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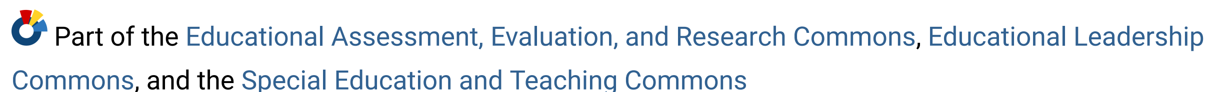

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The Lived Experiences of Black Male High School Students Diagnosed with Emotional or Behavioral Disorders: A Qualitative Study on Self-Concept

By

James Menke

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Educational Doctorate

In

Educational Leadership

Minnesota State University, Mankato

Mankato, Minnesota

December 2022

November 7th, 2022

The lived experiences of Black male high school students diagnosed with emotional or behavioral disorders: A qualitative study on self-concept

James Menke

This dissertation has been examined and approved by the following
Members of the student's committee:

____

Dr. Melissa Krull, Advisor

____

Dr. Karen Eastman, Committee Member

____

Dr. David Kimori, Committee Member

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THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF BLACK MALE HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS DIAGNOSED WITH EMOTIONAL OR BEHAVIORAL DISORDERS: A QUALITATIVE STUDY ON SELF-CONCEPT

JAMES MENKE

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF EDUCATIONAL DOCTORATE IN EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of how the lived experiences of four Black male high school students in a setting-four program diagnosed with emotional or behavioral disorders (EBD) impact their self-concept. Through a multi-case study method, participants engaged in two interviews responding to questions in reference to lived experiences and self-concept. Critical Race Theory tenets counter-storytelling and intersectionality were applied to further and more deeply analyze the content from the interviews. A cross-case analysis of four cases produced overarching themes: I was treated inhumanely; I benefit from invested staff who build individualized connections with me; I require responsive support; I independently need to cope. Conclusively, the students navigated and persevered in a school system not built for them to succeed.

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CHAPTER I:

Introduction

Background of the Problem

Disparities in achievement based on race, gender, and ableness are the results of oppression and exploitation. Paulo Freire (2001) understood humans as dissimilar to animals based on their ability to create their own world and go beyond living within it. At the same time, humans have the capacity to dehumanize others, seen through history as the powerful exploiting the ones with less. Black male students diagnosed with emotional or behavioral disorders are one population that society has not supported nor given equitable opportunities to be successful. These students have been isolated in more restrictive settings and devoid of education and peer interaction, and schools have failed to address their needs. Students are instead set up for an improbable path to graduation (U.S. Department of Education, 2020a) or future occupation and face a higher likelihood of being imprisoned (Carson, 2018).

The above emphasizes the need to bring awareness and change to a significant issue restraining young Black males: the all-too-prevalent diagnosis of emotional or behavioral disorders (EBD). This background section describes the disorders, discusses gender and race differences in identification, and explores adolescent self-concept formation, intersectionality, and the all-too-common outcomes of being a Black male diagnosed with EBD.

Throughout this work, there is a specific focus on using “person-first language.” Using person-first language allows individuals with disabilities to be recognized as

people above their disability (Communicating with and about people with disabilities, 2020). This is especially important in this study as there is both a recognition of significant negative connotations and outcomes with students with EBD and specifically those who are Black males. It is necessary to recognize these individuals as humans first with the capacity to learn, love, and give while being productive members of society.

Emotional or Behavioral Disorders (EBD)

According to Minnesota Statute 3525.1329 (2007), a student may be diagnosed with emotional or behavior disorders (EBD) when there is a pattern of one or more of the following:

- Withdrawal or anxiety, depression, problems with mood, or feelings of self-worth
- Disordered thought processes with unusual behavior patterns and atypical communication styles; or
- Aggression, hyperactivity, or impulsivity

The individual's condition must interfere with their or other students' academic progress and occur in school and at least one additional setting outside of school. The behavior(s) must contrast with their cultural and ethnic norms and be significantly different from that of their grade-level peers. To qualify for special education with the label of EBD, a student must demonstrate need via an evaluation that includes (a) nationally normed behavioral rating scales (with clinically significant scores), (b) intellectual ability and achievement assessments, (c) at least three observations, (d) interviews with a parent, the

student, and a teacher, (e) a mental health screening, and (f) a functional behavioral assessment (FBA).

For a student to be diagnosed with EBD based on the statute (2007) criteria described in (A) above, the individual may demonstrate the following:

- Isolating self from peers,
- Displaying intense fears or school refusal,
- Being overly perfectionistic,
- Failing to express emotion,
- Displaying a pervasive sad disposition,
- Developing physical symptoms related to worry or stress, and
- Changes in eating or sleeping patterns.

Additionally, a student can be diagnosed based on criteria B from the (2007) statute above if the individual demonstrates the following:

- Reality distortion beyond normal developmental fantasy and play or talk;
- Inappropriate laughter, crying, sounds, or language;
- Self-mutilation, developmentally inappropriate sexual acting out, or developmentally inappropriate self-stimulation;
- Rigid, ritualistic patterning;
- Perseveration or obsession with specific objects;
- Overly affectionate behavior towards unfamiliar persons; and
- Hallucinating or delusions of grandeur.

Lastly, behaviors associated with criteria C from the above statute (2007) include

- Physically or verbally abusive behaviors
- Impulsive or violent, destructive, or intimidating behaviors
- Behaviors that are threatening to others or excessively antagonistic

An estimated 12 percent of children have emotional or behavioral needs that could qualify them for receiving special education services (Forness et al., 2012). However, less than one percent, or about 350,000 students (ages 5-21) in elementary and secondary schools, receive special education services with a primary label of emotional or behavioral disorders (EBD; U.S. Department of Education, 2020a). This is mainly because of narrow yet unclear criteria (Walker & Gresham, 2014), such as adversely impacting students' "educational or developmental performance" (Minnesota Stat. § 3525.1329, 2007). In some cases, the student may receive services under a different primary label (Forness, 2005). In one study, students with criteria that could make them eligible for EBD were over five times more likely to be diagnosed with a different disability in elementary school (Redden et al., 2002).

Any of the above criteria can be utilized to qualify for services under the EBD label. In a study of 1,025 special educators, Becker et al. (2014) investigated educators' perspectives on elements around eligibility and placement of students with EBD. The researchers found that teachers understood adult and peer-directed aggression and disruptive classroom behaviors as the most relevant factors in determining a student's eligibility for EBD. These behaviors are most apparent in criteria C of the above statute. Furthermore, teachers frequently find male and Black students demonstrating disruptive

behavior (Silva et al., 2015). This bias then creates the beginning of a structure for an overrepresentation of Black males diagnosed with EBD.

Gender and Race Differences in Diagnosis. Statistical differences based on race and gender exist in identifying students who qualify for an EBD diagnosis. Of the 350,000 students diagnosed with EBD, 70 percent are males (U.S. Department of Education, 2020b). Students who are American Indian, Alaskan Native, African American, and Pacific Islander are significantly more likely to be diagnosed with EBD than their White peers (U.S. Department of Education, 2020b). Black students have a 2.0 risk ratio (are twice as likely) to be diagnosed with EBD in comparison to their grade-level peers. In contrast to students who are Hispanic and white, Black students are 300 percent and 200 percent more likely to have the diagnosis, respectively (U.S. Department of Education, 2020b). According to Grimmett et al. (2016), diagnostic factors beyond that of the student's health include evaluator bias. The lack of specificity and subjectivity in identifying someone with EBD provides a greater opportunity for evaluator bias (Algozzine et al., 2017). Other areas in which such biases about people of color are apparent include the diagnosis of people with attention deficit disorder, the sentiment of being oppositional, and the perception that one possesses conduct problems (Feisthamel & Schwartz, 2009), all of which may have a compounding effect for students with behavioral needs. Similarly, Hays et al. (2010) concluded that an overdiagnosis might be due to the evaluator's low cultural competency, creating a predisposition to stereotype Black males as criminals and likely to demonstrate hostility, aggression, and violent

behavior. Together, these perceptions and biases equate to a distinct population of students, Black males, who fit such criteria for EBD more frequently.

Isolation. Students with EBD are secluded outside the general education setting more than their peers who are not diagnosed with EBD receiving special education services, despite no measurable advantage (Powers et al., 2015). Moreover, there are significant disadvantages for students with EBD, such as further bullying and involvement in more fights due to such seclusion (Powers et al., 2015). In addition, if a student begins receiving special education services and is removed from general education classes, they frequently interpret this as rejection by the school. This removal leads to decreased academic motivation, stigmatization, and disaffiliation with mainstream peers. Ultimately this experience fuels elevated rates of depressed moods and school dropout. This outcome is especially true for students who are intellectually similar to their peers (Lane et al., 2005). Of students with special education services, 60 percent are in the general education setting for at least 80 percent of the school day, while 48 percent of students with EBD are in a general education setting for 80 percent or more of their school day (U.S. Department of Education, 2020b).

Additionally, Becker et al. (2014) noted that the most significant factors in determining the extent to which students with EBD are in a more restrictive setting are adult and peer-directed aggression and disruptive behavior. This finding may cause students with EBD, specifically Black males, to be more vulnerable to such isolation because Black males are identified as demonstrating such behaviors and needing such services more frequently due in part to bias.

An additional exclusionary factor that significantly impacts students with EBD and Black males is suspension. According to Sullivan et al. (2014), 47 percent of students with EBD were suspended for at least one day, and 30 percent were suspended for multiple days. Students with EBD were more than twice as likely to be suspended than their peers with special educational needs. Anyon et al. (2014) found that students diagnosed with EBD were the most likely to have a behavioral referral and suspension in an urban school district (Denver Public Schools). The likelihood of suspension for a student with EBD was more than two times that of their grade-level peers. Black students were over 1.5 times more likely to be suspended than their white peers, and males were 1.2 times more likely to be suspended (Anyon et al., 2014). From a statewide analysis of Wisconsin's discipline data, Bal et al. (2019) found that Black students were 7.29 times more likely to be removed from the learning environment. Sullivan et al. (2014) noted that the overuse of suspension exasperated the students' social and emotional needs.

Self-Concept

Kinch (1963) defined self-concept as an "organization of qualities that the individual attributes to himself" (p. 481). This concept starts with the individual noting that they exist separately and are distinct from other individuals. The self-concept comprises attributes and roles that Mead (1934) noted are created through social experience. As the self-concept forms, it guides an individual's behaviors (Kinch, 1963). Thus, a great deal of power exists in an individual's lived experiences and social interactions because these experiences and interactions build the individual's

understanding of their "self" and, in turn, impact their ongoing behaviors and ways of living.

Through childhood, a person's sense of self is primarily created and maintained by their interactions with their parents' expressed values and norms (Crocetti et al., 2008). This identity foundation is affirmed and revised during adolescence through daily identity formation and uncertainty based on social experiences (Becht et al., 2016). Crocetti et al. (2008) created a model for developing one's identity that incorporated three interconnected processes: *commitment*, *in-depth exploration,* and *reconsideration of commitment*. The foundation of their ideas came from Marcia's (1966) conceptual understandings. Commitments are ways that one sees themselves at any given time. An in-depth exploration occurs through an individual gathering more information, reflecting, and communicating about their commitments, causing a reconsideration and a possible revised commitment.

Gender, race, and ableness impact one's self-concept. Gage and Lierheimer's (2012) study discovered that urbanicity and ethnicity impacted the self-concept of students with EBD. The researchers found that the self-concept of many students of color labeled EBD worsened from elementary to middle school to high school. Tyler et al. (2016) found a correlation between internalizing racist stereotypes and self-handicapping in academics. These participants owned the stereotype as part of their identity by internalizing stereotypes. Furthermore, Rogers and Way's research (2016) discovered that ninth-grade Black males did one of three things in incorporating race and gender into their identity. They endorsed racial and gender stereotypes, rejected racial stereotypes but

accepted gender stereotypes, or rejected both racial and gender stereotypes. Additionally, these rejections or endorsements caused tangible impacts on the students' identities, impacting their future behaviors.

Similarly, Nasir (2012) examined a high-achieving, accomplished, college-bound Black male's journey from 11th through 12th grade. The researcher noted that a person's identity could be both a possibility and a limitation as it develops from lived experiences in various settings. In this case, the student stated he grew tired of challenging the perceptions of others and the greater society as his school attendance, grades, and promising hope to enter college faded. Further understanding of the self-concept of Black male students with EBD is necessary to gain a better understanding of current practices and how they impact them during adolescence.

Critical Race Theory: Intersectionality

As Crenshaw (1989) found it critical to acknowledge and understand the intersections of gender and race for Black females due to "the intersectional experience (being) greater than the sum of racism and sexism" (p. 140), it is necessary to do the same with the overlapping identities of race, gender, and disability in this study of male students diagnosed with EBD. School experience, behavior, and academic success are greatly influenced by the intersection of race and gender (Jethwani, 2015). Simultaneously, it is evident that adding a third component, such as a person's disability (and EBD in particular), may further increase discrimination as these students are more isolated, less likely to graduate college, and more likely to be imprisoned.

Outcomes

The outcomes of African American males, specifically those individuals with EBD needs, are built partly on a system rooted in oppression. Students diagnosed with EBD frequently endure adverse outcomes. Compared to their peers, students with EBD are the least likely to graduate from high school and earn a college degree (U.S. Department of Education, 2020a). Chesmore et al. (2016) studied students diagnosed with EBD in an urban environment through a longitudinal study. Students diagnosed with EBD were more likely to suffer from substance abuse (60 percent) and depression (133 percent). The author also found that if the students did graduate, they frequently had continued needs in adjusting to adulthood. Parents stated that students with EBD continued to demonstrate significant needs due to emotional problems, impulsivity, oppositional defiance, and poor coping skills (Wynne et al., 2013). The students' capacities and skill sets were not developed fully in school. Students with EBD were 1.6 times more likely to be incarcerated than their general education peers (Chesmore et al., 2016), and an estimated 60 percent of students who had a diagnosis of EBD and dropped out of high school were imprisoned within four years (Newman et al., 2009).

As students diagnosed with EBD are recurrently imprisoned, so too are Black males, adding to the adverse outcomes due to the intersection of race, gender, and ableness. In 2016, among 18 and 19-year-old males, African Americans were 11.8 times more likely to be imprisoned than their white peers (Carson, 2018). Furthermore, when Black males are convicted of a crime, they receive longer sentences. According to the United States Sentencing Commission (2017), Black males' sentences are 19.1 percent

longer than White males for similar crimes. King and Johnson (2016) found that not only a man's skin tone, but also Afrocentric features could play a role in sentencing.

Black males diagnosed with EBD are subjected to societal and systematic failures. An overrepresentation of Black males diagnosed with EBD exists, and these young men become isolated from their general education peers and too frequently have their needs unmet. These failures impact their tangible outcomes and their self-concept. The basis of this study is to discover the lived experiences of Black male students diagnosed with EBD and the impact of such lived experiences on their self-concept.

Purpose Statement and Research Questions

The purpose of this qualitative study was to gain an understanding of the lived experiences of four Black male high school students diagnosed with EBD. The intersection of race, gender, and disability was investigated through a multiple-case study exploring how the participants' self-concepts were developed and impacted by school experiences. The primary research questions were:

1. What are the lived experiences of Black male students diagnosed with EBD?
2. How have the lived experiences of Black male students diagnosed with EBD impacted their self-concept?

Significance of the Research

This study uncovered the views of a distinct population of students who are under-researched and have fewer opportunities: Black male high school students diagnosed with EBD. It exposed how students are affected by current practices and

school environments through their lived experiences and more deeply about how these experiences affect their self-concept. The study includes students who battled racial and disability bias. Schools need to hear from this vulnerable population. It benefits teachers and administrators to understand the lived experiences and the impact of current practices. This information may provide a platform to adopt better practices to support and challenge students.

Delimitations and Limitations

This research explicitly studied Black males diagnosed with EBD. The specific focus impacts the generalizability and transferability but also provides a larger understanding of the lived experiences and the effects of these experiences on the population's self-concept. This study is not generalizable, rather will provide a greater understanding of the lived experiences of four Black male students diagnosed with EBD.

Furthermore, as a white male, I benefit from racism within our society. I have gained access to education, resources, and employment that are given to me in part due to my race, ableness, and gender. My privileges and lived experiences helped form my point of view. Although I have taught in an urban school setting, explicitly serving many students that fit the criteria my study is investigating, I am biased. My lived experiences are different from the population I am researching. While I attempted to reduce my biases, I hold certain perspectives that others may not, impacting my interpretation, writing, and theories.

