ED, and SEL.

To ensure that I was being self-critical, I kept track of how my worldviews, prejudices, and experiences influenced the research, both when I collected data and when I analyzed it through journaling. As a second eye for data analysis, I had weekly meetings with my chair to examine data points and linkages made in analysis and interpretation. Then, in the last focus group, I compared my results with the other participants, and initially, we planned to construct a

final product that would serve as an instructional brochure to assist and inform instructional policy around SEL and Black males with ED. While we did not create an instructional brochure as initially planned, participants and I still discussed how to improve the SEL curriculum at the school using advice and tenets given by the Black Feminist texts *We Real Cool* (2003) and *Pushout* (2015).

Merriam (2009) concludes by emphasizing that in action research, trustworthiness, and validity require consistent collaboration between the researcher and the participants in an attempt to codify an activity or result that can induce change.

Furthermore, generalizability was not able to be applied explicable due to the study's small sample size, which may not be typical of the full teacher populace who works with Black boys with ED in SEL instruction. Furthermore, because teachers' experience with Black Feminist texts (Jagers et al., 2019) as SEL instruction is limited, the findings and their national application remain a "working hypothesis." However, the feedback and advice received can serve as a first step in determining whether developing categories can assist transferability when implemented at a national level in education policy.

Chapter 4: Findings

The purpose of the study was to investigate the following research question: How do principles from Black Feminist Thought/Black feminist texts shed light on teachers' understanding of SEL education with Black male youth? To discuss the findings, this chapter is divided into three parts: 1) school context, 2) teachers' prior knowledge of SEL, Black boys, and ED, and 3) major takeaways from the focus group with Black feminist texts and implications for SEL.

School context

To better understand how the teachers, I worked with experienced the focus group meetings discussing Black feminist texts with SEL, it is important to understand the school context around SEL training and instruction that the teachers received before my time with them. Therefore, in this section, I will explore the historical background of the school, the superintendent's philosophy of SEL, teachers' onboarding process, SEL teaching, and teachers' characteristics.

PAMI academy is a school that serves grades Pre-K-12, divided into two campuses, one primary grade (PreK -2nd grade) and one secondary (3rd -12th). Each school has a principal, and they are both overseen by a superintendent. The school was founded in 1990's to provide children in a major city in Texas, with a superior educational choice. The school opening began with grades 5th-8th and as mentioned above, now serves students through pre-school up to 12th grade.

PAMI Academy draws its four to five hundred students primarily from traditional neighborhoods in a major city in Texas. According to data from PAMI, as of 2023, the students at PAMI were 88.7% Black and 7.8% Hispanic; 78.4% of students are considered economically disadvantaged, meaning they

receive free or reduced lunch, and 39.6% are at-risk (likely to drop out of school based on state-defined criteria). Their teaching staff is small. There are a total of 27 full-time teachers consisting of 98% African American and 2% Hispanic in 2023.

The superintendent of the school requires the teachers to be trained in cultural awareness, and his training incorporates pedagogy that is centered on African American students' learning. The superintendent of PAMI describes his commitment to the education of African American students as the highest priority there is to reverse historical educational failures and negative trends in the educational arena.

The superintendent began his career in the late 1990's at PAMI Academy. Prior he worked with a nonprofit organization, which was a summer technology program that served 5,000 children on the eastside of a major city in the state of Texas. When he began at PAMI Academy, he taught 5th through 8th grade English and History. Within less than a year, he became the superintendent of PAMI Academy, as a result of his innate ability to excite children about education.

He contributes his early expertise in instructional leadership and school management to studying under prolific African American scholars who owned Eso Won's library in Los Angeles, California, where he was able to deeply study African American literature, specifically reading about the experiences of African American students and how to free African Americans and traditionally marginalized people from their current socioeconomic context(s). From there he moved to Texas, in 1994, where he would "sharpen his iron" of his non-traditional education, with Roland Hayes, an African American Cultural Center director, and NAACP Lifetime Achievement Award-winning history professor. At this time, he would codify both his experiences and expertise in college.

His role at PAMI is fostering an educational environment to excel, motivate and promote the dedication of students and staff. His vision ultimately entails helping African Americans overcome historical white supremacy and being able to effectively live and provide for themselves and others. It was in his third year as superintendent, in 2002, that he crafted the school's current mission, which is to provide students with a sound education in a nurturing and stable environment conducive to learning and academic excellence. He says that the current mission was a result of his ongoing study of African and African American history and the history of other oppressed groups in South America and Asia.

SEL Context PAMI

The superintendent is committed to racially empowering African American students. While he doesn't do explicit SEL training for teachers, he feels that he addresses SEL (and CASEL standards/curriculum) through the teacher onboarding process and the distribution of additional texts throughout the semester. Through tailored teacher instruction/staff onboarding, as well as ongoing professional development, school-wide programs (human development day), and community gatherings, which are used to facilitate dialogue, CASEL's principles are integrated into the culture of PAMI to address the students, staff, parents, and community members' needs.

Staff onboarding. At PAMI Academy, human development is synonymous with SEL; therefore, I will use these terms interchangeably. When teaching his staff, the superintendent prioritizes cultural awareness and educational acumen. When onboarding new teachers, it is made clear that *failure is not an option for their students*. Before they start teaching at PAMI, all novice teachers are given the following books:

- *The Souls of Black Folk* (DuBois, 1903)

- *The MisEducation of the Negro* (Woodson, 1933)
- *Ordinary Children, ExtraOrdinary Teachers* (Collins, 1992)
- *Pedagogy of the Oppress* (Freire, 1968).

The texts above are the beginning, but not the ending of SEL formal training and practices.

Onboarding training includes teachers reading books that specifically inform SEL. Having children become comfortable in their skin, understanding the veracity of cultural knowledge, and giving texts to understand the historical problem that permeates their lives today, is the mission of social-emotional learning at PAMI. All novice teachers (especially those who teach 3rd- 12th grade) are given the following books in their first year. Each book becomes a required reading, which the superintendent uses to inform and direct their SEL training over the course of novice teachers' academic school year, involving meetings and discussions every two weeks.

- *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (Haley & X, 1965)
- *Visions for Black Men* (Akbar, 1991)
- *The Endangered Black Family: Coping with the Unisexualization and Coming Extinction of the Black Race* (Hare & Hare, 1984)
- *Know Thy Self* (Akbar & Hillard, 1988)
- *Black on Black Violence: The Psychodynamics of Black Self-Annihilation in Service of White Domination* (Wilson, 1991)

Professional development for SEL includes utilizing the books, having bi-weekly group discussions, and advising over the course of the entire academic school year for novice teachers

onboarding at PAMI Academy. Text selections are assigned to teachers from among this book list, and group discussions occur in two-week increments. After every two weeks, novice teachers are paired with the five lead instructors and the superintendent to discuss the books, as well as their prior experience(s) as classroom teachers or collegiate students and the techniques they intend to bring into the classroom. In addition, novice teachers are required to talk about their current classroom experience(s) at PAMI and reoccurring or emerging issues that they witness for themselves. These issues range from internal conflict, student-teacher interaction(s), staff personnel relationship(s), parental engagement, or lack thereof, or administrative or district policies and procedures that inform undesired outcomes. All instructors, whether novice or veteran are advised that all teachers' actions must be directed toward facilitating the school's mission and purpose at PAMI Academy.

After reading books that specifically inform SEL, if issues emerge as a result of group discussions, the superintendent and the lead instructors provide novice teachers advice, case studies comparisons, or more literature to help them facilitate the desired outcomes of their students and teaching performance.

Human development day. Another part of the PAMI school district's SEL approach is Human Development Day for students and staff. This is a special day-long program that features human development and self-awareness topics. Mr. T, a teacher at the school, states: "Human Development Day is something that's been around since I went to school here nearly ten years ago. Human Development Day is the day that we set aside, to do away with schooling, and we develop humans. Mr. Johnson (superintendent's pseudonym) barbecues to reel in parents, teachers, and other community members." Mr. T's reflective statement expresses two things. One, Human Development Day is not only a day for the children. Two activities such as

barbecuing and festive activities are also used to draw parents in for community meetings and discussions that center both the students and their school's mission.

Community gatherings. The CASEL pillars of *communities, families, and caregivers, and authentic partnerships* are also upheld through community gatherings such as barbecues, performances by students, or other creative community engagement approaches. Community gatherings happen both on human development day and also as needed to address issues. These gatherings are utilized to update important community members about the successes of previous issues, resolve current problems, talk about new policies and procedures, or consider how culture may inadvertently impede student learning.