Definitions of Key Terms

Emotional or Behavioral Disorders (EBD). A school-based diagnosis that grants student accommodations, modifications, and special education services due to their needs that significantly impact academic progress.

Intersectionality. "The interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class, and gender, regarded as creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage; a theoretical approach based on such a premise" (Oxford University Press, 2019).

Self-concept. Personal perception of self made up of thoughts, feelings, and behaviors.

CHAPTER II

Review of the Literature

"It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men," Frederick Douglass exclaimed, fighting for the ethical treatment of Black Americans in 1855 (Mapp & Gabel, 2019). Unfortunately, Black males are subjected to a societal system that perceives them as mean, undeserving, and less than others. Rather than empowering Black males with EBD, school systems restrict their capacity to grow, maintaining a system of white supremacy. Taking a step back to recognize the construction of race and the history of Black males' disenfranchisement in the United States is a purposeful starting point in this literature review. Baldwin (1953) wrote in his essay "Stranger in the Village" that "People are trapped in history, and history is trapped in them," as he expanded on the racial situation in the United States from the perspective of a Black man. Ibram X. Kendi (2019) provided a similar sentiment, stating, "If you don't know Black history, then you don't know American history. If you don't know American history, then you don't know America. If you don't know America, then you don't know yourself." Grounding this review in the historical context of race as a construct that has oppressed African Americans supports subsequent sections about research on students with EBD, specifically, Black males with behavioral needs. This understanding helps to more deeply understand the impact of their lived experiences on their self-concept.

Color Caste System

"We are all wired for expansive learning, high intellectual performance, and self-determination" (Jackson, 2015, p. vi). The problem, however, is that humans

disenfranchise others, interfering with their ability to self-actualize. According to Smedley (1993), a color caste system was created with colonialism and continues to be reinforced for political and economic gains. Race exists as a social construct fashioned to benefit some and disenfranchise others through five assumptions:

1. All members of a particular race share characteristics distinct from other groups.
2. These characteristics include physical differences (skin color, eye shape, bone structure) and possibly behavior and intellectual differences.
3. These characteristics are biological and present in one's genes.
4. These genes/characteristics are passed from one generation to the next.
5. Race is associated with a group's original geographic location. (Stanford, 2016)

Three Beginnings

In *Black Man Emerging*, White and Cones (1999) noted three beginnings for African American males. They describe each beginning's impact on the Black male through seven important foundational characteristics: spirituality, interdependence, holism, humanism, emotional vitality, rhythm, and oral tradition. The first beginning preceded race and was built through a cohesive, rich culture created by independent African tribes. The second existed as a direct contrast to the first. Shackles, chains, whips, and involuntary servitude of slavery deliberately dismantled their sense of masculinity, culture, social constructs, and spirituality. The third beginning is the time

from the Civil War to the present day when a continued network of systems and structures maintained a racial hierarchy (White & Cones, 1999).

The First Beginning

The first beginning was when Black males were able to develop a sense of independence and shared values in Africa. Boys could build a positive understanding of self, identity, and masculinity. The barrier of race was not apparent in their lives and, therefore, did not impact their self-worth.

The concept of race has a long history tracing back to ancient Greek and Roman civilizations. Isaac (2004) found that some Greek and Roman scholars shared proto-racist views of other groups of people. These scholars shared their understandings of other groups of people through stereotypes, applying characteristics to a population dependent on their location/climate. They determined these characteristics passed from one generation to the next, assigned different groups distinct physical, mental, and moral capacities, and recognized some groups as superior or inferior to others (Isaac, 2004). While not everyone held this same understanding, Isaac noted that this literature influenced European thinking centuries later.

This early literature supported ideas fashioned in the 1400s to defend the practice of slavery. Slavery was common practice for centuries before, but Gomes Eanes de Zurara took it a step further in the utilization of race created in his book, *The Chronicles of the Discovery and Conquest of Guinea* (Zurara et al., 1896). In it, he depicted Africans as inferior beasts who needed taming to help them become saved from themselves via enslavement and Christianity (Zurara et al., 1896). Furthermore, enslaving Africans to

save their morality provided an additional reason to use them as their captives. This idea passed through Europe and quickly revised the idea of the population meriting enslavement based on color. It later became normalized in American culture (Kendi, 2016).

The Second Beginning

The second beginning for African Americans was via the slave ship. The captivity of Africans changed the way of life and ways of thinking for Black males, as their rights and political power became exterminated. Black Africans were acculturated into the new European worldview through chains, imprisonment, and a life of servitude, eventually creating a general sense of inferiority in Black males (White & Cones, 1999). Many U.S. leaders created systems and structures and profited from messaging Black people as "less than." For instance, Thomas Jefferson's *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1787) affirmed Blacks' essence as property in society, detailing the way they should be traded and inherited, dealt with upon committing a crime, and further narrating the Black person's general inferiority of mind and body (Jefferson, 1787). Abolitionists such as Phillis Wheatley, Benjamin Banneker, David Walker, and Fedrick Douglas countered the likes of Thomas Jefferson and Samuel Morton's proposition of Blacks' inferiority.

In 1790, the number of enslaved people in the United States grew to 760,000. From 1790 to 1860, the beginning of the American Civil War, the number of slaves increased to 4.4 million people (The Census Bureau, 1864). Using the narratives of slaveholders and witnesses, Weld (1839) depicted realities for slaves as inhumane in terms of food rations and quality, general living quarters and treatment, working

conditions, and punishments. Punishments were both brutal and made in public to impose and maintain a system of control. In the early 19th century, racism was apparent in the North, including detaining 31,000 individuals as slaves (Horton & Horton, 1997). Additionally, Horton (1999) described Black freedmen as neither free nor slave as their race interfered with their opportunity to vote, provided incomplete citizenship, exempted them from some occupations, cast them as requiring aid due to their inferiority, and caused them to repeatedly be victimized by white mobs in churches, on streets, and in schools.

The Third Beginning

The third beginning, after the Civil War, did not bring about equality because Black men continued to be depicted throughout society as unintelligent sub-humans deserving of a subordinate role (White & Cones, 1999). The result was a multi-system web of oppression. Entertainment, racial science, violence, Jim Crow laws, education systems, politics, and social disenfranchisement caused negative ramifications in terms of education attainment, criminology, income, social standing, and political power that continue to exist today.

After the Civil War, significant barriers and trauma for Black Americans persisted. First, slavery by the state was permutated through the 13th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, abolishing slavery only in part: “Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have duly convicted, shall exist within the United States” (U.S. Const. amend. XIII). This exception was especially significant due to the likelihood of a Black person being convicted of

lawbreaking. The retention of Black men via imprisonment and convict leasing became a norm, especially in the South, where freedmen were identified as offenders and again labeled as needing discipline and control (Adamson, 1983). An example of this appeared in the *Annapolis Gazette* in Maryland in 1866, a year after the abolishment of slavery:

> Public Sale—The undersigned will sell at the Court House Door in the city of Annapolis at 12 o'clock M., on Saturday the 8th December 1866, A Negro man named Richard Harris, for six months, convicted at the October term, 1866, of the Ann Arundel County Circuit Court for larceny and sentenced by the court to be sold as a slave.
>
> Terms of sale—cash.
>
> WM. Bryan,
>
> Sheriff Anne Arundel County.
>
> Dec. 8, 1866 (Childs, 1866, p. 57)

Inequitable laws increased the likelihood of Black male imprisonment, infringing on their ability to live freely and provide for their families. While there was an initial effort to provide 40 acres and a mule to all freedmen through the Southern Homestead Act of 1866 and the Civil Rights Act of 1866, opposing interests largely defeated the effort after the assassination of Abraham Lincoln (Edwards, 2019). Racial segregation in schools, buses, parks, and businesses was promoted through Jim Crow Laws and endorsed to maintain the unequal status between Black and white Americans. Such laws also impacted Black males' ability to vote and have political representation (Morris, 1999). Additional efforts around maintaining and reinventing dehumanization,

specifically segregation, existed after the *Plessy v. Ferguson* case supporting the ideology of "separate but equal" (Supreme Court of the United States, 1895). This decree interfered with Black people's ability to accumulate wealth. In 1910, Baltimore passed the West Segregation Ordinance to enforce racially segregated neighborhoods, linking Black families with poor property values and the cause of decreased property values when Black Americans moved into white neighborhoods (Halpin, 2018). Similar regulations appeared across the United States in the years following via culture, law, and redlining.

Brown v. Board of Education was celebrated as a monumental piece of legislation, ending the separate but equal doctrine. It asserted, "Segregation with the sanction of law, therefore, has a tendency to [retard] the education and mental development of negro children and deprive them of some of the benefits they would receive in a racial[ly] integrated system" (*Brown v. Board of Education*, 1954). This ruling brought about a perception of equity by declaring separate public schools unconstitutional but contained flaws in the articulation of the law and the omission of how to proceed. Derrick Bell (1980) found that, at the very least, the decision may have increased awareness, which he recognized as the first step in dismantling racial inequality. Still, the decision inherently placed a deficit mindset on Black children. Specifically, in Brown's cases moving up to the Supreme Court case, Brown argued that although resources, buildings, and teacher qualifications were equal, the schools were inferior. The Brown family spoke of how they loved their segregated school but found it wrong that their child could not attend a school significantly closer to their house because

of her skin color. However, the ruling supported the findings that pure segregation of a race from another would inherently "retard" *only* the Black community.

Additionally, the *Brown* ruling effect on education specifically for students of color continued to be debated, as it failed to address how to integrate schools and thus caused a disenfranchisement of African American teachers, administrators, and most notably, students (Lash & Ratcliffe, 2014). In the 1950s, of all African American professionals, one-half were teachers (Foster, 1996). However, since that time, the percentage of Black educators has decreased. Currently, seven percent of teachers are African American (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development, Policy and Program Studies Service, 2016). This decrease may result from such factors as closing previously all-Black schools, revised teacher certification requirements, the demotion and firing of Black educators and administrators, and the inability to hire new African American teachers upon others' retirement (Lash & Ratcliffe, 2014). The *Brown* Supreme Court ruling preceded other major civil rights victories, including Rosa Parks's historic bus protest, the Little Rock Nine's attempt to integrate the high school in Arkansas, and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "I have a dream" speech (López & Burciaga 2014). Despite these movements and steps toward equality, inequitable realities persisted.

Skin Color of a Criminal

Black Americans have continuously been overrepresented in prison. In 1880, Black Americans made up 13 percent of the U.S. population but 29 percent of the prison population (Cahalan, 1986). The likelihood of imprisonment for Black Americans

continued to increase: in 1923, Black Americans made up 10 percent of the U.S. population but 32 percent of the imprisoned population, and in 1970, 11 percent of the population and 41 percent of the prison population (Cahalan, 1986). At the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, illegal lynching was a common practice most prevalent in the South, where slavery was previously most widespread. At least 3,265 Black individuals died via lynching across the country between 1883 and 1941 (Seguin & Rigby, 2019). Ida B. Wells, a significant anti-lynching activist and abolitionist, categorized such lynching as a form of terrorism since it was conducted after a breach of law such as rape but more so exercised in such instances of Black Americans accruing wealth (Squires, 2015). This terrorism and the lack of opportunity caused many Black Americans to travel north during the great migration. In 1910, 89 percent of Black Americans lived in the South, and by 1970, that number had decreased to 53 percent (Gibson & Jung, 2002).

Although Black Americans' imprisonment was not new, during the 1970s to 1990s, new legislation fueled a corrupt and racist system. Racial and ethnic bias played a significant role in The War on Drugs beginning in the 1970s. Alexander (2010) theorized that the effort was built systematically to continue to infringe on people based on race and has resulted in the mass incarceration of Black males. According to Mitchell and Caudy (2016), drug trafficking and usage rates between the races are similar, and more specifically, the usage of harder drugs is higher for white Americans. However, the rate of arrests and convictions is significantly higher for Black men (Mitchell & Caudy, 2016). Moreover, Mitchell et al. (2017) found that imprisonment for drug offenses does

not lead to a decrease in reconviction but generates a continuous cycle. Gaston (2018) found that numerous arrests for drug possession were initiated due to racial bias using "out-of-place policing," stopping individuals of a race other than the majority in a community (Gaston, 2018).

There are significantly more African American adults imprisoned or under correctional supervision today than enslaved in 1850 (Alexander, 2010). In 2016, among 18 and 19-year-old males, African Americans were 11.8 times more likely to be imprisoned than their white peers, and such a disparity exists through all age groups, with the smallest disparity between Black and White males 4.4 times for individuals 65 years of age and older (Carson, 2018). Additionally, Western (2006) found that 22.4 percent of Black males born between 1965 and 1969 were incarcerated at any given point in their lifetime, while their same-age white peers had a rate of 3.2 percent. Furthermore, Black males receive longer sentences. According to the United States Sentencing Commission (2017), the sentences for Black males are 19.1 percent longer than for white males for similar crimes. More specifically, Black males receive over 20 percent longer sentences for violent crimes. King and Johnson (2016) discovered that not only a man's skin tone but also Afrocentric features could play a role in sentencing. From a sample of 866 booking photos of male offenders, the researchers found a correlation between skin color and Afrocentric features (broad noses, wide lips, and coarse hair) and harsher sanctions. The severity of the sanctions was in the following order from least to greatest: White, White with Afrocentric features, Black, and Black with Afrocentric features.

Simultaneously, Black males are the most frequent population subjected to police brutality and to be intervened with lethal force by police (Buehler, 2017).

Economic Consequences

A multitude of systems and factors disadvantaging Black Americans have resulted in economic and social realities. All levels of government, businesses, and residents have promoted and utilized residential segregation. According to Rothstein (2017), housing segregation has alienated and maintained inferior spaces for Black Americans, particularly in urban locations. He recognized that governmental laws, regulations, and practices continue to systematically support segregation in every metropolitan area, including those in the Midwest, West, and North. In 1921, the national lending standards began factoring in demographic information as a tool for appraising the property value, and the weight of such information exceeded even the property's condition (Woods, 2012). Furthermore, "The Color of Money" by Bill Dedman (1989) highlighted continued discrimination against Black Americans through a series of articles noting Black families as more than twice as likely to be declined for home mortgage loans (Dedman, 1989). Moreover, in a recent study, Quillian, Lee, and Honoré (2020) noted a decline in housing discrimination since the 1970s; however, loan denials continue to occur more frequently for persons of color, decreasing only slightly since the late 1970s. Similarly, significant racial gaps persist in mortgage costs, and people of color are provided fewer options and worse treatment in the process of searching for a house (Quillian et al., 2020). These gaps cause ramifications in terms of accruing wealth, the

capability of owning a home, and a decrease in options in terms of neighborhoods and attending certain schools.

A continuous lack of income has plagued Black Americans since the end of the Civil War. After reconstruction, some laws started to promote equality, but the median income for Black families was still 51 cents on the dollar to their white counterparts (U.S. Census Bureau, 1999). While continued progress decreased the difference, inequality persists. In 2014, the disparity between the median household incomes of African Americans ($39,490) and their white peers ($65,041) was over $25,500 (Semega et al., 2017). Additionally, de Brey et al. (2019) utilized data from 2016 and found that the income disparity persists through all ages and educational attainment. The median salary for Black Americans was $33,700 and $44,900 for white individuals for 25-34-year-old full-time workers, with a disparity of $8,000 for individuals with less than a bachelor's degree and about a $5,000 disparity for those that attained at least a bachelor's degree. The same study found that a gap persists in the contexts of working and enrollment in college as well. In 2017, among 18-19-year-old individuals, 16 percent of Black people were neither working nor enrolled in school compared to 9 percent of their white peers. For 20-24-year-olds, the difference was 7 percent between the two groups (de Brey et al., 2019). Accrued family capital also advantaged white families as the median wealth of white persons was $143,000, in contrast to $8,935 for Black individuals in the United States (Herring & Henderson, 2016). In 2016, African Americans were 13.2 percent more likely to live below the poverty line than their white counterparts. Moreover, 34 percent

of the Black children lived below the poverty line, and the children were three times more likely to live below the poverty line than their white peers (de Brey et al., 2019).