For instance, at one of the community gatherings recently, the superintendent talked about student-favorite hip-hop songs and dances. The superintendent used metaphors and anecdotes to illustrate how the music they listened to as teenagers and young adults influenced their thoughts and behaviors at the time and how this is true for their children. He illustrates this point with the metaphor, "Ain't nothing new underneath the sun," as well as lyrics from rappers such as Drake, Flo Milli, and others. He argues that these rappers' messages do not provide the outcomes they want for their students and that this necessitated parental assistance. Parents are taught to be self-aware that the music they play or the actions they exhibit before dropping their children off at school, may play a major role in their child's behavior(s).

Teachers' Prior Understanding of SEL

There were five teachers selected for this study. At PAMI Academy, each of the five teachers selected for this study lead SEL training and curriculum development. These five teachers aid other teacher faculty in their implementation of SEL in their classrooms and

tailored instruction. These teachers are considered to be leading SEL teaching experts at PAMI Academy. All teacher participants are advised by the superintendent regarding SEL design and implementation. These participants included Principal J, Mr. B, Mrs. H, Mr. T, and Ms. R. Each of the five teacher-participants in this section identify as African American. In this section, I will describe each of their backgrounds and characteristics.

All participants were aware before the focus groups that SEL or *human development* were integral components of their school culture as opposed to an isolated curriculum. Every decision made reinforces human development (SEL) and is based on the needs of their students. Furthermore, the aim of the school and the ideals in the publications mentioned above, are reinforced through their interactions with staff, students, and parents. Hence, before the focus group, each member discussed the behaviors that they engage in frequently and naturally when upholding SEL.

Principal J is originally from the Caribbean Islands. She is in her late twenties. Principal J's educational background stems from her attendance at a major university in New York. She would later receive her bachelor's degree from an historically Black university and her master's from Texas State University. She began her journey at PAMI Academy as a science teacher. She uses both her science and mathematical skills to illustrate how numerical data informs both herself and her students' understanding of SEL practice in her classroom. She has taught at PAMI for over 5 years and now serves as the principal of the secondary school located in one of the major diversifying cities in Texas. Principal J takes pride in her Caribbean background. She is an advocate of Black families and their engagement in children's learning. This advocacy of family unit, educational pursuit, and obtainment is a result of her experience seeing her mother

pursuing higher education in the United States, as a young adolescent girl living in the Caribbean Islands.

Mr. B is a veteran teacher and a lead instructor at PAMI Academy. He currently teaches multiple grades and content. The courses he teaches include language arts, social studies, geography, and science. He teaches grades 8th through 12th in these subjects. Mr. B has taught at PAMI Academy over the span of 10+ years. Mr. B also has an M.Ed. from an historically Black university (HBCU), and is the father of a five-year-old son. He serves as a lead teacher and administrative assistant in many capacities to both the superintendent and principal at PAMI. Mr. B has served on active military duty overseas and uses his vast experience(s) of traveling across the world, to inform his teaching. For Mr. B “traveling”, sometimes is as simple as leaving the classroom to facilitate dialogue about SEL instruction.

Teachers should use team-building activities such as hiking and traveling to teach students to work together for the common good and to learn something about themselves.

This will help them deal with other issues when they return to school.

Mr. B's advocacy for outdoor exploration illustrates the need for Black children's SEL education to extend beyond the confines of the classroom. Mr. B implies that Social Emotional Learning should not just address the internal mental distress of children, but also address how children's external environments in which they grow up, also may contribute to their emotional anguish. The following is a summary of the sentiment in which he tries to impart upon novice teachers during their onboarding process. Both teachers and administrators must think outside the box and the confines of their classrooms. We must begin to support the idea that social-emotional learning necessitates venturing outside of one's normal context. It is vital to discover innovative approaches to understanding how to interact with others and solve problems that students of

color encounter inside of the school's parameters in short if reoccurring problems cannot be solved inside the classroom, maybe there are solutions outside---literally. Reiterating that Black children's SEL education must extend beyond the confines of the classroom.

Mrs. H. serves as an administrative assistant at PAMI Academy. In addition to her role as an administrative assistant at the school, Mrs. H acts as one the primary leader of CASEL learning and programing at the primary school for grades Prek-3rd. In addition, she works directly with both the principal and the superintendent at the secondary level to establish data base designs and the uniformity of CASEL's standards policy and practices both at the primary and secondary campuses. Furthermore, Mrs. H is the mother of two sons: one son, whom she inherited through her marriage, and her three-year-old biological son. She is the sister of seven brothers. Mrs. H's history entails her mother leading a foster home and homeschooling children. Mrs. H's SEL philosophy stems from here educational background and childhood experiences. Mrs. H comments on how her adoptive brothers experienced difficulties navigating the foster care and child protective services systems while attending school and how their early school experiences influenced her to become the administrator, she wishes they had when growing up.

I have witnessed the struggles of the educational system and its shortcomings. My adopted brothers, Robert and Jonathan were adopted young and had a lot of traumatic experiences before coming to our home. As they grew, issues started surfacing or became clearer due to being placed in a stable environment. I remember how all the doctors wanted to label them ADHD, but nobody wanted to dig deeper and ask any further questions? As an admin, I'm not just going to name it based off of what's in the diagnostic book. My position requires me to understand the landscape of our babies and what they are dealing with.

She is also an advocate of Black fathers and their presence in the home, as it concerns Black boys being guided through racial systemic oppression and systems. She has served as administrative staff at previous schools before PAMI and, as noted, currently serves as the administrative associate and a program director of CASEL at the primary school for grades Pre-K-3rd. In her capacity as administrative associate, she can deliberately use data to inform schools' decisions around emerging trends and themes amongst their students' demographics. This data that Mrs. H oversees includes but is not limited to, the number of student infractions, emotional outbursts, parent-teacher conferences, and individual learning plans (IEPs). Her bird's eye view gives her access to the problems that children encounter. She has served as both an instructor and an administrator for a total of 8 years. This is her first year at PAMI.

Mr. T is PAMI Academy's mathematics teacher for grades 3rd through 6th. Mr. T has taught for five years. He is a former student of PAMI Academy during his primary years. He has an older brother who is also a former student of the academy. Mr. T pulls from one of his favorite teachers' playbooks to start SEL instruction every day for his math classes.

The first thing we do is, have a roll call. "I'm the head and not the tail, I've above and not beneath, I'm a leader, not a follower, and whatever I do, must be the best. I accept that I am somebody". I do this because I learned that there's power in the word, and you have the ability to affect somebody's perception of their self-identity by saying things like this out loud every day.

Both Mr. T and his brother are teachers at the school on the secondary campus. Mr. T is known as Coach T around campus by both students and teachers alike, due to his active role in both girls' and boys' sports after school. He fathered his first newborn recently. Mr. T is 29 years old.

His advocacy in his SEL teaching practices centers on being action-oriented, culturally relevant, and student-tailored.

Ms. R is the secondary campus' third-grade language arts and social studies teacher. She is originally from the state of Colorado. However, she began her teaching career in the state of Maine and now is in her fifth year of teaching. Listed as a teacher's referral by a former teacher at PAMI, she is now in her third year at the academy. She began her career at PAMI in 2019, the first year of COVID-19. Therefore, she is the first cohort of teachers who are onboarded during the year of virtual learning. Ms. R advocates for SEL to entail hands-on approaches to learning and community fostering and believes that students' expression is vital to their human development. While being a loved and respected teacher herself, she speaks about the importance of men bringing the social aspect into emotional learning for Black boys in their preliminary years.

Black boys tend to have more emotional outbursts in 3rd grade due to home life struggles and the standardized test. Black male teachers are needed to teach Black boys how to express their emotions in a healthy way, as they make up 2% of the teaching force. SEL is a social activity, and here, Black men and Black women faculty allow both our boys and girls to be emotional.

She strongly believes that all students can achieve and obtain prominent levels of accomplishment through strategic community approaches and engagement, which she uses to characterize her practice as an SEL lead instructor.

Focus group: Findings from Black Feminist Text Discussion

All the teachers in the school had a strong background in SEL and critical texts before my focus group. However, I found that the Black feminist texts and discussions in the focus group meetings revealed a new understanding of SEL education with Black male youth. In this section, I briefly reiterate the procedures used to conduct the focus group meetings. Next, I explain the reasons the selected books were chosen for SEL intervention. After, I report teachers' reflections and their reactions to the books, *We Real Cool* (hooks, 2003) and *Pushout* (Morris, 2015).