Educational Ramifications

Black students make up 14 percent of the United States K-12 education system students. For more equitable opportunities, Rothstein (2015) asserted a need to desegregate neighborhoods to make it possible for schools to integrate different races and social and economic diversity. While states did increase the equality of school district funding for schools with significantly less funding due to their local tax base from 1990-2014, social resource inequities have grown from 1990 to 2014. These social resources exasperate any district's limited capacity, and the concentrated disadvantage deprives the effect of the matched funding (Bischoff & Owens, 2019). This disadvantage is especially concentrated in urban districts where much research has focused on teacher stress (Shernoff et al., 2011), the effects of teacher turnover (Ronfeldt et al., 2013), violence, and unsafe schools (Milam et al., 2010), and the underachievement of students (Levin, 2009). According to Lawrence and Mollborn (2017), while Black families are more likely to seek information about a school's performance, they cannot do what many White parents do: move to neighborhoods with better schools.

Furthermore, another educational issue that continues to plague Black males is school discipline. During the 2013-14 school year, 13.7 percent of Black students were suspended from school. This rate is significantly higher than any other race. Schools suspended 3.4 percent of white students in the same year. Moreover, when accounting for the intersection of gender and race, schools suspend Black males most frequently at 17.6

percent (de Brey et al., 2019). Morris & Perry (2016) found this exceptionally significant since it accounted for 1/5 of the difference in school performance between Black and white students. Additionally, 13 percent of Black students reported involvement in a physical fight on the school premises, seven percent more than their white peers. During the same school year, Black students were approximately twice as likely to be expelled from school as their white peers, and males were more likely to be expelled than females (de Brey et al., 2019).

Many past events and current structures have created a system in which Black Americans are not performing as well academically. Black Americans have a four-year high school graduation rate of 76 percent compared to 88 percent for their white peers (McFarland et al., 2018). While the average disparity in the United States is 12 percent, the District of Columbia (23 percent), Minnesota (22 percent), Nevada (23 percent), New York (21 percent), Ohio (20 percent), and Wisconsin (29 percent) have the most substantial high school graduation gap between Black and white students (McFarland et al., 2018). Furthermore, there is an over-representation of Black students in special education, with 16 percent of Black students receiving services via the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) compared to 14 percent of white students and 13 percent across all races (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). The average National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reading and math scale scores are consistently lower for Black students than any other race. At the same time, Black students are the least likely to enroll in higher-level mathematics (calculus and pre-calculus) or earn credits in International Baccalaureate or Advanced Placement classes

(de Brey et al., 2019). Additionally, the ACT reflects similar disparities as the average score for Black (16.9) and white (22.2) students are 5.3 points apart (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2019a). SAT scores are 946 and 1123, respectively (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2019b).

Disparities also exist in post-secondary achievement. In 2016, 36 percent of Black young adults (age 18-24) enrolled in a 2-4-year college compared to 42 percent of white adults, 39 percent of Hispanic adults, and 58 percent of Asian adults. Black males (compared to other female and male and Hispanic and white peers) have the lowest percentage of young adults attending 2-4-year colleges at 33 percent. Black undergraduate students earn a bachelor's degree within four years 21 percent of the time, compared to 45 percent of their white peers. Black students graduate within six years 40 percent of the time compared to their white peers, who graduate at a rate of 64 percent. The rate of Black males (34 percent) graduating within six years is the lowest among all intersections of race and gender (de Brey et al., 2019).

Emotional or Behavioral Disorders

The ambiguity of the educational disability, emotional disturbance (ED; the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act label of EBD) allows disproportionality and bias to play a role in the identification process. Gresham (2007) found that the federal definition utilized "vague" and "illogical" criteria. These criteria created a system where 12 percent of children demonstrated symptoms of an EBD diagnosis (Forness et al., 2012). However, less than 1 percent of students received services with a primary label

EBD (U.S. Department of Education, 2020a). Special education teachers found adult and peer-directed aggression and disruptive classroom behaviors as the most relevant factors in determining a student's eligibility for EBD (Becker et al., 2014).

However, teachers employ implicit bias in identifying students of color more frequently for behaviors such as classroom disruptions. Girvan et al. (2017) discovered that most of the variance between Black and white students in the disproportionality of office referrals results from teachers' subjectivity. This same subjectivity thus impacts teachers' perception of students needing or not needing services for EBD. Prior research, such as Silva et al. (2015), found that females were most likely to receive positive reinforcement for positive behavior, and white students received praise for safe behavior more frequently. Black students and males were most likely to receive reports of inappropriate behavior. In response, Downs et al. (2018) found that students at risk for EBD are more sensitive to such feedback. Students at risk of EBD demonstrated a propensity to shut down and disengage more to teacher reprimands than their peers. Praise also impacted them more, causing them to demonstrate the expected behaviors (Downs et al., 2018). These factors negatively impact and disadvantage males, and students of color, at risk of EBD. They are more likely to receive negative feedback resulting in more disengagement and reprimands. Additionally, reprimands are increasingly more popular in higher grade levels than praise (Reddy et al., 2013), setting up factors for further disengagement.

The current disproportionality of the number of disciplinary actions reflects educator biases. Black students accounted for 11.2 percent of the K-12 student population

in Minnesota during the 2018-2019 school year; however, Black students made up 38.4 percent of the disciplinary actions (out-of-school suspension for one day or more, expulsion or exclusion). Compared to white students, Black students were 6.3 times more likely to receive such consequences (Minnesota Department of Education, 2020). Downs et al. (2018) concluded that optimizing the praise/reprimanding ratios could support students at risk for developing an emotional or behavioral disorder. Lewis (2016) added that a school staff needs further and ongoing professional development to provide a continuum of interventions, all of which must be done with fidelity. The current systems and fidelity of interventions are lacking, causing biases in who receives services.

During the 2018-19 school year, of the 344,473 U.S. students that qualify for services under the EBD label, 243,855 (70.8%) students were male, or to put it another way, males were 2.42 times more likely to qualify for special education services with the label EBD (U.S. Department of Education, 2020b). Additionally, Black students are two times as likely to be diagnosed with EBD than their peers (U.S. Department of Education, 2020a), accounting for 80,600 students diagnosed with EBD (U.S. Department of Education, 2020a). Further data from the state and federal level was sought regarding the intersection of race and gender, Black and male; however, the data around disability is not disaggregated in this manner. Further research must be completed to understand this intersection at local, state, and national levels.

Becker et al. (2014) investigated educators' perspectives on elements around eligibility and placement of students with the disability EBD. The teachers identified teachers, psychologists, and family members as those with the most active role in

determining if a student qualified for the diagnosis. Administrators, counselors, social workers, and nurses were also perceived as having an active role, while teachers perceived that mental health providers and the student had the least active role. Scardamalia et al. (2018) reported that school psychologists demonstrated great differences in interpreting the same assessment results, such as teacher reports, educational history, and interview information, naming these assessments consistently inconsistent. The psychologists' conclusions were divided on whether the same student should qualify. Of those who found the student should qualify, the psychologists were also divided on the different primary reasons (depression, anxiety, or inappropriate behavior).

Levels of Service

Once a student is diagnosed with a disability, they transition into special education services. The Minnesota Department of Education (2016) stipulates various levels of service dependent on location and amount of time outside of the general education setting, as follows:

Federal Setting Code 01: less than 21 percent of the school day.

Federal Setting code 02: between 21 and 60 percent of the school day.

Federal Setting Code 03: at least 60 percent of the school day.

Federal Setting Code 04-07: students receive services outside of the general education building for at least 50 percent of the school day.

According to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004, students are to be in the least restrictive environment, meaning a student's

education should take place with general education peers to “the maximum extent appropriate.” Students are placed in an alternative setting most frequently when students with EBD display chronic behaviors that impede learning or endanger themselves or others (Atkins & Bartuska, 2010). According to the U.S. Department of Education (2020a), 48 percent of students labeled EBD receive services in the general education setting for at least 80 percent of the school day, and an additional 17 percent are in the general education setting between 40 and 79 percent of the school day.

A More Restrictive Environment

Myklebust (2006) found conflicting results when it comes to a more restrictive setting. Students in a more restrictive setting earned higher grades and were less likely to drop out but demonstrated lower levels of academic achievement. Powers et al. (2015) found that many samples that show positive results for more-restrictive settings are not generalizable across classrooms or schools because of small sample sizes. They thus dismissed such studies as they identified them as an inconsistent exception. Rose et al. (2015) found that students in more restrictive placements experience more bullying victimization than their general education peers. Additionally, compared to peers with EBD in less restrictive settings, the students in the more restrictive settings are involved in more fights. The researchers believed these negative ramifications might be due in part to significantly different school experiences with fewer opportunities to interact in positive social environments causing reciprocal behaviors within the more isolated setting.

Powers et al. (2015) completed a study on students with conduct problems at school. They found that although no advantage was apparent for students in the more restrictive setting, there may have been a benefit for those not in the restrictive setting due to the exclusion of their peers. The researchers found that students in younger grades were more likely to be in restrictive settings due to academic needs. Students in a more restrictive setting (at least 750 minutes/week) in grades 7-10 demonstrated more conduct disorder symptoms and higher rates of high school non-completion. Furthermore, the adverse effects of being separated from grade-level peers were highest for students with higher cognitive abilities.

A move to a more restrictive setting happens recurrently in schools. According to Becker et al. (2014), the highest-rated factors impacting the degree of restrictiveness for students with EBD were adult and peer-directed aggression, disruptive behavior, emotional problems, and lack of success in a less restrictive setting. Additionally, parent advocacy or resistance, the capacity of the school staff to address the needs, patterns of suspension and detention, violations of school policies, academic problems, teacher recommendations, and school counselor and mental health provider recommendations were factors in determining restrictiveness. The factors with the least weight in determining a setting's restrictiveness included: truancy/absenteeism, substance use, the financial cost to the school, logistical issues for the school and family, gang involvement, and financial cost for the family. Students were placed in settings based on effectiveness, not the cost (homebound, web-based, general education to most restrictive settings).

However, team biases are apparent as Black students are less likely to be with their general education peers and more likely to be in a more restrictive setting (Skiba, 2013).

Insufficient research currently exists investigating the ability of students with EBD to decrease or eliminate special education services (Atkins & Bartuska, 2010). Hoge et al. (2012) discovered that few students transition from more restrictive placements to less restrictive placements. In their research, they discovered seven out of the 50 students made a complete transition out of alternative schools (level four programs) within a year. In total, 17 out of 50 students made some progress, demonstrated by an increase of attending no classes to at least one class with general education peers. Hoge et al. (2012) found that more factors played a role in moving to a less restrictive placement than moving to a more restrictive setting. Aggression, defiance, running from classroom/school, mental health concerns, danger to self, and a transfer from other settings were factors in admitting a student to a more restrictive setting. However, to exit the more restrictive setting, additional factors were taken into consideration. These included: attainment of program-wide goals, parent concerns, behavior regression, student resistance to transition, more evaluation needed, current placement is least restrictive placement (LRE), home instability, and a lack of openings (Hoge et al., 2012). According to Perzigian et al. (2016), providing opportunities to move back to their neighborhood school is especially significant as students who attend an alternative school earn fewer credits and have lower attendance than similar students attending their neighborhood school.

Impact of Education

Schools have demonstrated a limited effect on growth for students with EBD. Becker et al. (2014) investigated special education services' effectiveness from the special education teacher's perspective around different student needs—academic, emotional, behavioral, and vocational readiness. In meeting the needs of students diagnosed with EBD, the teachers reported that schools do the best in meeting these students' academic needs, giving this category 3.94 on a scale of 0 (very poorly) to 5 (very well). Teachers also found that schools do a relatively good job of addressing behavioral (3.77) and emotional (3.53) needs. In both these categories, the ratings from high school and middle school teachers were significantly different, with high school teachers rating their schools as worse in meeting behavioral and emotional needs. Teachers found that schools had the least success in capitalizing on students' strengths and talents (3.35) and vocational readiness (2.76; Becker et al., 2014). According to Wynne et al. (2013), few parents of students with EBD mentioned school as a factor that helped their child achieve positive adult outcomes, and more found school as a contributor to unsuccessful outcomes due to a negative environment, lack of education, and a lack of support. The majority noted success occurring due to family support and financial support, as well as the individual's characteristics, such as work ethic, attitude, maturity, and intelligence. Lastly, the study found that when a child completed high school, they were much more frequently viewed as successful later in life. When these results are coupled with statistics from Chapter 1, including high suspension rates,

incarceration rates, substance abuse, depression, and the lowest graduation rates, the apparent need is striking.

Researchers have identified keys to supporting students with EBD. In studying students with emotional and behavioral needs, Kern (2014) found three influential factors that must be addressed to maximize successful growth. These include relationship building, purposeful implementation of positive supports, and interventions implemented with fidelity. De Leeuw et al. (2020) added that student voice provided a deeper understanding and buy-in in creating a plan for the student. Furthermore, there exists a need for comprehensive care, support from administrators, the use of mental health professionals, trained teachers, and the amplification of families and student voice in decision-making (Becker, Paternite, & Evans, 2014). In addition, they found it necessary to use a whole-child approach to reach the student's academic behavioral and mental health needs and build more substantial stakeholder support to help the students with EBD improve holistically.

Lived Experiences and Self-Concept

Carter G. Woodson (1933) shared his understandings of the practices of capitalizing on Black men in U.S. society in *The Mis-Education of the Negro*:

> If you can control a man's thinking, you do not have to worry about his action. When you determine what a man shall think, you do not have to concern yourself about what he will do. If you make a man feel that he is inferior, you do not have to compel him to accept an inferior status, for he will seek it himself. If you make a man think that he is justly an outcast, you do not have to order him to the back

> door. He will go without being told; and if there is no back door, his very nature will demand one. (p. 31)

The marginalization of humans depresses their capacity to live, controls their experiences, and limits self-actualization. Individuals can only conquer the apex of Maslow's hierarchy of needs by solidifying the foundational components of physiological needs, safety and security, belonging, and esteem (Maslow, 1993). Viktor Frankl (1949) added to this research through his vision of man's continuous search for understanding their meaning and doing the best in their decisions, given their circumstances. These, in combination with Carl Rogers' understanding of the individual seeking congruence of their self-image with their ideal self, create a defined goal for all people. One may foster positive life outcomes by achieving these ideals, including autonomy, self-realization, and psychological empowerment (Shogren et al., 2017).

Self-Concept

The self-concept is a "central cognitive structure" that is "complex, consisting of diffuse public, private, and collective facets" (Greenwald & Pratkanis, 1984, p. 166). According to the reciprocal determinism theory, cognition, behavior, and environment continually impact each other (Bandura, 1978). Baumeister (1998) concluded that the concept of self has three primary functions: reflexive consciousness, interpersonal, and executive. The reflexive consciousness function provides an opportunity for the individual to build self-awareness. The self-concept can both observe and be observed (Ferris et al., 2018). It works in two ways: one, as an object that can be seen and valued, forming the basis for self-esteem and self-efficacy (Ferris et al., 2018), and also as a

subject, performing the operation of doing (Brockner & Wiesenfeld, 2016). The second function exists through interpersonal relationships in that the context impacts the self, and the self impacts the context. The self is both appraised by others and self-monitors and manages others' impressions of it (Ferris et al., 2018). Lastly, the self is an executive. It exerts control over itself and its environment by making decisions and taking and prolonging action based on motivation (Baumeister, 1998).

The self-concept changes over time due to social experiences (Gore & Cross, 2011). As stated in Chapter 1, an adolescent's social experiences affirm and revise schemas, elements of their self-concept, through a process of commitment, in-depth exploration, and reconsideration (Crocetti et al., 2008). Generally, children's self-concept is primarily based on relationships, but as a person moves into adolescence, a more in-depth understanding of their abilities and skills is developed. The self-concept can change less significantly and more specifically through situational factors like relationships or more significant and broader, based on the individual's skills and abilities (Gore & Cross, 2011). Aspects related to self-concept change, self-evaluation change (directionally, more positive/negative), and self-structure change (the way beliefs are organized) can alter how a person sees themself. A more optimistic or pessimistic perception can be caused by new realizations, stress, or a desire to protect the self (Gore & Cross, 2011). Three components of self-concept that are most relevant to students' lived experiences are self-efficacy, self-esteem, and identity.

Self-efficacy, the belief in one's capacity to reach the desired outcome (Kassin et al., 2017), has three essential elements: level, the belief in how well an individual can

perform; strength, how confident they are in reaching that level; and generalizability, the broadness (school) or narrow (a math test) perception of the belief (Bandura, 1997). A person's self-efficacy is influenced by past experiences (accomplishments/failures), observations of others, persuasion, coaching, encouragement, and internal feelings (Bandura, 1994). Thus, a person's self-efficacy can change and vary by activity, time, place, and scope (Driscoll, 2004) and directly impact behavior and outcomes (Bandura, 1994). Because those with higher efficacy will assess a problem and find a solution (Bandura & Wood, 1989), Bandura (1994) further proposed that efficacy can make a more significant impact on one's performance than factors like skill and ability.

A person could have a high self-efficacy performing many acts but possess a low self-evaluation holistically. Self-esteem is a person's positive/negative evaluation of self (Coopersmith, 1967). Leary and Baumeister (2000) emphasized that self-esteem exists because of social interaction. A person's self-esteem is based on the level of similarity or difference between their perception of who they are and whom they want to be (Higgins, 1989). Baumeister, Campbell, Krueger, and Vohs (2003) found that higher self-esteem promotes enhanced initiative and positive feelings, while lower self-esteem may promote a self-concept change because of internalizing situational factors (Campbell, 1990). However, Baumeister et al. (2003) found that boosting self-esteem does not cause improved outcomes. Thus, praise and positive reinforcement should be used as a tool to help students demonstrate self-improvement and socially appropriate behavior. It should not be used to merely lift someone's self-esteem.

Cross (1987) understood self-concept as consisting of two components: personal identity and reference group identity (racial, ethnic, and group identity). During adolescence, difficulties may arise due to a normative “identity crisis,” where individuals explore many new roles (Erickson, 1968). This daily identity formation and uncertainty occurs through social experiences (Becht et al., 2016) and can be incredibly difficult due to racism, discrimination, and other barriers for people of color (McLoyd & Steinberg, 1998). Black males are especially at risk for negative development of self because of intersecting obstacles (Sullivan & Esmail, 2012). Multiple studies show the possible benefits of a strong racial and ethnic identity, including resiliency, academic achievement, and positive life outcomes (Howard et al., 2004; Ellis et al., 2015).

An accurate examination of interlocking oppression occurs by investigating the sum of different characteristics that make up a person’s identity (Carbado, 2013). A group’s privilege or lack thereof produces different expected outcomes due to society existing primarily through a hierarchical system (Spencer, 2007). The intersectionality of Black males has current outcomes that are products of various factors discussed previously in this literature review. Together, these individuals and, in particular, those diagnosed with EBD have specific experiences and needs that require addressing in our educational systems. The lived experiences within schools are vast and span from incredibly positive to very negative. By bringing these individual interactions, relationships, school cultures, and ways of operating together, it is possible to correlate and isolate specific criteria that are imperative for these specific students to be successful. The impact of the students' lived experiences on their self-concept (comprised of self-

efficacy, self-esteem, and identity) has been understudied for Black male students diagnosed with EBD and will be addressed in the current study by analyzing answers to the interview questions outlined in Chapter 3.

Through the remainder of this review, numerous studies, many of which employ student voices, will be utilized to create an understanding of what the school experience is like for Black males diagnosed with EBD. Currently, there is no research investigating the lived experiences of Black male students with EBD from the student perspective. Furthermore, such a study does not exist investigating how their lived experiences have impacted their self-concept. Due to this lack of research, it was necessary to use a group of studies that vary based on students' racial and cultural backgrounds and whether or not they have a diagnosed educational disability or identified behavioral needs. The following studies also took place in multiple countries, varying school environments, and settings with different restrictive levels. This variation was deemed best to gain a deeper understanding of the conditions that impact the student population investigated in the current study.

Belonging and Welcoming School Climate

"I have dreams" (Bell, 2014, p. 6). "I am weird, one minute I am nice, then the next minute I am horrible, and the next minute, I want to cry, then I want to go mad. I think I have got something wrong with me" (Caslin, 2019, p. 175). "No one really cared about us" (Bell, 2014, p. 5). They "believe in myself even in times that I didn't" (Brooms, 2016, p. 823).

"The general message from the media is that if you see a Black male, you don't see a successful person" (p. 2573), a student narrated in a study focused on successful Black male middle school students (Hackett et al., 2018). Black males are bombarded by negative images of themselves, as another group of students recalled: "We are only [seen] as rappers, basketball players," "fighter(s), hot heads," and not as "doctors or lawyers" (Hackett et al., 2018, p. 2573). At the same time, students may grow up in a similar setting to this high school graduate:

> I had friends who were in and out of jail, some other friends who were murdered. This was just a part of life growing up in the projects. You would see hustlers, pimps, winos, crack heads, and all kinds of derelicts around your neighborhood. It was just a way of life, and you really had to know what you wanted out of life to make a conscious decision to not go down the same road. (Land et al., 2014, p. 152)

The development of self-esteem, the personal evaluation of one's self-concept (Coopersmith, 1967), occurs through associations, activity, and affirmations by others (Searcy, 2007). An example of an association is identifying as a part of a group. For example, Black males who view blackness positively and identify as such demonstrate a higher likelihood of educational success. This embrace, correlated with positive school efficacy, may also prevent internalizing negative stereotypes and narratives (Ellis et al., 2015). Schools play a significant role in writing this script. Conversely, much research has asserted that students associate "acting white" with behaviors reinforced by the dominant culture's educational expectations (Stinson, 2010; Ogbu, 2008). To abolish

such ideologies, schools must "become places that are counterhegemonic in nature and racially affirming for all students who attend them" (Carter, 2007, p. 553).

Warmth, Belief, and Trust

A positive school climate has the power to provide shelter and promote academic growth as a "home away from home" (Slaten et al., 2016, p. 28). Some school climates cultivate an environment that is "calm," "stress-free," and "mellow" (Slaten et al., 2016, p. 28). A student from another school expressed his experience walking into the building differently. He felt "various emotions, such as anger, resentment, and hurtful feelings" (Caton, 2012, p. 1065). Students voiced the school climate's impact as an essential element in reaching success (Slaten et al., 2016). Students noted that schools need to create a climate of belonging, support, and commitment (Caton, 2012). Caton (2012) concluded that school personnel possess great power to foster and improve such a climate. Furthermore, Singh et al. (2008) found a positive correlation between Black students' sense of belonging and their achievement and engagement, suggesting that if belonging increases, so might achievement and engagement.

Brooms (2016) studied a positive school climate that embraced and supported Black males in an urban environment. One student who attended the school spoke of how he received the positive message, "believe in yourself" (p. 814), even when he felt down. The student emphasized that the school community nurtured a collective "we believe" (Brooms, 2016, p. 815). Based on social learning theory (Bandura, 1971), this belief is then learned, affirming that they should believe in themselves because others believe in them, generating a more positive self-esteem (Searcy, 2007). Further demonstrating this

idea, one student surmised that this belief stretched beyond words, remarking that the students in his school embraced and felt they could overcome any obstacle. The sense of belonging was enhanced through relationships with people who affirmed a sense of mattering and a path toward self-actualization (Brooms, 2016). Another articulated a similar premise:

> [The school culture] impacted my high school experience to actually make me want to strive to be a college graduate. Outside of that and without that, I know I would've fell between the lines of being a young hood and never making it out of the inner city. (Brooms, 2016, p. 822)

Another graduate added, "That was the main thing, just people believing that I could do all the things that I said I wanted to do. They actually wanted to see me achieve" (Brooms, 2016, p. 822).

Research also identified differences in how other students felt about a school's performance in creating such an environment. In one study, many shared how, rather than feeling embraced and believed, they felt watched over, yelled at, and untrusted (Caton, 2012). Security measures affected the students' perception of the school climate. Students considered it similar to a prison or a detention center, walking through metal detectors and people watching them on security cameras. While a safe learning environment promotes higher student self-esteem (Zhang et al., 2016), the manner it is achieved also plays a significant role. The security guards "escalate(d) minor issues" and did not build positive relationships with the students (Caton, 2012, p. 1065). "The environment was not good for students' morale" (p. 1065), a student contended, contrasting his experience

with what he saw at a school that served a larger population of white students. "I did not see metal detectors . . . the guards were polite. I did not hear the guards shouting at students" (Caton, 2012, p. 1066). These heightened security measures and negative interactions appear to be contending with the students' positive self-concept or identity as a student. Ginott (1972) noted it valuable to separate undesired actions from the individual, for example, not labeling a child "bad," but instead that the action needs improvement. In the environment discussed here, students noted they were untrusted and not believed, possibly affecting their valuation and self-concept.

Additionally, other Black male students who dropped out of high school from the Bell (2014) study named a cultural mismatch between them and staff as a substantial barrier. They found staff prejudiced against them. They distinguished that most of the elements that inhibited their on-time high school graduation were not related to academics but other obligations, such as medical and home needs. One student articulated that he could not catch up after he was in a car accident, and "no one really cared about us" (Bell, 2014, p. 5).

Nevertheless, students found that schools can support and grow how students see themselves, building pride in self-worth and academic work (Brooms, 2016). Some schools have adopted a philosophy of leading with care. Members of these schools stressed the need to understand that care needs to endure despite violent acts and threats to overcome significant obstacles. Care for students must survive and be maintained through positive relationships, and care is especially crucial for students demonstrating emotional, social, and behavioral needs (Warin, 2017).

The Staff as an Ally

Students found it advantageous to have staff they could go to as an ally and celebrated an environment that bolstered their academic self-concept (Land et al., 2014; Brooms, 2016; Slaten et al., 2016). They noted that such an environment transpired through high expectations, encouragement, not intimidation, and an opportunity to express themselves (Hackett et al., 2018). Graduates from urban schools concluded that encouragement, high expectations, verbal praise, and relationships all supported the development of positive self-esteem (Akin & Radford, 2018). Being that all the students in the Land et al. (2014) study at one time or another had a lack of parental support due to death, incarceration, or drugs, it was vital to have individuals in schools that would listen and be an ally. Most students identified staff in their school that helped and provided them with the necessary things to succeed. Some of the staff grew into significant influencers in students' lives, and students identified them as role models and encouragers (Land et al., 2014). These relationships between students and staff affirm a school's positive culture (Brooms, 2016). Another student named a variety of people who played pivotal roles in his success, his school mentor (a business manager), his dean—causing him to think over riddles critically, teachers—simplifying and taking the time but also challenging him, and also office staff and principals (Brooms, 2016). In another study, students mentioned their appreciation for environments with staff who are approachable and willing to listen and give students a voice (Slaten et al., 2016). Jolivette et al. (2016) deciphered the need to foster positive relationships as even more significant for students moving from a more restrictive setting to a less restrictive one. In the work of

Slaten et al. (2016), the students relished being in a setting where they did not feel judged but accepted for being themselves. The students acknowledged it bridged a community of shared goals and a place to "take care of your business" (Slaten et al., 2016, p. 28).

Having students embraced as leaders, and education-related experiences effectively reinforced positive messages for students. Examples of these in the Hacket et al. (2018) study included becoming the school ambassador, being provided additional responsibilities from the administrators, and being asked to complete small favors. These opportunities improved their self-confidence and helped them feel dependable. The impact of nonacademic experiences was also meaningful for students (Hacket et al., 2018; Brooms, 2016). Visits to colleges and internships supported students' ability to internalize optimism about their futures (Brooms, 2016). College visits and internships, along with after-school programs exploring race, likely positively impact students' life goals and academic self-efficacy (Ellis et al., 2015). In addition, when students could contribute via extracurricular activities and represent their school, it contributed an additional way for them to see themselves positively (Hacket et al., 2016). Individual self-esteem could then be impacted in two ways: one, in being associated with others of a particular group positively, and two, in accomplishing goals through the identified activity (Searcy, 2007). For another student, art offered him a venue to become academically resilient because it was something he could do to express himself independently (Hacket et al., 2016). Tutoring other students also created an additional benefit and improved students' self-esteem while promoting growth academically (Hacket et al., 2016).

Peers

Motivation and determination were factors that students perceived as necessary for developing success (Hacket et al., 2018; Brooms, 2016). However, at times, such a motivation was not there. In those times, it was valuable to have friends step up and support them. One undergraduate shared, "I had a few friends that I was relying on—not to cheer me up but to get me through—who would get me back straight. A couple of guys who were setting me straight all the time, and I needed that" (Brooms, 2016, p. 821). Another student stated it was comfortable in part because "you got the students here to help you" (Slaten et al., 2016, p. 28). Moreover, a student's friends can hold a safe place to share things important to him. One student in a self-contained classroom designated to serve students diagnosed with EBD added that he primarily trusted his friends in his inner circle to share his future goals of opening a mechanic shop. He trusted them most, despite perceiving family, friends, and his school counselor as dependable support (Yeager et al., 2020). Most students in this study of students diagnosed with EBD noted that friendships were meaningful, with one remarking that he was not interested in having friendships. These friendships supported the students' ability to stay out of fights, helped with attendance and classwork, prevented a suicide attempt, and supported their transition to adulthood (Yeager et al., 2020). Some students from another study articulated a similar premise of supportive friends, stating, "I had five friends, and they really cared. If I got bullied, they'd stand up for me" (Brown Hajdukova et al., 2015, p. 216).

Peers also can influence students' lives negatively. "None of them liked me. They never came near me. They called me 'fat pig' and 'glasses boy,'" a student identified as

having emotional and behavioral needs articulated (Brown Hajdukova et al., 2015, p. 213). Another student from a different study stated, “They kept talking about me . . . [that] we don’t live in a house . . . and stuff like that when it’s not even true” (Sullivan et al., 2014, p. 107). In yet another study, most students with EBD reported being disliked and ridiculed by mainstream peers bringing about feelings of social isolation, sadness, and distress (Brown Hajdukova et al., 2015). These feelings and events commonly caused reactions from the students, including punching, throwing desks, and kicking others (Brown Hajdukova et al., 2015), and evidence suggests social rejection from peers negatively impacts a student’s self-concept as the child may internalize the problem (Spilt et al., 2014). The impact could compound the perception of student feelings like, “I know that the school knows that I’m bad, so they’ll just go for their side. They won’t believe anything I said” (Brown Hajdukova et al., 2015, p. 215). For the students in this study, the residential school was a place with fewer bullying incidences and a place they felt safe (Brown Hajdukova et al., 2015). Students with EBD are especially vulnerable and have additional needs that require support. One student noted, “Social cliques kind of look down on the students who are in [special education]… [we are] seen as being disabled, or weird, or different… most kids try not to associate with that in an attempt to appear higher social standing” (Mueller, 2018, p. 277).

It is imperative for schools to foster positive relationships among peers and to be responsive, restorative, and present to support students’ needs. In response to conflict, these practices impacted students’ capacity to feel welcome and restore relationships. It supports them in growing socially, emotionally, and behaviorally alongside their peers.

School stresses and culture created a place where some students noted similar ideas to: "You know you walk from a fight you get called a faggot. You get called a shitbag and whatever else" (Crowther et al., 2019, p. 68). Students fight for various reasons, including protection, acceptance, earning respect, avoiding appearing weak, and contest victimizing. At times, it becomes part of an individual's identity. To dismantle such an identity, staff must break down why the student needs to be perceived as tough and aim to create interventions to reduce the aggressive behavior (Crowther et al., 2019). One intervention that has been found necessary is eliminating the positive reinforcement of proactive aggression by peers (Useche et al., 2014). This positive reinforcement becomes a place to gain peer approval and is more common in a special education setting for students with EBD peers (Useche et al., 2014). Students identified with EBD needs that were victimized by bullying were reluctant to reach out to staff because of a lack of trust in the relationship. However, they wished the staff and peers worked more frequently to support the students (de Leeuw et al., 2018). This support is especially important because students who identified as having EBD needs had a lower perception of the school climate, experienced more mental health problems, and were victimized more frequently than their general education peers (La Salle et al., 2018). Furthermore, schools that developed a more positive school climate had more positive peer interactions and less victimization for students with EBD and those without a disability (La Salle et al., 2018). In all, students identified a positive school climate, positive peer relationships, and supportive staff that promoted a positive outlook and opportunities as an influential element in supporting Black male students diagnosed with EBD.