After individual interviews were conducted, each participant was given the book, *We Real Cool: Black Men and Masculinity* (hooks, 2003). Teachers were verbally reminded that there would be a total of two focus group meetings conducted over the course of the entire intervention procedure, in which after the first focus group meeting, each participant would receive their second and final book, *Pushout: The Criminalization of Black Girls* (Morris, 2015).

We Real Cool

Before our first focus group meeting, I asked teachers to read chapters 3 and 8 from their books, *We Real Cool: Black Men & Masculinity* (2003). *Schooling Black males* and *Healing the Hurt* are the titles of the two chapters that were chosen for the intervention. I chose these chapters for three reasons. One of the selected chapters refutes the stereotype that Black boys are intellectually inferior to their White counterparts. Second, it asks teachers and school officials to explore, evaluate and reconsider their own student biases. Third, the chapters explore how culture can be included in the school curriculum to benefit Black boys' emotional self-esteem beyond high school. Focus group meetings were conducted in December and were recorded by an audio app on my phone. The first focus group meeting lasted one hour and fifteen minutes.

Two significant themes emerged from their overall discussion regarding the book, *We Real Cool: Black Men and Masculinity*. One, Black boys need supportive systems. Two, Black

feminist text(s) help teachers explore how to examine their own biases, regarding race, gender, class, and sexual orientation, that they may unintentionally perpetuate onto their students. In an effort to investigate the different developing topics that emerged from each chapter, I present the findings about the two chapters that were assigned.

Chapter Three: Schooling Black Boys

Chapter three states that due to racism and sexism, Black boys are seen as intellectually inferior. According to hooks (2003) well-educated Black boys are groomed and taught how to down play their intelligence, in a world where smart Black boys risk punishment for acting either “too smart” or using their intelligence to first question and then challenge discriminatory practices and normalized oppression. One key point from the conversation about the Schooling Black males’ chapter from Black feminist text’s (BFT) principals, is the idea that a paradigm shift is needed to reimagine how Black boys are seen and to whom we are expecting Black boys to model themselves after and for what outcome if we are to shift the entire way, we address Black boys and SEL. Mr. T reads,

They [are] called, “a paradigmatic Black man”. This man or boy is described as nice by white people. In whatever integrated setting he works in, he is the standard against whom other Blacks are measured. “If they were all only like him, everything would be so much better. He is passive, nonassertive, and nonaggressive (p.40).

Black boys need supportive systems to effectively minimize emotional outbursts. Three out of the five participants opened their books over to show and highlight the term *paradigm*, in a paragraph related to this issue of support systems. “Certain things stood out to me, as far as Black males reacting to you in the right way. ‘A more comprehensive environment workspace’. Although I understand what paradigm means, I never heard of applying this term to school

environments, workspaces, and support groups. bell (the author) requires you to see young Black boys through a new paradigm” (Mr. T).

This sentiment from Mr. T doesn't stem too far from his initial declaration that words of affirmation at the beginning of class, "I am the head, not the tail", but shows that BFT (hooks, 2003) adds nuance layers to paradigmatic concepts that can be used to help him shape what types of positive affirmation both he and teachers alike can use to shape students and teachers' perceptions of themselves.

Another issue that emerged from the conversation about chapter three was regarding sports and Black boys' academic performance(s). This chapter ignited a conversation that Black boys need supportive systems outside of sports, and how old paradigms debilitate Black boys' learning when their choices are limited.

All five participants agreed that there is a value structure in place in education in which Black boys are rewarded and valued for their athletic prowess over their academic inclination, and for some, there lack thereof. “They want you to, you know, as I said, have a strong body and a weak mind (Principal J).

Understanding how race, gender, and sexist stereotypes play out in K-12 education for Black boys is exemplified in student outcomes across the country, according to Mrs. H. “Alternative education, in our case PAMI, discourages sports to be prioritized over our boys' education. Like we say here, no matter what, “No grade, No play”. She (the author) talks about this in this chapter” (Mrs. H).

I think the undoing of what is done can be seen in the outcome of our boys at this [charter] school. This school prioritizes giving Black boys more critical thinking skills and one-up on traditional public education institutions (Mrs. H).

Mr. B follows up with Mrs. H and states, that the prioritization of sports over academics or grades for Black boys is a trope that derives as far back as slavery. “I found that to be kind of disheartening, because the same stuff they’re talking about from slavery, is the same stuff that’s going on today” (Mr. B). Mr. B goes on to state that for some Black men, it is not until they’re in prison and they are forced to sit still, is when the value of education becomes apparent for them. However, I must reference, Mr. B does not shy away from the fact that there are systemic issues at play as well when discussing Black boys' lack of enthusiasm for education.

Another part that was really disheartening was that one author who wrote that book, who freed himself when he was on death row. And I find that ironic that you’re freeing yourself after you’ve been condemned to die...He goes to prison, all of a sudden, he enhances his mind and sees the value of education. What she talks about, reminds me of his story.

All God's Children: The Bosket Family and the American Tradition of Violence (Butterfield, 1995) and *Finding Freedom: Writings from Death Row* (Masters, 1997) are the two books that Mr. B references with bell hooks' (2003) Black feminist book, *We Real Cool: Black Men and Masculinity*, which was utilized during the first focus group discussion.

Principal J plays devil's advocate to Mr. B's statement. She states that Black boys have also been punished for being “too smart’, sometimes outrightly challenging their teachers’ intelligence and authority”, she states when referring back to the book. She challenges the notion

that not all Black boys delay their academic pursuits, and argues that some are punished, for taking their academics too seriously in unsupportive environments. She argues that some schools don't value Black boys' intellectual capabilities, and in fact, some faculty feel threatened by Black boys' intelligence if they perceive it as threatening to their authoritative position. She explains one of her takeaways from *Schooling Black Boys*, is that supportive systems include Black boys needing teacher advocates.

Black boys that were successful in public schools, although being gifted, were more outspoken, and thus they were deemed troublemakers...If you don't have an advocate you end up in ISS or detention for being 'defiant' (Principal J).

Four out of five teacher participants agreed that such a sentiment is true and often "being too smart" can be perceived as annoying and distracting by some educators. Thus, prioritizing sports over learning or penalizing Black boys whose academic inclination can be perceived as distracting or threatening to the teacher's authority, reinforces the old paradigm, of "strong body, weak mind". All teachers agreed that principles from BFT encourage the rethinking of an old trope and call for discussion around new paradigm thinking for Black boys through SEL teacher training.

There are two takeaways from the focus group meeting about the chapter, *Schooling Black males*. First, the principles from Black Feminist Thought/Black feminist texts resonate with teachers' understandings that the traditional model of schooling Black boys is an outdated paradigm that promotes a "strong body, weak mind." This consensus is derived from the concluding argument, that a school culture that promotes "strong body, weak mind" or in other words, sports over academic accolades, pushes Black boys to display emotional outbursts when success is not an option in either category.

Second, BFTs helped teachers understand that if we are to diminish student outbursts, they must help Black male student-athletes find value through separate outlets outside of sports, and highlight voices of change, especially among Black male students who are academically inclined. BFTs can enable discussion around highlighting voices of change—especially amongst their most vocal Black male students, while simultaneously offering new spaces for student-athletes to excel outside of the traditional arena of sports.

Chapter 8: Healing the Hurt

The most prominent topic that arose in the focus group discussion about this chapter was how BFT (hooks, 2003) encouraged them to examine their own biases that they may unintentionally perpetuate onto their students. “To create any outside change, you must first acknowledge that the first place of change must begin with the internal self” (Mr. B). All five participants discussed how the text (hooks, 2003) encouraged them to self-reflect and seek their *teacher's healing*.

All five teacher participants shared the sentiment that for SEL to be effective for any student, teachers, and administrative staff must first reflect and second, have hard conversations about their own biases and traumas that they may perpetuate unintentionally. The conversation around teacher healing prompted six major topics of discussion, which ultimately led to the final theme that will be discussed briefly in this section. The four major topics discussed by teachers when analyzing the text included (1) *gender and sexist harmful stereotypes*, (2) *personal traumas and unintentional biases*, (3) *soul murdering*, and (4) *support groups that advocate for, and support new model behavior(s)*.

Ms. R draws from an excerpt from Chapter 8: *Healing the Hurt* that states social-emotional learning or healing is not exclusively about Black boys but about the healing of an

entire community in which Black boys happen to be a part. “When Black males are in pain, we are all in pain” (Ms. R). Ms. R’s reiteration of bell hooks’ quotation reflects her reading and discusses how gender and sexist stereotypes are harmful to children and can be perpetuated by teachers. She mentioned that the culture in which boys grow up teaches boys to be tough and not to display emotions. Contrary to Black girls who are allowed to express their vulnerabilities, Black boys are told to toughen up, which inadvertently discourages Black boys from exploring their emotional pallet. Being denied the opportunity to express their feeling or having systems in place that enable that behavior can make Black boys feel invisible and enraged, which causes them to lash out.

On page 37, it talked about becoming invisible. Based on my past experiences, schools don’t want to deal with behavioral issues. And so, when you think about new students that we’ve had, it’s like, did it get to this point (Ms. R)?

Ms. R states that by perpetuating rigid gender stereotypes of Black boys, teachers leave little room for the conversation and acceptance that Black boys can be impressionable, sensitive, and worthy of care. When Ms. R expresses that when Black males are in pain, we are all in pain, to the group, her statement, fosters Mr. B's emotional expression of how teachers' accidental biases are a result of their traumas which are influenced by racial and gender stereotypes.

I like *Healing the Hurt* because it teaches that we can repurpose things all day, but if we never get to the core of things, how do we know if there’s true growth? There are more layers than that, especially if we as teachers are experiencing pain and have not healed from our current traumas. You have to say, I have to stop this cycle. In order to prevent a student from going through what you went through, sometimes it’s important

to find out if that hurt is still there before giving advice (Mr. B).

After reading BFT (hooks, 2003), it is clear that Mr. B's definition of SEL encompasses a different element that wasn't overly emphasized in his initial one-on-one interview. Mr. B's stance that SEL must be external in this situation highlighted that "SEL must include outdoor exploration and extend beyond the confines of the classroom," now noting that one must also adhere to an internal exploration as well, not only for the child but also for the adult at hand.

When Mr. B advocates for teachers' healing, Principal J returns to the text to emphasize that BFTs can be used to address harmful sexist, gender, and racial practices that for Black teachers perpetuate *soul murdering*. Soul murdering derives from the context that Black people are expected to over-extend themselves at work while being reserved at all times. She speaks about how teachers' emotional silence is synonymous.

They expect us to be emotional and have emotions, but they don't allow Black men even to do that. And that goes all the way back to slavery when they were expected to do all the hard labor and not say anything, not feel anything. The book talks about killing their souls. Soul murdering (Principal J).

Soul murdering is the psychological term that best describes this crushing of the male spirit during boyhood (hooks, 2003, p. 82). All three female participants state that this can be seen when Black boys are repeatedly told, not to cry, but are expected to continuously work.

Mr. T speaks up. He asks the group to turn to page 135, to point out how women too, play a part in reinforcing harmful racial and gender stereotypes. "Yes, Black men and women can sometimes be too tough on Black boys" but emphasizes that toughness on boys is not again exclusively a race or gender common association, but a sexist ideology that is

seen in schools that can be combatted with [Black] male support groups.

According to Mr. T, Black males are not entirely responsive to what they hear, but rather to what they see. “From my perspective, Black boys have to see it and that includes us as Black men as teachers” (Mr. T).

Ms. R brings the entire group back to the sentiment that *healing the hurt* is going to require community participation. Mr. T agrees and follows up by reading from page 143 when he states,

It is the cycle of damage that must be broken. If a Black man ought to be free, when talking about love, it says, Black men loving, is supporting other Black men. And the reason why that relates to me as a teacher is because we have Black boys that are not being loved, and those Black boys become Black men not getting the love and support they need, so sometimes they don't know how to love and support when they grow up. I can attest, we don't always know what love and support is, as a Black boy becoming a Black man (hooks, 2003, p. 143).

The five participants agreed that the school climate, culture, and classroom environments have a big impact on how kids act, how teachers see their jobs, how classrooms are structured, and whether or not both teachers and students can grow in those circumstances.

In conclusion, after reading *Healing the Hurt*, the instructors agreed that if surroundings are to be conducive to SEL outside of current place systems, it must begin with them, as teachers, improving in self-awareness. “It sounds like we need a culture of healing amongst us a staff. I think after reading this and discussing it amongst you all, that became clearer” (Mrs. H).

Pushout

After ending the first focus group meeting, each instructor was handed their second and

final book, *Pushout: The Criminalization of Black Girls* (2015). I asked the five participants to read two chapters: Chapter 1: *Struggling to Survive* and Chapter 5: *Repairing Relationships, Rebuilding Connections*. I chose these chapters for four reasons. First, the book identifies important scholars who discuss the importance of Black American identities, and how students' identities help inform their decisions in and outside of school. Second, the concept of intersectionality is introduced to contextualize the Black students' educational experiences.

Third, chapters discuss how children's lives outside of school, directly and indirectly, impact why they engage in certain subjects and why they may disengage from others. Fourth, *Pushout* (2015) uses anecdotal field research to identify solutions to educate children about positive interpersonal interactions, building student-teacher relationships, and minimizing school discipline and monitoring.

There was one topic of discussion that was consistently revisited throughout the second focus group meeting when reading both Chapter 1: *Struggling to Survive* and Chapter 5: *Repairing Relationships, Rebuilding Connections*. The consistent topic of discussion that could be seen when discussing both chapters in *Pushout* (2015) and *We Real Cool* (2003) was that BFT requires teachers to challenge their assumptions but also, helped provide some ideas about strategies to engage their students. Therefore, in this section, I will discuss the two major arguments and their supporting points of reference.

Challenging assumptions

Black feminist texts helped all teachers see their perceptions in a different light. *Pushout* (2015) also helped teachers see the complexities of students' experiences around their own identities. All five teacher participants shared the sentiment that Black Feminist Thought (BFT) challenged their assumptions and required them all to see the complexities of

students' experiences around stigma, gender, race, and their school experiences. Each teacher said that, in their way, the list of questions and anecdotal experiences given by Morris (2015) helped open up their mindsets a little further on just how difficult some of their students' experiences navigating their childhood and school requirements can be. Administrative assistant and social studies instructor Mr. B returns to one of the major topics from the first focus group meeting. He begs the question of whether they too have been guilty of wrongfully categorizing their students. He also explains how the relevant questions are essential for gathering additional data about students' behaviors, before categorizing students and placing them into boxes.

[I] Wonder at times, are we guilty of acting like these people, when they put the girls in categories of good or bad? And if what you think is bad, you're pushed to the side, like when reading about that story about Claudette Colvin on page 22.

Mr. B is referring to the stigmatization of Claudette Colvin and the 1955 Montgomery Bus Boycott movement. Nine months before Rosa Parks made a similar decision that would launch the Montgomery bus boycott, fifteen-year-old and pregnant Claudette Colvin protested the segregation of Montgomery busses by refusing to give up her seat to a White passenger. Mr. B highlights from the book, that although Claudette Colvin was a part of the Youth Council of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), because she was pregnant and an unwed teen mother, she could not be used as the 'face' of the Montgomery Bus boycott movement because she would be perceivably rejected by the dominant White narratives of what is good or bad. Mr. B highlights that students who don't fit the description of the American ideal go unseen, unheard, and unwanted, and this sentiment is no different in how teachers pick and choose whom to punish and who is worthy

of grace.

Mr. B uses Claudette Colvin's story to illustrate how students are stigmatized and the impact that stigmatization has on them later on down the line as they become older. Mr. B addresses how a teenage, unwed, darker-skinned Black girl was seen as unfit and too *taboo* to be the galvanizing face for both Black and White people to push Civil Rights in 1955 and thus, was unworthy of issues that permeated American Black culture. Mr. T then brings us forward to 2023, when he refers to the statistics in which some of our students are expected to navigate, measure up to and present themselves as un-stereotypical, while being “good scholars”. He also uses BFT to illustrate how unaddressed issues of pregnancy, poverty, race, and gender, which affected the Black community in 1955, still exist today. He reads aloud from Morris’ (2015) book:

Twenty-five percent of Black women [mothers] live in poverty. The unemployment rate for Black women aged twenty and over at the end of 2014 was 8.2 percent, compared to 4.4 percent for White women and 5 percent for all women. Black women [mothers] are also disproportionately employed in low-wage occupations—jobs that pay them less than \$21,412 per year. And while they do not constitute the majority of women on public assistance, Black women are disproportionately represented among those who receive what are collectively known as welfare benefits (e.g., SNAP, or food stamps, Section 8 housing vouchers) (Morris, p. 21, 2015).