Supportive Systems and Structures

Caton (2012) found that creating interventions that teach students rather than restrict growth through punitive measures as one of the most fundamental and beneficial efforts schools could implement. Positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS) can help successfully transition from a more restrictive environment to a less restrictive environment (Jolivette et al., 2016). PBIS is a framework that proactively supports students' social, emotional, and behavioral needs. PBIS emphasizes the use of encouragement, verbal praise, and positive language, all of which positively impact students' self-concept (Akin & Radford, 2018). One example of this was in a study by Jolivette et al. (2016), where one student transitioned from a more restrictive environment, and proactive interventions were utilized to meet his needs, including a check-in/check-out system, a social group, academic remediation, and mentorship. Also, additional structure to support the transition from a more restrictive setting helps meet the student's needs (Buchanan et al., 2016). Coelho et al. (2016) noted self-concept (academic, emotional, and physical) levels could decrease as students move to new schools with unfamiliar teachers, norms, etc., but specific interventions in preparing students for such a transition can have significant positive implications on the self-concept and more specifically self-esteem. Buchanan et al. (2016) found a significant need for positive reinforcement around behavior. Parents felt that once a student left an alternative setting, students needed to follow all rules without schools providing the necessary tools to help the students continue to improve. Schools could support students by providing second opportunities to demonstrate respectful behavior, such as saying

something to the effect of "That really sounded disrespectful; do you want to try to rephrase that?" (Buchanan et al., 2016, p. 139). For Black males to gain a deeper connection to schools and a perception of fairness, behavioral expectations must be clear, and the responses must be consistent (Caton, 2012). In response to behavioral offenses, some components of a more restorative model for a school include restorative justice, referrals to school supports, including counselors, peer mediation, and family group conferences (Caton, 2012).

Positive supports began as mounting evidence demonstrated that punishment was not a way to improve behavior. Students with the highest need were disenfranchised, as zero tolerance and consequence-based interventions routinely failed. However, although many schools have transformed how they approach students with negative behaviors, multiple hurdles exist in providing the necessary supports. Pinkelman et al. (2015) stated that staff buy-in, resources, money, and time routinely negatively impact implementation with fidelity.

Moreover, when positive supports do exist in schools, the implementation of such supports follows gender and race lines. Similarly, students are disciplined for various reasons, and racial and gender bias continues to be prevalent (Silva et al., 2015). These biases were also common themes reported by students (Caton, 2012). Students briefed researchers on how school staff were unfair and targeted students with a history of behavioral needs (Yeager et al., 2020) and Black males (Bell, 2014). One student articulated:

> The disciplinary practice at my high school ruins my life and some of my friends'. Many of my friends, who are Black males, are in a similar situation. Isn't that sad! The disciplinary practice tends to be applied unfairly. For example, it is possible that I would have been suspended for fighting, and another student would have been given detention. (Caton, 2012, p. 1073)

School staff were most effective in the eyes of students when they "were always there no matter what. They always cared about you even when you got in trouble; they didn't want to see you fail" (Brooms, 2016, p. 815).

To be most effective, a solid base of teamwork was necessary between the family and the school, including initial communication in coordinating routines and expectations between home and school (Buchanan et al., 2016). These conversations could occur in many activities and meetings before the student's arrival to get everyone's input with a solid understanding of norms and expectations between the student, family, and the school (Jolivette et al., 2016). This team approach with families would include IEP development, specifics around educational expectations, and in response to behavioral needs. "My mom is trying to be involved in school" (Bell, 2014, p. 6), but too frequently, families like this one were not part of the process or utilized insufficiently (Caton, 2012). Stoutjesdijk et al. (2016) found schools needed to reach out to parents to help partner with them to foster a collective team.

Teacher and Student Relationships

"A little bit harsh, but deep inside she cares," said a student diagnosed with EBD about his special education teacher, continuing, "She's talked to me, like, personally, and

if a teacher cares about you… it's just like if you need anything, let me know" (Yeager et al., 2020, p. 223). A different student's perspective to describe great teachers involved the teacher's mindset:

> Teachers got the mentality to be like, I'm not gonna stop until I see them do great things. . . .I have to help him. I'm here to help them. You know, I'm not here for me. I'm not here just to teach them a few math problems and a few English lessons. (Slaten et al., 2016, p. 27)

Noting the importance of a teacher, another student stated, "A teacher can make or break you" (Caton, 2012, p. 1067), and this statement emphasizes how teachers have an incredible amount of impact on students' achievement and self-concept. Students valued and wanted teachers who connected personally to them, genuinely showed care, and provided motivation (Yeager et al., 2020). Current research demonstrates the importance of relationships between students and teachers and how these relationships can be enhanced or hindered through individual interactions, content and classroom environments, and the response to behavioral needs, particularly for students with identified EBD needs. Students with emotional and behavioral needs generally demonstrate significantly less trust and closeness in teacher-student relationships (Murray & Zvoch, 2011). However, students' feelings about teachers impact the students' behaviors (Hardman, 2014) and significantly impact student academic achievement (Hattie, 2012).

Yvette Jackson (2011) believed in focusing on High Intellectual Performance through High Operational Practices for all students, especially underachieving students of

color in an urban environment. Her theories and methodology align with Reuven Feuerstein's work and theories around modifiable intelligence, mediation, and engaging learners. She found many of the High Operational Practices were employed when working with students labeled gifted and talented but found remarkable growth achievable for students of color in an urban school district, who may be grade levels behind, using the same practices. She noted seven such practices as essential:

- Identifying and activating student strengths,
- Eliciting high intellectual performance,
- Providing enrichment,
- Integrating prerequisites for academic learning,
- Situating learning in the lives of the students, and
- Amplifying student voice (p. 89).

Furthermore, Jackson (2011) added that she made a point to emphasize identifying and activating student strengths first. She noted: "Positive affirmations can reprogram negative beliefs, mitigating the effect of disparaging input students receive from stereotypes, negative influences, or derogatory labeling perpetuated by a focus on weaknesses" (105), impacting the student's self-concept and self-esteem. Moreover, by employing all these practices, an increase in academic achievement can be fulfilled with the maturation of the self-concept. This makes the teacher's role vital, for they possess the capacity to create influential relationships, improve student confidence, and support students in connecting to the school environment (Hackett et al., 2018).

Race and Culture

The United States' education system is not built as culturally neutral but responsive to those with power. This responsiveness to those with power is evident in the integration of “ready to learn” ideologies, grade-level standards, high-stakes standardized testing, social and behavioral norms, and content and curriculum primarily built and supported by the white, middle and upper-class perspective (Harry et al., 2008). These factors create a significant need for teachers to navigate and create a classroom and lessons that are culturally responsive to all children. While a teacher’s racial and cultural background does not inhibit growth, Black teachers with similar cultural backgrounds to the students rooted in the community have shown greater understanding and connectedness. They can support students with their own life experiences in their teachings (Milner, 2006). The need to be culturally responsive continues to be essential as the number of students from diverse backgrounds continues to increase, and the teaching force continues to be primarily white (Villegas et al., 2012).

From the students' perspective, how teachers navigate factors of race and culture influences how students perceive them. Woodward (2018) found that a critical factor that Black male students noted was the teachers' preconceived notions about Black male students. From the perspective of both high school students who dropped out and future college students, racial differences and perceptions of them as Black males were barriers between some of the teachers and the students (Caton, 2012; Hackett et al., 2018). Students deemed teachers’ lack of cultural competence a barrier, as this student recounted: “We watched a movie about the slavery… I felt the teacher was supporting the

man who owned the slaves… That hurt me…" (Bell, 2014, p. 5). These incidences of microaggressions, microinsults, and microinvalidations are incredibly impactful. They reinforce a negative academic script, and due to the brain's negative bias, negative experiences create a response three times greater than positive, greatly impacting the self, how they perceive school, and how the student perceives the assailant (Hammond, 2015).

Student and teacher relationships were further fractured as some students felt multiple teachers understood the students as not being "culturally sensitive" toward the teachers (Land et al., 2014, p. 152). These sentiments lamented how students felt it essential for teachers to be culturally proficient (Land et al., 2014). From the student perspective, understanding the student culture, including the words they used, also impeded a connection. "My teachers didn't understand what I be saying sometimes; she always asked me to repeat. What's up with that? I remember using the word 'diss' . . . I had to explain that word to my teacher. I guess White kids don't talk like that" (Bell, 2014, p. 5).

A missing element in these cases may be a lack of a deep caring connection built from a powerful alliance that incorporates advocacy or solidarity (Boucher, 2016). In fact, The First Learning Alliance (2001) found in their study of over 90,000 students that more substantial and higher quality relationships foster better attitudes toward school and learning. They had heightened academic aspirations, improved motivation, and academic achievement, and those same students had more optimistic social attitudes and positive behavior. Boucher (2016) concluded that there are four avenues for white teachers to create solidarity with Black students: a want to work in a classroom with a racial divide,

identifying a need to build relationships of solidarity, questioning and processing their whiteness and privilege, and isolating their lived experiences as different than that of their students. The practice of building a powerful alliance is a daily journey of reflection, purposeful interactions, and continued maintenance and growth of the teacher/student relationship (Boucher, 2016). Building positive relationships between students and teachers impact students' self-esteem positively (Akin & Radford, 2018). Furthermore, there is also a capacity to recognize and grow deeper if teachers are willing to be vulnerable. Teachers who were vulnerable enough to share their racial identity and their associated struggles allowed for a more open dialogue between students and teachers (Slaten et al., 2016).

As teachers, it is not only critical to open up about their cultural backgrounds and lived experiences (Boucher, 2016) but also to create a place for the students to bring part of who they are into the classroom. By providing a place for students to express themselves authentically, teachers build stronger relationships and improve learning while deepening their cultural identity (Slaten et al., 2016). Paulo Freire (1998) discussed that "I cannot be a teacher without exposing who I am. Without revealing . . . the way I relate to the world, how I think politically" (pp. 87-88). He discussed further that he is "working directly with the freedom of the students and the development of their autonomy" (p. 89). This autonomy can be fostered into great freedom where a student found that being in a culturally responsive classroom felt like "a breath of fresh air… I could finally breathe, I could finally be here and actually learning, actually [be] in an environment where I feel comfortable" (Slaten et al., 2016, p. 28).

Leading with Care Without Judgment

Researchers found that students understood teachers approaching students without judgment and building an understanding of the students as a starting point to foster success in the classroom (Slaten et al., 2016). Consequently, the opposite can be detrimental (Caslin, 2019). One student announced how it feels to be cared for by a teacher always being present: “The ones [teachers] that really have the best interests at heart for you, they seem to somehow to always find a way to be with you, be around you, you know what I'm saying. Just to really tell you that, ‘Oh, you can do this…?’” (Land et al., 2014, p. 155). Another articulated the importance of teachers’ building trust and possessing a belief in their students:

> [They must] be able to have patience and talk to us, and we’ve got to be able to trust them, they’ve got to be able to trust us, you know. They got to have faith in us that we can make a difference, or we can get a better grade, you know? If you have nobody supporting you, you’re just going to feel like why even bother, you know? You need a support system. (Woodward, 2018, p. 68-69)

Students stated they appreciate teachers they could confide in because teachers need not only show care toward “[students’] education, but they care about the students themselves” (Slaten et al., 2016, p. 27). This shared interpersonal relationship can positively promote students’ higher self-esteem (Morin et al., 2013).

Similarly to the results from the other studies, students in the Schlein, Taft, & Tucker-Blackwell (2013) study seem to relate to a teacher’s approach as one “that is non-judgmental, that is very forgiving, (and) that allows a child to have space” (p. 138).

Students also cherished teachers who showed care by providing advice on life and listening to the students' opinions (Slaten et al., 2016). Merely listening to students and Black males provide two powerful outcomes: students feel valued, and the teacher can improve their relationship (Woodward, 2018). In contrast, a student shared, "I believe Miss [teacher name] want me to drop out" (p. 6). Another stated, "Some didn't give a damn" (Bell 2014, p. 5). Putting more context around it, a participant added, "I had to deal with other things, those personal home things. . . . School was easy, but they [teachers] didn't want to hear about your home life" (Bell, 2014, p. 6). At the same time, a teacher from another study emphasized knowing about a student's home life and stresses around drugs and a lack of a place to call home. In one situation, the teacher shared she made time to connect with the student one-on-one, which turned a student from being very disengaged socially and academically to one that contributed and learned (Schlein et al., 2013). Teachers demonstrated a lack of flexibility and care in another study, according to a student who stated, "I remember one time I had a doctor appointment. . . . She didn't let me make up my work. . . . Man, that was so mean . . . she didn't care if I failed or not" (Bell, 2014, p. 5).

Based on an extensive data set survey, Black and male adolescents had the highest self-esteem measures among their peers (Bachman et al., 2011). However, students with EBD reported self-confidence in some areas yet possessed lower global self-esteem than their general education peers (Conley et al., 2007). Moreover, some students felt stigmatized for having social, emotional, and behavioral needs. One student noted one such repercussion: "You always got blamed for everything . . . because you have got

disabilities" (Caslin, 2019, p. 173). Caslin (2019) found it vital for staff to look beyond a student's disability label and think about how they articulate a student's needs/labels with the student. In addition, a student's negative reputation inhibited progress when teachers did not allow him to start fresh:

> I developed a reputation in the ninth grade that followed me throughout high school of being a troublemaker. Many times, I was isolated in the classroom and, at times, ignored by some teachers. Many of my teachers were not aware of my strengths because they did not spend time getting to know me. (Caton, 2012, p. 1067)

From the perspective of students with EBD in the Zolkoski (2019) study, the two primary ways teachers promoted resilience were by showing care and helping them learn. The students also shared the following ways they can help them succeed: "Be helpful," "patience," "adjust and compromise," "be more understanding," and "show students you care" (Zolkoski, 2019, p. 239).

Academic Expectations and Pedagogy

While students prized teachers who were there and encouraging, they made it known that they also valued raised expectations. Students found feedback and high expectations on their academic progress, and things like attendance amplified their performance (Brooms, 2016). Zull (2011) discovered that dopamine is released when students use feedback and improve their understanding/performance. This dopamine provides additional motivation to support the student to maintain effort and persevere through the task. Conley et al. (2007) suggest that teachers focus on "demanding

performance" from students and letting self-esteem follow to maximize performance and self-esteem. "Sympathizing" due to low self-esteem does little to support the student's progress (Conley et al., 2007, p. 787). An instance of this occurred as a student noticed changes in their performance, which provided additional confidence:

> It was good for me because it let me know that the teacher cared if he was willing to push me. I didn't have the best attendance, but he would tell me that I could do so much better if I was in class more often. And that was the year that I was missing class because of my [long commute to school]. So, him saying that to me it was important because then I started to get up earlier so I could get there on time, and I saw my performance raise. So, definitely, I saw that it wasn't just him talking; it wasn't him just trying to do his job. He actually told me those things because he believed in me. (Brooms, 2019, p. 818-819)

An additional student stated:

> I think the [main] difference was I think I became a stronger writer, and I began to enjoy writing a bit more. I guess because my teacher expected more out of me. If I messed up or didn't put much effort into an essay, he would call me out on it. He wouldn't put me on blast in the class, he would see me in the morning, and he'd just ask me about it. He just expected more out of me, and I just appreciate that he thought that I could write better . . . or at a higher level. (Brooms, 2019, p. 818)

The capacity and impact of high expectations balanced with encouragement can be very positive. In particular, feedback can positively impact self-regulation, academic self-efficacy, and GPA (Brown et al., 2016). One student articulated that teachers "helped me

to stay grounded, realizing that I had potential. They kind of just kept telling me to stick with it, you know what I mean, for me to never give up" (Land et al., 2014, p. 154). Teachers also needed to exercise tough love as a tool to help students stay on track and discourage slacking. One student exclaimed:

> It was necessary; it was very necessary. I didn't feel like I was straying on a path, but I was going through some stuff my senior year. Sometimes just knowing that there's the love and it was tough was needed. In the midst of all of the toughness, they [showed love], and they showed favor—not favoritism, but favor. . . . Not letting up on me even though seeing that I'm hurt; still pushing me and not taking it easy and not taking it soft. Letting me know that it would be all right but not letting up on me. They didn't baby me. (Brooms, 2019, p. 819)

Studies showed that while strategies for fostering a positive learning environment were essential from the student's perspective, they were not always executed well. One student recalled frequently being divided into two groups in classes based on their behaviors and or academic skill levels (Caton, 2012). The students noticed that Black males were more frequently in the "lower" group, especially those with perceived behavioral needs as a student shared:

> I oftentimes belonged to the 'low achievers' group. I did not feel that most teachers were supportive of me. It was difficult to change the teachers' perception of me because they focus more on my behavior issues, and therefore, it was hard to develop relationships with them. (Caton, 2012, p. 1068).