The second takeaway among teacher participants was that a disproportionate number of Black boys are labeled as emotionally disturbed as a result of racism, prejudice, and the teachers' subpar teaching strategies. Mr. T refers back to the book’s reference of “disproportionately represented” and our initial conversation during one-on-one interviews to

challenge the assumption that if a large number of students despite their race, class, or gender are frequently suspended and expelled due to “emotional outbursts”, then why are Black boys the “face” of a systemic issue that plagues all students, yet other groups are left out of this conversation?

Furthermore, Mr. T discusses how some Black youth cannot escape the consequences of being stereotyped even into adulthood. Misleading stereotypes do not help, but rather detract from Black boys who go on to become fathers or husbands and work to support their families while trying to nurture their Black sons or girls. A new father himself, Mr. T questions whether American culture genuinely comprehends or cares how tracking and incarcerating young Black boys lowers their chances of becoming economically mobile Black men. He states, “Yeah, I think the conversation around tracking needs to be included in this conversation, and how data about boys go from one school to the next and how that data can hurt their chances of success and potentially a new start in a different school” (Mr. T). In conclusion, all teacher-participants agreed once again, that challenging assumptions, including their own, about the perceptions of Black boys, was the most common takeaway when reading *Pushout’s* Chapter One: *Struggling to Survive*. Next, I will discuss the major takeaway from Chapter 5: *Repairing Relationships, Rebuilding Connections*.

Strategies

Black feminist texts give schools strategies on how to deal with emotional outbursts and boys who display characteristics of emotionally disturbed (ED). After discussing how Black boys are disproportionately labeled as ED as a result of racism, prejudice, and teachers' subpar teaching strategies, the final "aha" moment came when instructors noted that Chapter 5 in Morris' book, titled *Repairing Relationships, Rebuilding Connections*, can offer schools

and teachers strategies -including descriptive narratives, anecdotal evidence, quantitative data, and preventive measurements—that they can incorporate in their SEL.

Mr. T expresses that Black feminist texts can be used to help math and science teachers address racial, gender, and socioeconomic inequities in real time. He challenged the notion that if some students are dealing with these issues, why don't they as instructors tailor their lesson plans to address students' issues to possibly minimize emotional outbursts that are a derivative of the issues students are responding to?

Mr. T states that along with descriptive narratives, the statistics that were presented by Morris (2015), can be used to inform lesson plans for math, reading, social studies, and science. "I can take out the numbers from our math book, and put these numbers in. I can also change the narrative around to fit what she's [Morris] talking about and asked the students, "How do you feel about that"? He also states that teachers can learn a lot about a student's behavior by asking them to take their assignment and discuss with their parents what they learned in school and return to school the next day about the consensus the student and parents made as a collective, as a method to prepare ongoing interactions using the specific tailored instructional lesson.

Administrative associate, Mrs. H answers Principal J's question who prompted this question as a novice teacher trying to find direction on how to deal with children's emotional well-being by drawing the entire group to page 18 of *Pushout: The Criminalization of Black Girls*. She simply replies, "Those list of questions".

The question of survival among Black girls has always been about *whether* they are seen, and if so, *how they are seen*, particularly in economically and socially isolated spaces. Are they "background noise" in a larger view of urban life that prioritizes

men and boys? Are they disruptive forces in the exploitation of Black communities? Are they loyal “ride-or-die chicks” who sacrifice their own safety and well-being in the name of love? Are they willing participants in their own oppression? Are they making a way out of no way at all? Are they good girls? Are they bad girls (Morris, p. 18, 2015)?

Mrs. H summarizes that first, teachers and administrators can use questions already presented in *Pushout* (2015) to inform professional development among staff members to address the *culture* of students and their emotional well-being.

If you look at the list of questions, you can answer all of them, yes or no. But there is no one-size-fits-all because every child’s situation is going to be different. Every household is different. Every question can lead to a protocol. It may be more questions that need to be added, but that’s one of those things you won’t know until you dig deeper into students’ situations to know what questions to ask further.

In this case, we see Mrs. H's initial understanding that SEL informs schools' decisions around emerging trends and themes amongst their students’ demographics, discussed in her one-on-one interviews, emerge once more during her second BFT intervention with *Pushout* (2015).

Teacher participants concluded that BFT can help inform strategies such as personalized instruction. Ms. R explains that in Chapter 5, she had to consider informal practices like student-teacher preference. At PAMI Academy, during elective hours, third-grade students have the choice to select alternative teachers who align with their learning styles and are willing to adapt their strategies. This arrangement allows instructors to provide personalized guidance and support for academic and informal matters. Furthermore,

Ms. R emphasizes that students tend to choose teachers based on cultural background, irrespective of race, class, or gender, presenting an opportunity for schools to foster institutional changes that promote positive learning experiences and desired student outcomes.

Again, the common thread of *teachers' assumptions* is revisited, however this time it is paired with teaching practice(s). During one-on-one interviews, when asked what she thought was lacking from SEL that Black boys needed, Ms. R, replied, "More Black male teachers". Further emphasizing that SEL before intervention required hands-on approaches to learning and community fostering, preeminently the importance of [Black] men for Black boys in their preliminary years. However, when discussing the closing chapter in *Pushout* she discusses the need for men who can show vulnerable emotions or teachers who can demonstrate a feminine side, despite that teacher being male or female.

When the girl in the *Pushout* described herself as masculine, that made me think about boys who don't always need a masculine man. It made me think maybe they need men who are gentle or who display sentiments of feminine energy. I think that part about her being a girl but identifying as masculine brought attention to some things I don't think about as it relates to what intersectionality is and how it relates to our kids and what they need based upon those things.

The reason why Ms. R's sentiment is so essential is that it highlights how Black feminist texts illuminate a different side of Black boys that sometimes goes unheard of in schools and policy, their need for love, grace, and attention. In this case, she learns that Black boys also need masculine Black men who are unequivocally willing and capable of demonstrating an emotional and sometimes perceivable feminine approach when teaching and assisting Black

boys in SEL.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I discussed the study's school context, teachers' prior knowledge of SEL, Black boys, and ED, and the major takeaway from the focus groups with Black feminist texts and implications for SEL. Two significant themes emerged from their overall discussion regarding the book, *We Real Cool: Black Men and Masculinity* (2003). One, Black boys need supportive systems. Two, Black Feminist text(s) helps teachers explore how to examine their own biases, regarding race, gender, class, and sexual orientation, that they may unintentionally be perpetuated onto their students. Furthermore, there was one topic of discussion that was consistently revisited throughout the second focus group meeting when reading both Chapter 1: *Struggling to Survive* and Chapter 5: *Repairing Relationships, Rebuilding Connections*. The consistent topic of discussion that could be seen when discussing both chapters in *Pushout* (2015) and *We Real Cool* (2003) was that BFT requires teachers to challenge their assumptions. In addition, the final closing chapter of *Pushout* (2015) helped provide some ideas about strategies to engage their students and teachers alike.

Chapter 5: Conclusions

For a decade and counting, Black boys more than any other racial, ethnic, or gender group, have been disproportionately referred to and suspended for emotional outbursts (Barnes et al., 2009; Beyond Suspension, 2019; Camacho & Krezmien, 2018; Cooley & Trimmer, 2001; Civil Rights Data Collection, 2014; Digest of Education Statistics, 2019; Henderson, Klein, Gonzalez & Bradley, 2005; Rogers & Way, 2018; Tate, 2019). In addition, students who have outbursts are more likely to be disproportionately identified as ED and funneled into special education programs (Beyond Suspension, 2019; Losen et al., 2014; Mark & Buck, 2016; Oelrich, 2012). Chapter two discussed four of the explanations in the existing literature as to why. First, the lack of cultural inclusivity in teacher preparation programs and its connection to Black boys and ED can be attributed to insufficient prioritization of curriculum and instruction, not addressing the emerging perspectives and experiences amongst a racially diversifying student population. The other three causes linking Black boys to Emotional Disturbance (ED) include the reduction in counselors and the increase in School Resource Officers (SROs), misidentification and misclassification within special education, and a lack of cultural inclusivity in restorative practices.

One of the major school practices used to address the phenomena surrounding emotionality, students, and emotional outbursts is social-emotional learning (SEL). Despite SEL being used to address both emotional outbursts (EO) and diagnoses of emotional disturbance (ED), critics state that the SEL movement is ineffective if it fails to incorporate or acknowledge issues of race, class, gender, and sexual orientation, or what could be classified in Black feminist literature as *intersectionality* (Collins, 1990).