Other students experienced a lack of support, problematic expectations, or an imbalance of support and critical feedback. At best, some of these students perceived indifference. One student stated, “A lot of teachers have this mentality of, if you don’t care, then there’s really no point. Like I’m going to try to help you learn, but I’m not going to go too far out of my way” (Woodward, 2018, p. 67). Some students found they experienced ongoing negative expectations largely due to being “Black and poor” (Land et al., 2014, p. 152), which negatively impacted students’ academic self-concept and deterred their pursuit of academic progress. Another student found because of a supplementary identity as an athlete, teachers did not hold high expectations for him academically, “The teachers never said anything to me productive as I was an athlete so they would just do what needed to be done to keep me playing” (Land et al., 2014, p. 152). Another student added, "I tried my hardest, and I talked to everyone that I could, and I still didn’t get help [for] two years” (Land et al., 2014, p. 152). Other students experienced an inability to access and keep up as the teachers did not meet the students at their academic level. Schoolwork was “too hard to understand,” and teachers “rushed through the work" (Bell, 2014, p. 5). One student stated, “Yeah, I used to tell him that is not my fault that I can’t write. He used to say it is, ‘you should be able to write at the age of five.’ I used to try my hardest” (Caslin, 2019, p. 174). A final student responded, “a barrier I faced at school would have to be not having adequate teaching” (Land et al., 2014, p. 152).

Students valued teachers’ efforts to provide a duality of providing support and flexibility in combination with high expectations. In the Slaten et al. (2016) study, students appreciated the flexibility in the pacing of the online curriculum. Furthermore,

students liked how support improved based on student feedback (Slaten et al., 2016). By providing students a voice in the classroom, students more readily invest in their learning (Jackson, 2011). Students also appreciated that staff fixated on improving their understanding (Slaten et al., 2016). Another student took it a step further, naming a key to success for him was availability:

> You could still send them [an] emailed, they could also talk to you about stuff outside of school like what was going on at home. And, they'd give you rides too. . . . They didn’t just say, ‘I’ll help you with this course, and when the bell rang, it was all over with.’ Even if you didn’t have that class, they’d help you. They were very supportive because they were doing stuff that they wasn’t even getting paid for. (Brooms 2019, p. 820)

Bell (2014) warned that the failure of not reaching students would continue, even with a rigorous and relevant curriculum, if social and cultural opportunities do not exist.

The Slaten et al. (2016) study found that teachers’ capacity to connect the content to the students’ lives was essential in creating a meaningful experience. Learning can only take place by an existing connection, one's cultural context, or past understandings (Feuerstein et al., 2006). Jackson (2011) added that engagement, confidence, and constructing meaning increase when content is connected to their lives. Furthermore, students sought teachers who provided meaningful content outside of academics. One student emphasized, “[it's] not just about academics, it’s about learning about life” (Slaten et al., 2016, p. 27). Students also appreciated finding themselves in the curriculum, such as exploring and growing an understanding of their vocational

opportunities. One student exclaimed that the school allowed them to focus on what was important, stating, “Everyone has a dream. No matter who they are, they have a dream, and they need to strive for it” (Slaten et al., 2016, p. 29).

According to Dweck (2006), the emphasis on skill-building and building a growth mindset is far more valuable than purely a push to raise esteem due to the potentially dangerous understandings of entitlement and superiority. In the study completed by Hackett et al. (2018), students found that they were successful in part due to their self-regulation, goal-setting, and time-management skillset. Essential aspects of supporting a student’s transition from a more restrictive to a less restrictive environment include goal-setting and mentorship groups (Jolivette et al., 2016). Furthermore, a student found that although he had trouble concentrating, he was able to succeed because of developing an obligation to himself (Hackett et al., 2018). Another student named a teacher who took the next step in building such skills, “He taught us how to be students and to study on our own” (Hackett et al., 2018, p. 2568). Social skills are also a common need for students with EBD. Such instruction has also demonstrated an increase in a student's aptitude for interpersonal relationships and demonstrating prosocial behavior, and such an intervention may reduce bullying (Brown et al., 2015).

Other students found social-emotional class discussions incorporating local news, peer relationships, and emotional intelligence supported a student to “develop as a person, as a human being. It helps me develop a psychological understanding of the world around me and the way that people perceive me and the way that I feel about myself” (Slaten et al., 2016, p. 31). Lessons and discussions that focused on the world

outside the classroom's confines with topics including oppression, corruption, race, and violence provided engagement and an opportunity to grow in perspective-taking and experience empathy (Slaten et al., 2016).

For teachers to implement evidence-based best practices, they must have a strong understanding of the practices, their needs, and an understanding of pedagogy (Torres et al., 2012). From the student's perspective, the presentation of content mattered. For instance, because there was no opportunity to explore and connect with the classroom content, students with EBD concerns in a setting three program preferred drawing and working on computers at home rather than at school (Yeager et al., 2020). Additionally, students from the Woodward (2018) study provided a mixed review. Students shared that some teachers did not care to utilize culturally relevant pedagogy. Nevertheless, others from the same study expanded on how some teachers made lessons enjoyable by bringing in student interests like hip-hop or utilizing real-world applications in math, science, and social study classes. Another student believed teachers could be more flexible and open up their curriculum and pedagogy by allowing students "freedom to build up self-motivation to learn and realize." Teachers could be more flexible with technology, allowing students to use their phones and YouTube to help them master lessons on their own (Woodward, 2018, p. 69). The same researcher suggested that teachers need to provide students with an opportunity to share and exercise learning that fits their learning style (Woodward, 2018). Students "want to be able to feel like their opinions somehow matter and influence those around them" (Boucher, 2016, p. 97), and it is up to the teacher to create a place for that to come to fruition.

Classroom Management

According to students from Hackett et al. (2018), how a teacher maintained a learning environment and responded to different student needs was crucial in upholding positive relationships and academic success. From an urban elementary principal's perspective, some teachers have "very unrealistic expectations" for student behavior. Moreover, some teachers take misbehavior as personal disrespect meriting suspension (Moreno & Scaletta, 2018, p. 104). While in other classrooms, the learning environments were impacted routinely by the teachers allowing for misbehavior to go unchecked, impacting the learning for all students (Hackett et al., 2018). According to Sullivan et al. (2014), peer instigating, teasing/bullying, and influence can negatively impact students with special education needs, influencing their participation in the classroom due to factors of not feeling safe voicing their ideas, asking a "stupid question," and feeling driven to fit in.

Silva et al. (2015) found a significant bias in providing positive or negative feedback on student behaviors. Thus, to implement with purpose, staff must be trained and taught how to effectively navigate their biases and give all students an equitable opportunity to succeed. Other students noted an unfair practice of redirecting some students and not all. Students also felt teachers were biased toward Black students naming negative perceptions of Black males and how students were treated:

> The teacher would 'turn a blind eye' to some students' misdeeds, especially those who were doing well in school. On the other hand, many teachers would call attention to the misdeeds of students who were not doing well by sending them to

> the dean's office. Most of the students sent to the dean's office were Black males." (Caton, 2012, p. 1068)
>
> Some of my teachers would send me to the dean's office for stupid reasons. An example was one teacher who sent me to the dean's office for raising my voice in class. Other students would raise their voices, and that action would be overlooked. The teacher wrote on the referral slip that I was disrespectful. My schoolwork suffered because I was away from the class. (Caton, 2012, p. 1069)

Caton (2012) added that due to these needs, teachers require additional professional development in classroom management and need to rely significantly less on exclusionary practices that provide little learning opportunities from errant actions regarding behavior. Additionally, negative reputations persisted, and rather than getting to know the students, some teachers only saw students negatively: "At times, I feel that I was singled out for punishment because of my reputation" (Caton, 2012, p. 1067).

Furthermore, students also connected insufficient responses with the biases against the males with emotional and behavioral needs: "The teachers always blamed things on you, cos you've been in trouble so many times, they think it was you instantly" (Brown Hajdukova et al., 2016, p. 215). Others felt teachers identified and treated them differently due to their disabilities, as one student described:

> He would just like pick on me to do everything, he would sit there, and if he was wound up, he would flip on me for no reason. He was horrible, and I would tell him to shut up, swear at him. (Caslin, 2019, p. 173).

How teachers responded triggered some students:

> I don’t know, there are loads of teachers in our school that just face. That does my head in if a teacher like gets in my face. I just go to hit them, and it just doesn’t work for me. (Caslin, 2019, p. 174)

Additionally, a student shared his displeasure with being hyper-monitored due to his EBD needs. “So she would come in, and she would just watch me, and I’ll look over… and one time I said, ‘What are you staring at?’” “So then, I ended up getting called to the office, and they were like, ‘Oh, your teacher told us you blurted out a certain many times.’ And I was like, ‘that’s cause I have someone right there behind me counting how many times I speak.’ It just feels uncomfortable” (Mueller, 2019, p. 275).

According to Moreno and Scaletta (2018), a special education teacher’s coursework in preparation for teaching has a dual focus on academics and behavioral supports, differing from general education teachers’ focus on content and pedagogy. In lower-level non-threatening or non-immediate need situations, special education teachers rated their preparedness significantly higher than their general education peers. Because of this, the researchers found that special education teachers may attempt further interventions and be more prepared to deal with the behavioral needs of students. The difference in teachers’ preparedness may result in general education teachers writing a referral and creating a pathway for students to be removed from school rather than supported through positive classroom management (Moreno & Scaletta, 2018).

For other students, the classroom experience impacted their achievement and challenged their self-esteem. One student shared that a teacher went “out of her way to make me feel bad about myself” and “would be extremely loud and scream for no

reason" (Hackett et al., 2018, p. 2574). A student shared a particular incident where the teacher called a student's question "stupid" and ridiculed him further in front of his peers after he asked why she felt his question was stupid (Hackett et al., 2018, p. 2574). From one teacher's perspective, she found it crucial to learn about students' interests and lead with care and love as a classroom management strategy (Schlein et al., 2013). Students seemed to agree with such a strategy but also made it clear that it was not evident enough in practice. Feeling ashamed, disparaged, and singled out, and teachers showing favoritism or punitive responses toward the student negatively impact a student's self-concept (Gage & Lierheimer, 2012).

Sacks and Kern (2008) found the quality of life for students identified as having EBD was significantly lower than that of their peers based on student and parent responses. Similarly to Gage and Lierheimer, they also found that parents noted a more considerable disparity between students with and without an identified EBD label. This disparity may be caused by students' diagnosed with EBD illusory bias, an excessively optimistic belief in their abilities in contrast to other evidence (Gage & Lierheimer, 2012). Theorists believe this occurs due to individuals creating a protective buffer or not realizing their own lack of abilities (Gage & Lierheimer, 2012). Additionally, Gage and Lierheimer (2012) found that as students of color (diagnosed with EBD needs) age, their self-concept commonly decreases. Gage and Lierheimer (2012) believe the lack of culturally relevant practices being exercised in schools and, in particular, in classrooms plays a significant part in such a trend.

Students articulated that home circumstances and stressors, including death, a parent leaving home, and movement through foster care, impacted the student at school (Caslin, 2019). "Sometimes, I end up bringing it into school, and I end up taking it out on everyone and getting into more fights" (Caslin, 2019, p. 175). Instead of uplifting them, students felt teachers let them down by not maintaining care and support. "I believe that my teachers should have covered my back; instead, they threw me under the bus. I was far behind with my schoolwork when I returned to class and trying to catch up with the classwork was an impossible task" (Caton, 2012, p. 1070). Even worse were actions that directly impacted the students, such as being "talked down to" (Land et al., 2014, p. 152). These actions brought about the perception of not having an ally to lean on for support (Bell, 2014). Too often, teachers fixate on misbehaviors instead of leading with a student's strengths (Caton, 2012). Anderson (2005) found that when an individual's strengths are developed, their self-concept also improves, creating an improvement cycle through additional motivation and positive reinforcement. "One of my teachers always sent me to the dean's office for stupid reasons. One time. . . . After I had finished explaining my side, the dean asked, 'Why didn't the teacher take care of this issue rather than sending you to my office?'" (Caton, 2012, p. 1068). Teachers' overreactions to behavioral concerns and transgressions negatively impacted teacher-student relationships (Caton, 2012). The students had feelings like:

> The teacher was taking the other kids' side when I didn't do anything. I wanted to talk to them, but they wouldn't listen. They never listen. The kids could say the

> wrong thing to you, hurt you, but the teachers wouldn't do much. It's kind of not the same for everyone else. (Hajdukova et al., 2016, p. 215)

Students noted it was beneficial when teachers supported resolutions between peers: "My friend and I had a fight in the cafeteria, and the teacher took us to his office, and we worked it out. We were not sent to the Dean's office" (Caton, 2012, p. 1070). A teacher initiated and named this strategy as effective in Schlein et al. (2013). She found it best to mitigate and restore the situation herself rather than to move toward more punitive responses, such as calling for behavioral support. Supporting a restorative resolution supported all moving forward and learning from the incidents.

Every Child is Gifted

Yvette Jackson's (2011) research asserted that a successful urban education system treats all children as gifted. This treatment may be even more relevant for urban students diagnosed with EBD. The case study of a Black male student labeled EBD by Owens, Ford, Lisbon, and Owens (2016) illustrated what is possible, which is a suitable way to conclude this literature review. The researchers explored a students' lived experiences as a twice-exceptional African American male. Since kindergarten, the student, Franklyn (pseudonym), frustrated educators and administrators. He demonstrated physical aggression, destruction of property, and disrupted learning. At the same time, he had a "charming" smile and an infectious laugh. From his peers' perspective, he was smart, helpful, and the class clown, but they also had to be aware of his moods. In the community, he was known for starting fights with others his age. Simultaneously, he was a leader. After such events, he took responsibility by sharing that he led his peers to such

actions. At home, Franklyn took a position as a role model for his sisters as he met the house expectations and helped his sisters do their homework. He was infrequently violent with his family but received regular consequences for verbal aggression. Concurrently, Franklyn challenged teachers, infrequently completed his classwork, and was repeatedly suspended and missed opportunities to engage with his peers in school. In turn, he demonstrated low academically in his classes and was held back in first grade.

In second grade, it was determined that he qualified for special education under the label EBD. Through the evaluation to qualify for special education, Franklyn demonstrated an IQ of 125, testing in the top 25 percent for math, reading, and writing among his grade-level peers. At the same time, on other state tests, Franklyn demonstrated that he was below grade level in reading and math and proficient in science, history, and language arts. The researchers found that the team was focused on the behavior and ignored his notable strong academics, which was a missed opportunity. They note this as a commonality among other studies as well. In the next two to three years, Franklyn demonstrated limited growth. He was in the resource setting, where he demonstrated further aggressive behaviors. He was repeatedly suspended in and outside of school and was held back at the end of third grade. He did not have a permanent or highly qualified teacher in special education.

In fourth grade, Franklyn had a first-year teacher as his special education teacher, and things started moving more positively. The teacher noticed Franklyn's strengths of leadership, being a conversationalist with adults, and creativity. His teacher started partnering with others to form a team of support. She worked with his general education

teachers to integrate interventions in their classrooms and developed a plan incorporating one-on-one conferencing, behavior intervention plans, and nonverbals between the student and teachers. Significant improvement occurred both behaviorally and academically. By fifth grade, he earned a high B grade point average in his core classes.

From the perspe2ctive of the researchers who published this case study, Franklyn demonstrates similar behaviors to those in many twice-exceptional students, specifically those who are African American. They found that the deficit model interferes with the ability of teams to identify the student as also advanced in other area(s). Instead, they find it imperative to use a different paradigm and go beyond one individual identity and prioritize the "interlocking traits of promise." The priorities of doing so included: targeting the gifted potential, relating to the students' identities, and utilizing student-centered, culturally responsive teaching practices (Owens, Ford, Lisbon, & Owens, 2016).

Jackson (2011) argued similarly, describing a need to foster a belief in the remarkable capacity of urban children. She found it imperative to start with strengths. It is critical not just to fill in the holes in the current system disserving students but to dismantle a deficit mindset about the most vulnerable students, including Black males and students diagnosed with EBD. From much of the evidence, students seek many of these practices yet find themselves, as Black males, subject to high suspension rates, low graduation rates, and high incarceration rates. They are the most likely to be diagnosed with an emotional and behavioral disorder, and the interventions are not providing enough of a platform to best support their needs. Students diagnosed with EBD are

frequently not making the necessary gains to become productive and successful members of society. They frequently move to higher levels of service but are not given the same opportunity to move to a less restrictive placement. Teacher and school practices too often impede the creation of a positive self-concept. There is a growing concern about the impact of schools' influence on psychosocial outcomes for students (Slaten et al., 2016).