The purpose of the study was to investigate the following research question: How do principles from Black Feminist Thought/Black feminist texts shed light on teachers' understanding of SEL education with Black male youth? This study was conducted to understand whether the assigned Black feminist texts (hooks, 2003; Morris, 2015), could be used to change teachers' understanding of students and, in turn, reduce racial disparities of suspension and expulsion amongst Black boys and their connection with emotional disturbance (ED) and their disproportionate diagnosis in K–12 (Beyond Suspension, 2019; Camacho & Krezmien, 2018; Cooley & Trimmer, 2001; Civil Rights Data Collection, 2014; Digest of Education Statistics, 2019; Tate, 2019).

The study's objective, which is covered in Chapter 3, was originally a Participatory Action Research (PAR) study but later transitioned into an Action Research Project. The study's site was a charter school network that was selected because this school caters to a significant number of Black students and has a reputation for accommodating students who have faced marginalization in traditional public schools due to disciplinary problems (e.g., suspension, expulsion, or transfer referral). In addition, these students' parents have actively sought out alternative educational options at PAMI Academy which is known for prioritizing a supportive learning environment while respecting their cultural heritage, and racial identity, and fostering critical learning skills.

The teacher participants were nominated by the superintendent based on their level of expertise, experience, and leadership in SEL instruction at the school. This study was conducted in two phases: in the first phase, I did one interview with all five participants, discovering their previous experience(s) with SEL, Black boys, and ED. In the second phase, teacher participants engaged in two focus group meetings, describing what they learned about Black boys, ED, and

SEL after reading *We Real Cool* (2003) and *Pushout* (2015). The goal was, through focus groups, to understand how BFT could inform new understandings of Black boys and ED, using SEL instruction. The goal of this study was to help educators improve SEL to address racial inequities by using informed practices, instruction, and texts, which teachers can turn to, that address issues surrounding intersectionality (race, class, gender, and sexual orientation). I identified three findings from this study, which I elaborate on below.

Examining own biases and assumptions. First, teachers concluded that there is a need to explore and examine their own biases regarding race, gender, class, and sexual orientation, which they may unintentionally perpetuate onto their students. In the interviews, teachers talked about their common understanding that ED is misunderstood in the current school climate and era. Their discussion of the ambiguous terminology of ED that has led to its lack of comprehension as it pertains to Black boys' common behaviors, highlights a need for greater understanding and awareness surrounding ED, including its relationship to Black boys' emotional outbursts and then later misidentification. Teachers reported that the BFT readings helped to enhance their knowledge in this area, and they discussed how both themselves and others can better support students with emotional disturbance and create inclusive classroom environments.

During the focus groups, teachers discussed a surprising revelation. While they were aware and prepared to challenge stereotypes and misconceptions about Black boys and emotional disturbance (ED), they were unprepared for the emotional weight that discussions on these topics would elicit after reading Black feminist texts (hooks, 2003; Morris, 2015). This included addressing the traumas and how their parents and the adults in their communities coped with issues related to parenting, burnout, parent-teacher interactions, and how their own parents'

childhood issues that were once projected onto them as teachers when they were kids, could be the same projections (e.g. biases, stereotypes, insensitive behaviors or lack of empathy) that teachers potentially project onto their students today, inhibiting healthy learning environments for their students—and more particularly, Black boys across the nation.

Teachers discovered that the effectiveness of their SEL program in meeting the ever-evolving needs of their students will be limited until they address their unanticipated misconceptions, beliefs, and ways of knowing views and/or past traumas. Ultimately, by acknowledging and addressing the emotional well-being of teachers, teacher preparation programs can contribute to the creation of a more inclusive and supportive educational environment, benefiting both educators and their students. Black feminist literature (hooks, 2003; Morris, 2015) elicited this finding.

Black Feminist literature helped teachers realize and conceptualize how they stereotype their students. Participants discussed how both their harmful assumptions and teachers' stereotyping can have detrimental effects on the behavioral and academic outcomes of Black boys. When teachers hold biased beliefs or perpetuate stereotypes about Black boys, such as the assumption that they come from unstable homes, it can influence their expectations and interactions with these students. The stereotype of Black boys coming from unstable homes can lead to negative assumptions and biases about their behavior and academic abilities. Teachers may unconsciously lower their expectations for these students, leading to a lack of challenging opportunities and limited academic support. This can create a self-fulfilling prophecy where students internalize these low expectations and underperform academically.

Additionally, biased perceptions and stereotypes can result in differential treatment and discipline practices. Teachers may be more likely to interpret behavior from Black boys through

a negative lens, leading to disproportionate disciplinary actions such as suspensions or expulsions. This not only disrupts their learning but also perpetuates a cycle of disengagement and increased likelihood of involvement with the school-to-prison pipeline.

In conclusion, Black Feminist literature played a crucial role in helping teachers understand the impact of outdated systems of instruction that promote harmful stereotypes. By engaging with this literature (hooks, 2003; Morris, 2015), teachers can become aware of the damaging effects of such stereotypes and work towards dismantling them. BFT, teacher-reading groups, and interventions highlight the importance of challenging biases, fostering inclusive learning environments, and providing equitable opportunities for all students.

Need for supportive systems. Second, teachers realized through the readings that Black boys need support systems. “Systems” in this context, refers to the broader societal structures and institutions that impact the experiences and outcomes of individuals, particularly concerning racial and gender oppression. These systems include policies, practices, and norms that perpetuate inequities and create barriers for marginalized groups.

While teachers had read extensively about systems of racial and gender oppression such as the school-to-prison pipeline, zero-tolerance policies, and the misdiagnoses of Black boys in special education in their professional development and onboarding training as novice teachers, they came to understand through the readings by Black feminists that these systems are experienced differently based on one’s identity. This realization highlights the importance of recognizing that systems of oppression intersect and interact with multiple identities, such as race, gender, and class. Black feminists have contributed to this understanding by emphasizing the unique experiences of Black individuals within these systems, taking into account the intersections of racism and sexism (Collins, 1990). This is no coincidence, for in 1990, Dr.

Patricia Hill Collins, the creator of Black Feminist Thought, refers to this phenomenon as *the matrix of domination*. Nonetheless, this knowledge challenges teachers to go beyond a surface-level understanding of systems and delve deeper into the nuanced ways in which individuals are affected by multiple forms of oppression.

By acknowledging the differential impact of systems based on identity, as mentioned in Chapter Two by other Black feminist scholars, teachers can work towards creating more inclusive and equitable learning environments that address the specific needs and experiences of Black boys and other marginalized groups. This understanding calls for a comprehensive approach that takes into account the intersections of race, gender, and other social identities in analyzing and dismantling oppressive systems.

Furthermore, teachers discovered that developing new systems goes beyond simply constructing physical or administrative structures. It also involves exploring new literary genres, such as Black feminist literature, that provide space for student voices and perspectives to be acknowledged and heard. This means incorporating diverse and inclusive literature that reflects students' backgrounds and experiences, enabling them to see themselves represented and encouraging them to share their stories and advocate for their needs. By examining and reshaping these structures, teachers can create educational environments that prioritize students' voices, promote inclusivity, and empower students to actively participate in their educational journey.

Teachers also discovered that to carry out effective SEL instruction that improves students' behavior and academic performance, they need to be aware of the various intersectional perspectives that their students are coming from at any given time. This knowledge is essential

for teachers to think about new ways of creating systems of change and reinforcing new ways of knowing and behaving amongst Black boys who display signs of ED.

In addition to employing text to inform new approaches to managing school systems, teachers determined that a support system requires two elements. One is an awareness of how not just race, but gender and sexist stereotypes, play a role in emotional outbursts amongst their students. Second, when teachers learned about implementing applied readings and theory to practice, they discovered the importance of creating spaces for students to advocate for how new school practices either encroach upon or expand upon their emerging identities, particularly at the secondary level. For example, as discussed in Chapter Four, teachers spoke about how at PAMI Academy's students were permitted to "walk the track" or step outside the classroom doors to cool off with the instructor's permission.

Usefulness of BFT texts for instruction. Third, teachers reported that Black feminist texts (BFT) helped provide insightful ideas about strategies to engage their [Black] students and teachers alike in the emerging identities at their school. These identities may encompass various aspects, including but not limited to race, gender, culture, and personal growth. As an example, teachers' presumptions were tested by asking them to observe their students from an array of perspectives rather than from a single vantage point to understand why they behave the way they do. For instance, *Pushout* (2015) showed that a student's response to a teacher's attempt to discipline her was motivated by a medical condition they withheld from their primary instructor out of fear of embarrassment rather than their perceived dislike of the teacher.