Millions enslaved. Thousands lynched. Although that was yesterday, we continue to lose our Black males today. While writing this piece, yet another Black man, another in my community, unjustly lost his life.

"Say his name," they proclaimed.

"George Floyd."

"George Floyd."

"George Floyd."

In Minneapolis, Minnesota, a Black man begged for his life. An officer knelt on his neck for 8 minutes and 46 seconds. A crowd gathered, a camera rolled, and a Black man died.

In a eulogy a few days later, Al Sharpton (2020) stood in front of the crowd at George Floyd's memorial, drawing parallels to the killing, the maltreatment, and the continued failings of our society in keeping our knees on Black people's neck:

> George Floyd's story has been the story of Black folks. Because ever since 401 years ago, the reason we could never be who we wanted and dreamed of being is you kept your knee on our neck. . . . What happened to Floyd, happens every day in this country . . . in every area of American life. It's time for us to stand up in George's name and say, "get your knee off our necks." (Sharpton, 2020)

The time of injustice, shackled boys, and unthought and unrealized dreams must come to an end, and much of it can start in our schools. Black males and students with EBD are suspended more and graduate less. Students with EBD have a lower quality of life, are in more restrictive environments, and have continued needs after they finish school. At the same time, there exist no studies investigating the lived experiences of Black males with EBD and the impact of such on their self-concept. These students need to be heard, and their perspectives are thus needed, which is the purpose of this study.

CHAPTER III

Methodology

This qualitative descriptive multiple-case study expands on the current research related to Black male students diagnosed with EBD. The descriptive multiple-case study research design was chosen to provide a collection of lived experiences and illustrate the impact of those experiences on self-concept. Interviews are "an essential source of case study evidence" (Yin, 2018, p. 120). Through interviews, the researcher gathered the students' perspectives and articulated and amplified their stories. Because sizeable quantitative data sets frequently mute marginalized voices and an underutilization of student voice, especially from students of color and students with disabilities exists in the literature (Caton, 2012; Hackett et al., 2018; Caslin, 2019), there is a need to employ this qualitative research (Slaten et al., 2016). These students possess overlooked truths that require unearthing. Other studies have obtained such data as an opportunity to learn from similar individuals (Woodward, 2018; Hackett et al., 2018; Caslin, 2019), but because of scant research and recurring adverse outcomes, including high suspension rates, low graduation rates, and a lower quality of life (McFarland et al., 2018; U.S. Department of Education, 2020a; Sullivan et al., 2014; de Brey et al., 2019; Sacks & Kern, 2008), additional research is critical. This study focused on factors such as teaching practices, school climate, relationships, individual events, and student-student and staff-student interactions. These six aspects may have implications for forming a student's self-concept, which significantly developed during their formative years (Becht et al., 2016).

A qualitative descriptive multiple-case study fits the need to give voice to these young Black males diagnosed with EBD.

Method: Multiple-Case Study Research

The research method selected for this study was a qualitative descriptive multiple-case study. The case study research method was chosen because of the goals of the research and the act of seeking an in-depth description of a social phenomenon (Yin, 2018). Case study research is commonly used in social sciences to "understand complex social phenomena" (Yin, 2018, p. 5). Case study research can be used in any of the three phases of an investigation: exploratory, descriptive, and explanatory. Descriptive research exists to answer the question of "what" and "describe a phenomenon and its characteristics" (Nassaji, 2015).

Through case study research, there is both a single case study design and a multiple-case study design. Traditionally, an individual case study focuses on an individual person (Bromley, 1986), whereas in a multiple-case study design, each case is its own subject that produces individual findings. It is essential to have a focus for the study that is laid out through a theoretical construct and bound by a set of questions to identify pertinent information to be collected. These practices provide the researcher with an avenue to isolate particular variables for the study and discover relevant understandings (Yin, 2018). As a researcher, one is charged to think of the cases not as samples but as an "opportunity to shed empirical light on some theoretical concepts or principles" (Yin, 2018, p. 38). Through further analysis of the multiple cases, robust

conclusions can be formed and meet the goal of qualitative research, to provide deep insight into a specific world (Punch, 2005).

Conceptual Framework

Critical Race Theory

To explore the lived experiences of Black males diagnosed with EBD and the effect of such experiences on their self-concept, critical race theory (CRT), specifically counter-storytelling and intersectionality, was used in part as the conceptual framework. Critical race theory states that within the United States, a system of oppression and exploitation of people of color is maintained and operated through a system built on white supremacy and privilege. This system permeates American life to maintain a power structure benefiting those who are white (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Using CRT as a framework is an opportunity to identify, analyze, and upend structures that maintain subordinate racial positions in education (Smith-Maddox & Solorzano, 2002). The use of the CRT tenets further confronts a particular fault of American meritocracy of not acknowledging the significant factor of race (Ladson-Billings, 1998).

Counter-Storytelling

Counter-storytelling, a fundamental tenet of the CRT framework, provides a space for otherwise silent voices to be heard (Caton, 2012). Ladson-Billings (1998) found that CRT can promote historically muted voices and shed light on a less familiar world to address myths of fairness in society. Counter-storytelling challenges the status quo and understandings of the dominant culture (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Racism, white privilege, and oppression are maintained in the United States educational system to

promote white individuals' entitlement at the expense of Black students (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Howard (2013) expanded on this understanding, saying that "Black male accounts of their own schooling experiences have registered only a minor blip on the radar of social science research because it is assumed that they are unable or unwilling to tell it" (p. 64). This sentiment, in itself, further promotes maintaining the status quo and an understanding of "less-than."

Researchers have increased their use of student voice to bring in their unique and needed perspectives (Caton, 2012; Woodward, 2016). Student voice provides an opportunity for decision-makers to hear the youth's views to improve educational practices (Conner, Ebby-Rosin, and Brown, 2015). In using student voice, researchers have three primary goals: to capture and share student understandings, to promote reforms based on student feedback, and to elevate students to be more participatory members of the education system (Conner et al., 2015). Even though there has been an increase in the utilization of student voice, more is needed to understand how to foster positive relationships in the classrooms (Woodward, 2016), the lived experiences of those with disabilities (Caslin, 2019), and the impact of teacher practices and systems on Black male students (Caton, 2012; Hackett et al., 2018).

Intersectionality.

A second tenet of CRT, intersectionality, provides further opportunities to build upon the impact of the intersections of race, gender, and ableness in this study. Black males have recurringly been illustrated as violent (Hays et al., 2010), unintelligent, and subhuman (White & Cones, 1999). These depictions have impacted this population by

over-diagnosing such persons with EBD (Algozzine et al., 2017) and subjecting them to higher rates of disciplinary action (Minnesota Department of Education, 2020). The intent of this study was to awaken our understanding of the lived experiences of Black male students diagnosed with EBD and the impact of these experiences on their self-concept.

Self-Concept

Two other parts of the conceptual framework for this study are self-concept and lived experiences. These major pieces of human existence interact with one another. A person's self-concept comprises attributes and roles one associates with himself that develop through social experiences (Mead, 1934). The self-concept and a person's behaviors work reciprocally (Bandura, 1978). Three self-concept components relevant to students lived experiences are self-efficacy, self-esteem, and identity. A person's experience influences all three, and jointly, all three impact a person's behavior, influencing their lived experiences.

Summary

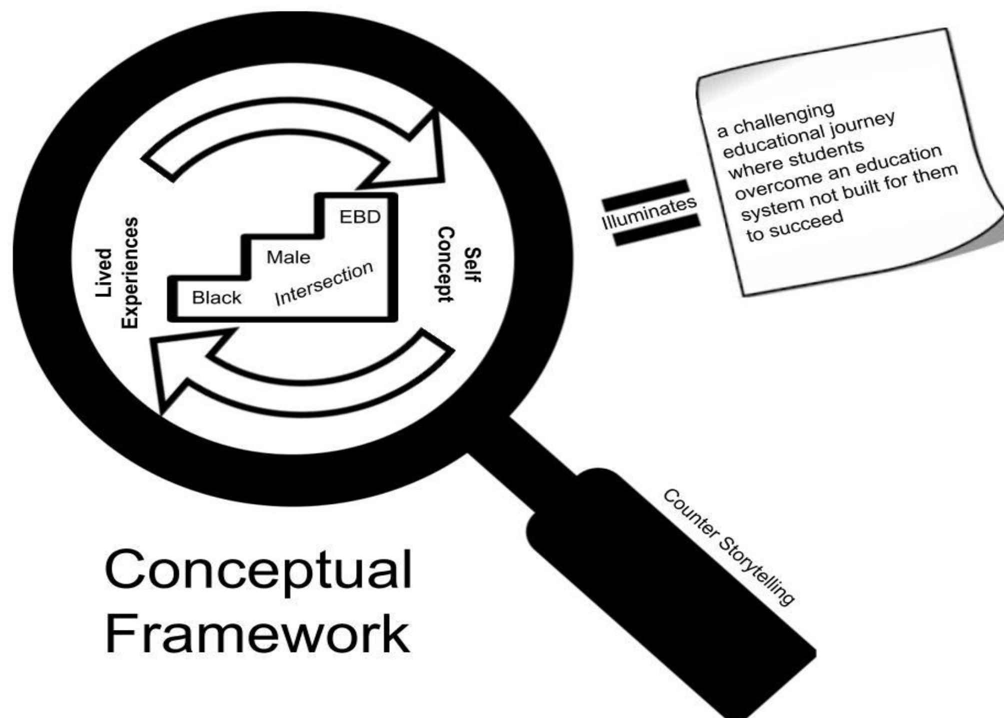
This study's conceptual framework ties together CRT tenets counter-storytelling and intersectionality by investigating a person's lived experiences and self-concept. This study is focused on four Black males diagnosed with EBD. It provides light into their journey through a racist educational system. Because these students lived in a racist society, it is believed racism has impacted these students' lived experiences, and these lived experiences have impacted how they see themselves. This study used counter-storytelling to provide the reader an opportunity to see how the intersections of race,

gender, and disability impacted these students' lived experiences and self-concept through their years in the educational system. The product of such illuminated a challenging educational journey where students overcame a system not built for them to succeed. To achieve such a product, the researcher utilized the students' perspectives gathered via two interviews per student centered on two main research questions:

1. What are the lived experiences of Black male students diagnosed with EBD?
2. How have the lived experiences of Black male students diagnosed with EBD impacted their self-concept?

Figure 3.1

Conceptual Framework



Research Model

The research model selected for this study was focused on four students' lived experiences and the impact of their lived experiences on their self-concept. Each of the four students represented an individual case. Incorporating the four cases into this one work formed the present multiple-case study. Pictured below is a visual of the research model, starting with the initial interview to drawing individual conclusions per case.

Table 3.1

Research Model

Research Model (Per Case)	
Initial Interview	Each participant was asked ten universal, open-ended questions in a semi-structured interview.
Initial Analysis	Per case, the researcher 1. Listened to each of the recordings. 2. Transcribed the content. 3. Read each transcript. 4. Coded each transcript. 5. Axial coding: made connections between codes. 6. Identified themes. 7. Wrote follow-up questions for the next interview.
Follow-up Interview	The facilitator 1. Asked specific questions of each participant. 2. Confirmed understandings drawn from the first interview.
Data Analysis	Per Case, the researcher 1. Listened to recordings. 2. Transcribed the content. 3. Read each transcript. 4. Coded each transcript. 5. Axial coding.

	6. Selective coding. 7. Identified themes.
CRT: Intersectionality and Counter-Storytelling	The researcher analyzed ● How did the findings align or misalign with intersectionality and counter-storytelling? ● What was the relationship between the tenets, intersectionality and counter-storytelling, and findings?
Self-Concept	The researcher analyzed what conclusions can be drawn between the student's lived experiences and their impact on their self-concept.
Prior Research	The researcher analyzed how these findings compare to prior research.
Final Conclusions	The researcher drew holistic conclusions.

Subjects

The population sought to participate in this study included Black male students (15-18 years of age) with a diagnosis of EBD. This multiple-case study comprises individuals with shared demographic characteristics and an understanding of the given topic under study because the individuals possess such characteristics. Participants for this study included four students from an intermediate setting-four school in the upper Midwest. The small sample size is purposeful as well. The goal of qualitative research is not to be generalizable but particular. The small sample allows one to explore a particular context and build working hypotheses for similar conditions (Patton, 1980). The sample was selected via a voluntary, purposive sampling method. Using purposive sampling, the researcher can gather content from willing participants who share certain characteristics (Creswell, 2014). For this study, participants were identified based on the student

demographic information: Black, male, age 15-18, with an educational disability of EBD. Race, gender, and disability area were specified to meet the criteria laid out in the study's primary research questions and purpose. The specific age range (15-18) met such criteria and ensured the students had further maturity and capacity to reflect on their educational experiences and the development of their self-concept.

The school staff was tasked with recruiting the sample to maintain student confidentiality from the research team until they had agreed to participate. A school administrative assistant narrowed the list of students to those that fit the demographic information, Black, male, age 15-18, diagnosed with EBD. Ten students fit the criteria. From there, the students were introduced to the study by a school administrator. The students/guardians received a formal invitation (Appendix A) and an attached consent form (Appendix B) either through email or a paper copy. Consent forms were returned via the student or a school staff member through a home visit. Of the ten students, four students volunteered and participated to be part of this study. The participants completed the assent forms (Appendix C) just prior to the first interview. The facilitator (interviewer) walked through the form, explained the study, and answered any participant questions.

Data Collection Procedures

To gather personal accounts of the participants' school experiences, each student participated in two rounds of interviews. Based on existing research and literature (Caton, 2012; van Manen, 2016a), the following interview protocol was developed to gather personal, educational narratives to produce four case studies. To produce the four case

studies, each participant was invited to participate in two semi-structured interviews with an allocated time of up to 60 minutes per interview. The interviews took place in the spring of the 2021-2022 school year in the students' school in a private room with only the participant and facilitator present. The time between the initial and the follow-up interviews per participant varied from seven to 24 days. Both the initial and follow-up interviews were audio recorded to provide the researcher data to later transcribe and analyze.

According to Creswell (2014), it is imperative in conducting a study to be sensitive to the needs of the participants, especially when working with a vulnerable population. Participants in this study, Black males diagnosed with EBD, are more prone to have experienced trauma, poverty, stress, racism, and a more challenging educational experience. The facilitator remained self-aware and engaged to provide a safe space with necessary emotional stability and to support the participant in sharing their authentic voice. The facilitator, a person other than the researcher, was a Black male educator from an urban environment, guided by the researcher to garner authentic dialogue from participants. The researcher taught, modeled, and coached the facilitator before each interview. Cresswell (2014) described many practices utilized in this study, including gaining parental consent and learning about and responding to cultural, religious, and gender differences that need to be respected to support the participants.

Initial Interview

The students each participated in an initial interview. The interviews consisted of open-ended questions to guide the conversation and use the participants' original words

and authentic ideas. Previous research has measured self-concept primarily through spontaneous self-reporting (open-ended questions) or reactive self-reporting, frequently using an inventory/scale (Gore & Cross, 2011). The employment of spontaneous self-reporting demonstrates greater construct validity (Brinthaupt & Erwin, 1992), making the use of open-ended questions more optimal (Gore & Cross, 2011). Open-ended questions rely less on the researcher's subjective views and more on the participant's perspective on the identified content under study (Creswell, 2014).

Each participant engaged in an initial semi-structured interview with the following questions, designed to bring insight into the students' perceptions of how systems, people, and practices impacted their educational journey and their self-concept.

- What is it like for you to attend school?
- What makes school a positive experience for you?
- What makes school a negative experience for you?
- What happened when/if you made a mistake in school?
- How has school helped you socially and emotionally?
- Tell me about your relationships with your teachers, administrators, and other staff.
- How do you think school staff sees you?
- How has school impacted your view of yourself?
- How do you see yourself as a student?
- What are your hopes and dreams?

During the interviews, the facilitator was tasked with creating an organic conversation building on what the interviewee shared, causing the interview to be more fluid than rigid. The fluidity of the interview is considered a best practice, as well as maintaining and engaging in the conversation unbiasedly. The facilitator was tasked with bringing about the participants' authentic understandings and experiences while not impacting such ideas through the questions or conversations associated with the interview (Yin, 2018).