Teachers reported that they could return to the anecdotes in the books to reflect on previous interactions they had with children and consider whether they had overreacted rather than the child in question. Simply stated, BFT sheds light on the extent to which teachers'

perceptions of student conduct are misinformed by their prejudices and misunderstandings. Going back to the initial finding, BFT advises teachers to examine their prejudices, before making final judgments about the perceived behaviors of their students. Second, before delivering punishments, this understanding might give teachers some innovative suggestions on how to conduct classroom management procedures and referrals that engage their students' voices and viewpoints.

Recommendations for Research and Practice.

My study has four major implications for policy and practice.

Incorporate BFTs into SEL. My second recommendation is the incorporation of Black feminist texts into SEL and as part of professional development. Black feminist texts can help school administrators and staff become more culturally informed (i.e., behaviors and languages) and aware of school-wide systematic approaches (e.g., tracking systems of previous behaviors and minor student infractions) that stunt academic and personal growth.

Use BFT to inform special education policy and practices. BFTs should be brought in as part of special education policy and practice, surrounding ED diagnoses. Teachers and school districts should utilize Black Feminist's theories to reassess their approach to special education diagnosis and school protocols. This reassessment should address the issue of misalignment between typical behaviors and cultural practices observed among Black students and the symptoms associated with Emotional Disturbance (ED).

There is a need to provide insightful ideas that inform new practices and strategies to engage [Black] students and teachers alike before teachers can take the first step in funneling their students into special education programs and [mis]identifying [mis]classifying Black boys with ED. As mentioned, in Chapter Four, elicited by Black feminist text such as Pushout (2015),

if schools are struggling to minimize school infractions that eventually lead to Black boys being considered as ED, school administration can look at alternative tactics discussed in BFT, that have been previously used in schools. This gives administrators keen insight into the cultural misalignment in practices that exist in their schools. However, to effectively implement change, staff must be trained.

It is crucial to re-evaluate the identification process and develop a new definition that is contextualized within a racially and socioeconomically diverse student body, replacing the vague language surrounding ED. This re-evaluation should be informed by factual data that exposes former systemic racial practices and outcomes, highlighting the disproportionate suspension and expulsion rates for Black boys and their misdiagnosis as ED.

Incorporate BFT into teacher education programs and training. First, we must enhance teacher preparation programs to effectively implement SEL instruction and adhere to culturally responsive pedagogy for a diverse student body population. To begin, rather than being a result of the student's failure to adhere to SEL competencies, the misidentification, and misclassification of special education can be attributed to novice teachers, supportive staff, and administrators' lack of cultural awareness. The lack of preparation hinders the facilitation of healthy social-emotional learning and accountability for both staff and students. This becomes transparent in teachers' acknowledgment, after reading Black feminist texts surrounding Black boys' emotionality and their schooling experience during the intervention, that they must address their traumas when facilitating SEL.

Creating a culture of empathy and understanding within teacher preparation programs can encourage open dialogue and reflection on personal experiences, fostering a sense of connection

and empathy among future educators. This can enhance their ability to relate to and support students who may be facing similar challenges.

These reflections highlight the need for teacher preparation programs to address not only the academic aspects but also the emotional well-being of teachers, as their personal histories can significantly impact their interactions with students in the present day. Furthermore, the teachers' realization of the impact of their own traumas and unresolved issues on their teaching practices underscores the importance of providing adequate support and resources for teacher well-being and mental health. Teacher preparation programs should incorporate strategies for self-care, stress management, and addressing personal traumas to ensure that educators are equipped to provide a nurturing and supportive environment for their students.

This expressed need must be followed by a comprehensive revision to curricula needed for the incorporation of culturally responsive pedagogies and providing explicit training on cultural competence and SEL. Additionally, interventions should be created in teacher preparation programs to address barriers and challenges that hinder the completion of teacher certification programs, such as difficulties in passing the edTPA exam, which often leads to program discontinuation among aspiring educators of color (Sadovi, 2018).

Teacher preparation must address the lack of cultural inclusivity in restorative justice practices to create system-wide change that will eventually lead to better student outcomes and performances. However, cultural inclusivity and restorative justice practices must first begin with how teacher and student differences impact their perception of their students' behaviors based on their own biases. This was seen throughout the entirety of the intervention, when teachers consistently acknowledged that there is a need to explore and examine their own biases, regarding race, gender, class, and sexual orientation, that they may unintentionally perpetuate

onto their students. I suggest the need for a list of Black Feminist Theory (BFT) literature to serve as a directory for teachers to embark on a journey of self-reflection, healing, and new directions in Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) training and teaching. This literature can provide valuable insights into intersectional dynamics of race, gender, and identity, helping teachers develop a deeper understanding of the specific needs and experiences of marginalized students, particularly Black students. Engaging with BFT literature can inform teachers' practice by promoting personal growth, fostering empathy, and guiding them in creating inclusive and culturally responsive SEL approaches that empower and support all students.

Revise instructional practices. In this study, teachers learned and encouraged others to remember that creating new systems requires more than just revising new structures in teacher preparation programs or professional development. It also entails reviewing current instructional practices, like curriculum and classroom management in this developmental process as well. After reading BFT, teachers discussed critically evaluating their current curricula and instructional methods. This discussion resulted in teachers encouraging others to prioritize inclusion, diversity of viewpoints within their student body, and creating opportunities for teachers to ask students “What are your needs?” and ensuring a safe space for students to express those needs.

This comes back to classroom management. The structures and practices related to managing classroom behavior and discipline also play a significant role in students' experiences. Teachers recognized the need to develop new systems that move away from punitive approaches and instead focus on restorative practices, fostering a positive and inclusive classroom environment where students feel heard and empowered to voice their needs. My contribution to the existing body of literature (i.e., Howard & Terry, 2011; Jagers et. al., 2021; Jones et. al,

2014; Kash & Borich, 1978) calls for the integration of cultural inclusivity pedagogy in teachers' professional development, while also advocating for the use of Black Feminist Theory (BFT) as a tool to support teachers in exploring and addressing any unintentional perpetuation of their own traumas onto their students.

My study has four implications for research.

Discussion and Pushback Racial Deficit Perspective(s). First is the need within research on social-emotional learning to acknowledge that Black boys are not inherently lacking in emotional development. The prevailing approach in SEL research often assumes that [Black] boys or minority students lack certain skills, as exemplified by the statement, "Additionally, poor and minority children usually benefit the most from SEL interventions (they are also more likely to start with lower levels of these skills)" (McClelland et. al., 2017, p. 39). This perspective is echoed by other scholars (Elias & Haynes, 2008; Domitrovich et. al., 2017; Yang et. al., 2018), prioritizing the deficits of minority students while overlooking crucial factors such as teachers' knowledge, cultural competency, years of teaching, relational context, and teachers' own SEL competencies. Instead, my study [re]emphasizes the importance of challenging prevailing perspectives and ideals that often overlook, dismiss, and invalidate Black boys' distinctive experiences.

Reconsider replacing counselors with SROs. The assumptions that increasing the presence of school resource officers (SROs) and reducing the number of counselors will effectively reduce emotional outbursts among Black boys are flawed and needs further examination. Future research can investigate how these changes in school practices might inadvertently contribute to a punitive system that fails to address the unique emotional needs of Black boys. Drawing on existing literature that has shown the disproportionate punishment of

Black boys due to police presence, future studies can explore the potential risks of criminalization and incarceration that may arise from the heightened controversy around the murders of Black boys, poor policing, and SEL competencies training.

Informed by Black feminist author Michelle Alexander's work on mass incarceration, particularly in *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (2010), studies like this can be utilized to explore the potential repercussions of pairing up African American boys in PK–12 who have been diagnosed with emotional disturbance (ED) with police officers in a learning environment. Future studies on Black boys, SEL, and emotionally disturbed [mis]diagnoses must take into account that these boys may already be viewed as threats by law enforcement outside of the school setting. This raises concerns about the effects of placing these boys' emotional welfare and educational experiences in the custody of police officers rather than counselors in institutional learning environments.

Examining how Black Feminist Thought can address Black boys' needs. Lastly, my study suggests researchers should continue to examine or conduct additional interventions that employ Black Feminist Thought around Black boys' emotions and their schooling experience as a way to further understand the complex intersections of race, gender, and education. By exploring how Black feminist perspectives can inform and shape educational practices, researchers can contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the experiences and needs of Black boys within the educational system. As noted previously, some of these previous research interventions that use BFT to understand Black boys' emotionality include Gayles' (2018) *The Feminist on Cellblock Y*, White's (2006), *Black Feminist-Masculinity* (narratives and readings), and Ferguson's (2000) *Bad Boys: The Creation of Black Masculinity in Public Schools*. My study suggests that there is a promise for using these texts with teachers, researchers can examine how

BFT can be used to address the need for the incorporation of race, class, gender, and sexual orientation discussions in SEL.

Contextualization: Rural, Suburban, and Urban School Settings. The implications of Social Emotional Learning (SEL) for Black males in various circumstances are significant. In rural communities, the stigma surrounding seeking help for emotional or behavioral issues can lead to a reluctance in utilizing mental health services, potentially impacting Black boys' well-being and academic success (Nichols et. al, 2017). Suburban schools, despite appearing affluent, face challenges like limited resources and cultural insensitivity, which can affect Black boys' emotional attachment and educational experiences (Jackson II, 2022). Urban schools have discussions about Black boys, punishment, and emotional outbursts, but integrating Black Feminist Theory is crucial for a more comprehensive understanding (Ferguson,2000).

The effects of these implications are diverse, as Black boys' academic achievement and well-being may be negatively affected in rural communities due to unaddressed stigma, while disparities may persist in suburban schools due to much-needed attention to the insufficient resources that are inclusive to cultural contexts or relevancy. To prioritize and understand Black boys' experiences in less diverse locations and promote equity and inclusivity, increasing research in these areas is essential.

By working together to improve SEL programs using Black Feminist Thought, we can better meet the unique needs of Black males and create more welcoming learning environments that support emotional well-being and academic achievement. This is particularly evident when we consider how racial and ethnic peer groups from a diversifying student body population connect and participate in future studies.

Sankofa: Honoring Black Feminist Thought in SEL

Black women have made essential contributions to addressing emotional issues and cultivating well-being in their communities, and their perspectives and insights are invaluable in enriching SEL approaches. I have defended the idea that Black Feminist Thought can be utilized to examine complex and nuanced issues from a distinct perspective throughout this study. Recognizing Black women's essential contributions to the field of social-emotional learning (SEL), whether directly or indirectly, is crucial to recognizing their invaluable contributions to the field. Black men and women collectively will continue to be at the forefront of addressing emotional issues and promoting well-being within their communities, while being cognizant and proactive about the racial inequities that surround them.

Black Feminist Thought offers a unique and essential perspective that can enrich SEL approaches by taking into account the intersectional experiences of Black individuals, including both adults and children. Black women's involvement with SEL is crucial as it helps us think through the work of addressing emotional issues in schools today with greater nuance and sensitivity. By incorporating Black Feminist Thought, educators and practitioners can create more inclusive and culturally responsive SEL programs that acknowledge and validate the diverse emotional experiences of Black individuals, leading to more effective support and positive outcomes in educational settings.

Given the significance of support systems for Black boys, research must also explore alternative methods to address Emotional Disturbance (ED) within school settings. Further necessitating the need to examine the effectiveness of support-focused approaches in contrast to punitive actions, accounting for the specific needs and experiences of Black boys within the institutional schooling system. Research must look into the value of actively involving students in shaping their educational experiences to foster a more inclusive and empowered learning

environment while employing SEL [combined with Black Feminist Thought/texts], giving students opportunities to express their perspectives, voice their concerns, and participate in decision-making processes at the instructional, administrative, community and policy levels.

SEL Advocacy Amidst Diversity Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Elimination Ruling

In June 2023, Texas became the largest state to cut state funding for diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) offices in higher education, and other states like Florida, South Carolina, Iowa, and Missouri are following suit (Wong, 2023). The DEI movement in the United States dates back as early as the 1960s Civil Rights movement and has expanded to encompass various identities such as gender, sexual orientation, religion, and country of origin (Edmunds & Lind, 2021).

When advocating for Social Emotional Learning (SEL) amidst the elimination of DEI initiatives, it is crucial to prioritize data-driven, sustainable outcomes and engage diverse stakeholders for measurable institutional improvement. Strategies to advocate for SEL in higher education include gathering compelling research data on its positive impact, engaging students, faculty, staff, and community members, addressing concerns about DEI elimination, proposing concrete policy measures for SEL integration, seeking partnerships, and funding opportunities, engaging in legislative advocacy, and raising public awareness. By emphasizing the benefits of SEL, fostering inclusivity, and aligning it with broader educational goals, advocates can make a strong case for its integration despite the challenges posed by DEI house bill eliminations.

In conclusion and expanding on previous contributions to the literature (i.e., Camacho & Krezmien, 2019; Blanchett, 2013; Farmer & Adams, 2021), I propose that scholars can play a vital role in aiding policy leaders to re-evaluate conventional norms surrounding Social-Emotional Learning, emotional and behavioral disorders (ED) and its connection to Black boys.

The mental health of children during and after COVID is vital, especially when managing emotional outbursts in classrooms, I must stress, as schools try to resume normal operations two years after the COVID-19 outbreak, children are struggling more currently. “More than 80 Percent of U.S. Public Schools Report Pandemic Has Negatively Impacted Student Behavior and Socio-Emotional Development” (NCES, 2022, p.1). COVID-19’s impact on students’ well-being, especially those [mis]diagnosed with ED, emphasizes the urgent need to give Social Emotional Learning (SEL) a top priority so that school officials and students alike, can be given the resources and assistance they need to effectively regulate classroom instruction, help students manage their emotions and thrive under trying situations.

Furthermore, by fostering a deeper understanding, this approach can contribute to normalizing the behaviors exhibited by emerging and diversifying cultures in today's classrooms. The effort to combat stereotyping must be intentional among teachers, administrators, and policy leaders. There must be a collective effort, with the assistance of BFT, to become more knowledgeable about the negative consequences of stereotyping and to actively work to combat it to create more positive academic and behavioral outcomes for Black boys. By providing supportive and culturally responsive instruction, guidelines, and policies, setting high expectations, and fostering a sense of belonging, there can be a collective effort that can help mitigate the negative effects of stereotypes and promote better outcomes for Black boys in both behavior and academic achievement.

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Appendix

Interview Protocol:

Interview 1:

1. What was your upbringing like?
2. What characteristic about you made you qualified to be an SEL instructor?
3. What motivated you to continue SEL instruction or curriculum?
4. How did your education prepare you to deal with Black students at this school?
5. Could you take me through a typical SEL engagement in the classroom?
6. What do you believe is missing from SEL that Black students require?
7. What are the typical characteristics that you associated to with ED?
8. What experience do you have with Black feminist literature?
9. What information sources do you rely on to inform your SEL training?
10. What SEL components are the most transformative?
11. How can SEL help Black males have a better chance of succeeding?

Focus Group Questions:

1. What part of the selected chapter, do you most identify with when teaching Black boys with ED?
2. What are some common themes you see in the text that could be related to CASEL?

3. What do the two chapters fail to highlight when addressing working with Black boys who exhibit symptoms of ED?
4. How do these chapters capture the internal battle that black boys face?
5. What is missing from the chapters that you feel like was not highlighted?
6. What can you do to help facilitate success in the classroom that will transfer to their success in their personal life?
7. How might the classroom environment create conduciveness to talk about feelings?
8. What activities have you done that represent what the text attempts to explore?
9. What new ideas emerged for you when reading the text?

2nd Focus Group Questions:

1. What about CASEL works for Black boys ED?
2. How can CASEL help Black boys take control of their own world?
3. What are the most vital components of Black feminist text that all teachers must now about regardless of race, gender, and class.]
4. How does Black feminist text further your understanding of social emotional learning for Black boys?
5. What new identities emerge when thinking about black boys after reading Black feminist text?
6. What is your definition of intersectionality?
7. How does intersectionality apply to Black boys with ED?

8. What components of Black boys life has to be considered when creating effective social emotional learning curriculum?
9. What is needed to ensure healthy dialogue between teachers and black male students with ED?
10. What outside connections are needed to facilitate a healthy learning environment for Black boys?
11. What must change to ensure that instructors feel equipped to understand and empower Black boys who show symptoms of ED in their classroom?
12. What text would you suggest for teachers to read, to help their understanding of Black boys and emotion in school?
13. What is the biggest misconception of Black boys with ED?
14. What school policies would you suggest facilitating social emotional learning for Black boys?
15. What school policies do not facilitate social emotion learning for Black boys?
16. Walk me through a day of learning in SEL using Black feminist text?
17. How does CASEL improve when using Black feminist text?
18. What instructional tools do you suggest for effective CASEL instruction?