Initial Analysis

After the initial interviews, the researcher listened to the audio recordings to become familiar with the content of each case. The recordings were then transcribed and read through by the researcher. He focused on one case at a time using the Strauss and Corbin (1990) model of coding. Beginning with open coding, the researcher read again through each transcript, breaking the content into different excerpts. These excerpts were then combined to build codes of content from each case, prioritizing the student's direct experiences and the impact of such experiences on their self-concept. The researcher proceeded to then draw connections between codes through axial coding. Subsequently, general themes started emerging, producing the **initial interview themes**. This content was utilized to write specific follow-up questions per case to understand more deeply content relevant to the two main research questions. Before the follow-up interviews, the researcher connected with the facilitator to share such findings and the drafted questions for the second interviews. By connecting with the facilitator, it allowed the researcher to

confirm his findings and next steps with the facilitator and prepare the facilitator for the follow-up interviews.

Follow-Up Interviews

The follow-up interviews were facilitated similarly to the initial interviews. The follow-up interviews took place between, seven days and 24 days after the initial interviews. The participants were asked open-ended questions designed to gain further insight into their lived experiences and how these experiences impacted their sense of self. Five of these questions were the same across each case study; they include:

- What good things would people say about you? What are you good at?
- What did/does a typical day/week look like for you in elementary, middle, and high school?
- How were you personally impacted by staff, peers, and your actions?
- How has school helped you grow in knowing yourself, handling your emotions, improving your relationships with peers and adults, and making responsible decisions?
- Is there anything else you would like to share?

The facilitator also engaged the participants in member checking by reviewing and confirming the general themes and codes gathered from the initial interview with the participant.

After the interviews, all paper materials and electronic recordings were provided to the researcher and kept in a secure/password-protected location. The researcher used

pseudonyms in the transcripts, and no other parties beyond the facilitator and researcher had access to the identities of the individuals who participated in the study.

Trustworthiness and Authenticity

To ensure validity and reliability, the researcher implemented a number of measures to support the trustworthiness and authenticity of the study. According to Creswell (2014), member checking is a way for the participants to determine the accuracy of part of the product, such as the general themes. In the current study, during the second interview, the facilitator shared the broad findings from the first interview with the participants to confirm accurate understandings. Additionally, the researcher provided “a rich, thick description to convey the findings” (Creswell, 2014, p. 200); this can add validity and make the results more realistic (Creswell, 2014). Furthermore, the researcher also clarified his biases at the end of Chapter 3 to show reflexivity. The researcher also triangulated data through converging multiple data sources, the four individual cases, to address the research questions.

To support reliability, the researcher executed two strategies recommended by Gibbs (2007). The researcher checked and corrected transcripts after the transcription software transcribed the interviews. Secondly, during the coding process, the researcher was careful to maintain the meaning of each code across different excerpts.

Data Analysis

This qualitative study aimed not merely to provide a conclusive set of ideas but to reach van Manen’s (2016b) charge “to be allusive by orienting the reader reflectively to that region of lived experience where the phenomenon dwells in recognizable form” (p.

238). To achieve this, the researcher coded, analyzed, and produced a set of themes centered on the participants' voices.

Follow-Up Interview Themes

After the follow-up interviews, the researcher transcribed the recordings and read through the follow-up interviews focusing on the content from one participant (case) at a time. The researcher completed deductive coding, starting with associating open codes with excerpts from the transcript. The codes were then connected to categories and later connected the categories and subcategories using axial coding. After that, the researcher identified themes from the follow-up interviews.

Narrative of Findings. Arranged by theme, structured narratives from each interview were drafted for each initial and follow-up interview.

Summative Themes and Theory

This research method employed a linear analytical structure progressing step by step. Beginning with the initial problem, questions, literature review, method, and themes from each interview. The researcher proceeded to find summative themes by categorizing, comparing, and contrasting the themes from each case to produce summative themes across the four cases. The researcher used pattern matching to compare the themes to the original conceptual framework (*Figure 3.1*). Pattern matching compares the findings to a prediction made prior to the collection of data (Yin, 2018). Additionally, the researcher focused on how the themes aligned with the CRT tenets of intersectionality and counter-storytelling, and self-concept. In doing so, the researcher answered the following questions:

- What is the relationship between the CRT tenets, intersectionality and counter-storytelling, and findings?
- What conclusions can be drawn between the student's lived experiences/themes and the impact on self-concept?

Thereafter, through selective coding, the researcher generated a theory for the study. The researcher was tasked and achieved Yin's (2018) challenge "to attend to all the evidence collected, investigate plausible rival interpretations, address the most significant aspects of your case study, and demonstrate a familiarity with the prevailing thinking and literature about the case study topic" (p. 164).

Researcher Bias

Croswell (2014) noted the researcher as the chief instrument with a need to identify their values, assumptions, and biases at the onset of the study. As stated in the introductory section, I am aware that my biases and previous lived experiences impact my interpretation, writing, and theories, even as I make every effort to ensure objectivity. As a white male who grew up in a small-town school system, my lived experiences considerably differ from those I am studying. My unconscious thoughts are impacted by the privilege I possess in the white-dominant society. At the same time, I have been an educator who has taught in urban school districts serving primarily students of color and many Black males diagnosed with EBD. I have garnered an understanding that we do not serve these students well, and I reflect on and recognize some of my own mistakes. I, too, notice that I hold a deep belief in every students' limitlessness and capacity to grow into

what their experiences may enlighten and foster. I believe educators have boundless power to make such an impact.

CHAPTER IV

Findings

Compassionate, joyful, goofy, and outgoing are four ways the participants described themselves in this multi-case study built from the students' narratives of their educational journeys. The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of the lived experiences of Black males diagnosed with EBD and how these lived experiences impacted their self-concept. Students' school experiences are filled with different factors impacting their successes and how they see themselves. Each student in this study represented a case, the individual stories of LT, AJ, KP, and JC (pseudonyms).

As stated in Chapter 3, the four participants participated in two interviews. The first provided the foundation of the content. The following ten questions guided the conversation through a semi-structured interview.

- What is it like for you to attend school?
- What makes school a positive experience for you?
- What makes school a negative experience for you?
- What happened when/if you made a mistake in school?
- How has school helped you socially and emotionally?
- Tell me about your relationships with your teachers, administrators, and other staff.
- How do you think school staff sees you?
- How has school impacted your view of yourself?
- How do you see yourself as a student?

- What are your hopes and dreams?

After the initial interview, the researcher analyzed the data by breaking the transcripts into excerpts and coding the content. The researcher uncovered general themes through the coding process. Thereafter, the researcher produced follow-up interview questions per participant. This content is shared in this chapter per case.

In this chapter, each case includes an introduction to the student, broad themes from the initial interview, the follow-up interview questions, broad themes from the second interview, a narrative of the findings, and final themes from the individual case. At the conclusion of this chapter, the overarching final themes across the four case studies are summarized.

The narrative of findings for each case study is written from each student's perspective. It is written in a semi-chronological structure to support the reader's understanding of how the student's school experiences and self-concept evolved. The researcher intentionally sought the use of participants' voices to reverberate through this piece. It was determined that this was the best way to illuminate the students' voices and provide them the platform to tell their counter-story. Within the narrative of findings, the researcher intentionally used as many direct quotes from the participants as possible to curb my influence on the content.

Additionally, the researcher used a clean verbatim technique in quoting the participants. The researcher cautiously and deliberately removed some words with less meaning, such as filler words ("um" and "you know"), repetitions, and false starts, to support the readability and to maintain meaning in the text while preserving the

participant's voice. Grammatical errors, slang, and expletives remained to provide as much of a sense of the participant's voice and feeling as possible. This process is supported by Collins et al. (2019), who found that it is "occasionally necessary" to edit parts of the transcript to meet the intended meaning of the speaker, support the reader, and meet the study's intent.

Each case study begins with an introduction. The initial four words are the words the participant used to describe themselves based on how they felt others saw them. These initial qualities were a way to begin the counter-story and identity. The goal of this chapter is to disclose the truth about the lived experiences as the students experienced them and reveal how their view of self was impacted along their educational journey by answering the primary research questions of this study:

1. What are the lived experiences of Black male students diagnosed with EBD?
2. How have the lived experiences of Black male students diagnosed with EBD impacted their self-concept?

Case Study 1: LT

Nice. Compassionate. Smart. Open-Minded. LT enjoys and thrives working with his hands. The junior in high school had previously played an instrument and currently dreamt of becoming an auto mechanic after high school and eventually opening a shop of his own. Once LT runs his shop, he wants to fix cars for "cheap" to help give back to his community. "I've always been low income, always had a very tight budget to try to get stuff." He will be starting this process next year as a senior in high school, where he will

be taking tech classes and starting to earn college credits. He thinks this will help him get into the automotive field because he will be "learning, welding, and dismantling a car," and he could earn a scholarship for college. Growing up in the school system, he did not always have room for this dream.

Themes from the Initial Interview

I had inadequate support

The initial interview uncovered rich content illuminating themes about LT's educational experience and its impact on how he saw himself. The themes from the interview are located in Table 4.1. The first theme was about receiving inadequate support. LT shared, "When in mainstream schools, it seemed like they (staff) were either swamped with work or don't care because I've seen it over and over with me and my peers just not getting the help we need with bullying issues, fighting issues, [and] emotional health." LT also shared, "Going to school is difficult. . . . It's been difficult since, really, I would say, like first grade because I have always been either picked on or bullied by other classmates." LT found that staff rarely addressed the bullying, and if they addressed it, the bullying would start up again. In reflecting on his time in elementary and middle school and its impact on him, he exclaimed:

> I still have a really hard time trusting people. I don't open up at all. There's definitely lines that I have drawn and that I don't let anyone, even family, cross, and I don't let information out that I don't want out, and if information that I don't want out to other people gets out, I get really aggressive. I've noticed that and that's something I've tried to stop, but it happens.

Table 4.1

LT: Themes from the Initial Interview

Theme	Open and Axial Codes
I had inadequate support.	• My staff did not help me with bullying issues, fighting issues, or emotional needs. —Rarely addressed. —If addressed, it would happen again. —I was treated as the aggressor and given ISS or suspension. • I was unsupported in class when I had questions.
I had responsive staff.	• My teachers were responsive to my hate for reading and encouraged me to read and improve. • My staff at my school responded to conflicts and bullying quickly and thoroughly. • My teachers were responsive to my need to rest when I was tired.

In Middle school, LT did not receive the help that he needed. Instead, the schools focused on consequences, and this did not help LT as he shared:

> I had gotten suspended and referrals so many times that I got a letter at the end of the year from the school asking me not to come back the next year. Every week, I was getting into fights because I was getting bullied and jumped in the hallways, and the teachers weren't doing anything, and then I would get in trouble and sent home, and the other kid would be able to come back to school the next day, and then I would get in school suspension, almost all the time. So, they would really just put me in like an office by myself with some schoolwork, maybe, and I get to sit there.

Repeatedly, LT found that he was mistreated, and staff response was recurringly over the top. One time, LT and another student were in a verbal altercation after the other student would not stop "messing" with him. A teacher heard the students yelling and called for support. He found that the teachers were overaggressive in their response, grabbing the students and pulling LT away. He did not understand why he got a two-day suspension, and the other student was back in class the next day.

Fourth and fifth grades were difficult for LT because his teacher "was terrible." During this time, LT was diagnosed with ADHD and taking different medication doses. "I was just like slightly falling asleep in class and like unmotivated, but he wasn't working with me with anything." "He wasn't trying to help." LT understood that the teacher had 20 other students to support and that other kids needed help, but LT felt ignored as he was just given a task and sent to do the work. "I would sit with my hand up for five minutes at a time, and just nothing, so I just put my hand back down and try to figure it out myself." In his mainstream school, he found staff did not understand him or address his needs, "I really don't think they got the whole story." Because of these difficulties, it made him think of himself as a "giant failure."

I had responsive staff.

The second theme apparent from the initial interview was about having responsive staff. While LT did experience a lack of support, especially in elementary and middle school, he experienced responsive staff intermittently in his younger years and frequently in his upper grades. LT found a few examples of staff being responsive to his academic needs existed in his mainstream schools. In elementary school, LT hated

reading as it was always difficult for him. Two teachers not only made it tolerable but helped him thrive. His first-grade teacher was the first impactful educator. He said, “She actually helped me learn to kind of like it and how to understand and wrap my mind around how words worked.” Similarly, while describing himself as a “stubborn kid,” he noted that his third-grade teacher helped catapult his skills. She also encouraged him, and he felt that he had made great growth. Starting at a first-grade reading level in third grade, he found that she convinced him to try and “put in the effort.” At the end of third grade, he made incredible growth, as he was reading at the fifth-grade reading level.

Concurrently, LT required help from his teachers with bullying. He said that his first-grade teacher “was the best.” He found this true because she helped him when he was messed with and bullied. She would listen to him and then would address the issue. Even if it did not result in anything in the end, “She actually took action, and that was really good.” Once in setting four, he found that teachers helped much more than in his mainstream schools. The staff was more responsive to conflicts.

At the setting-four school, “There was maybe once or twice where I almost got into it with someone, but it was squashed immediately by teachers and like they calmed everyone down.” LT continued, “They worked out the problem, and like the next week after, we had a sit-down meeting between me, the kid I almost got into it with, and another teacher, just to work out what happened, why we're upset and to like figure it out.”

An example of when staff were responsive was in response to an altercation with a student who was new and acting “big” and “important,” LT said:

> I was having one of my off days, and I wasn't trying to deal with it, and I started yelling, buffing up to him, and walking over, and immediately Mr. RB grabbed me, pulled me back. The other student got the other kid got him out of the gym, and me and RB just sat and talked for a minute to sit, get me calm. They got another teacher to sit and talk with him (the other student), and yeah, that's really about it, and then, we were able to go and continue on with our day like normal.

The staff responsiveness supported the students and helped keep a positive learning community for all. He shared, “The teachers at these schools are completely different. I feel like they actually care and actually want to take the time and make good lessons, and actually help the students.” LT discovered it was different in another way, in providing another example of how the staff was responsive to his needs. When he was falling asleep in class, his teachers told him, “Hey, we're gonna let you go out and go down to the nurse so you can go and go take a nap for a little bit.” LT would get a brief nap in and he would “be able to go back and learn, and they won't say or mention anything about it.”

Follow-up Interview Questions

The initial interview provided a strong foundation. The follow-up interview for LT took place seven days after his initial interview. In the follow-up interview, the researcher sought a deeper understanding of the lived experiences and the impact of those lived experiences on LT’s self-concept. The below questions guided the follow-up interview.

1. What good things would people say about you? What are you good at?

2. What did/does a typical day/week look like for you in elementary, middle, and high school?
3. How were you personally impacted by staff, peers, and your actions?
4. How has school helped you grow in knowing yourself, handling your emotions, improving your relationships with peers and adults, and making responsible decisions?
5. You spoke of how the teachers were different at your setting-four schools and mainstream schools. How were they different?
6. You shared that you felt the consequences for your actions were not the same as other students doing similar behaviors. Do you feel like race had an impact?
7. You stated that in your mainstream schools, “I really don’t think they got the whole story?” Can you elaborate on this?
8. Is there anything else you would like to share?

Themes from the Follow-up Interview

I survived independently.

The follow-up interview provided further depth into the lived experiences and the impact of such lived experiences on LT’s self-concept. These themes are illustrated in Table 4.2. The first theme that radiated from the text involved surviving independently. Being bullied continuously caused LT to self-manage, independently doing things to help him to push through. In sixth grade, he would do so by walking the halls. During his first hour, homeroom, he would leave five minutes before class was out and wander the building. In his next class, math, he usually walked out of there early, too, “because kids

at my table would constantly kick me under the desk and mess with me." When he returned, "my pencil was missing, calculator missing, stuff like that, and so, I would get fed up, just walk out, and go walk."

Table 4.2

LT: Themes from the Follow-up Interview

Theme	Open and Axial Codes
I survived independently.	● I was forced to find another way to manage as I was not allowed to cope my way (walk halls, shake legs/stress cube). ● I did not get enough support when I was being picked on/bullied, causing me to self-manage alone. —I left class early/walked the halls. —I fought other students. ● I coped with racist consequences.
I needed staff who invested in me.	● My teachers took time to teach me academics, how to think through things, and about myself. ● I felt they wanted me at the school and to do well. —I was placed in ISS rather than out of school suspension —I found "they were not going to get rid of me after a year."

Similarly, he also sought safety at lunch, eating with a small group of students that would not mess with him and did not care if he sat at their table. After lunch, he would "go back to my routine of walking the school." Avoiding staff, LT played "Ring around the Rosey" and would hide in unmonitored areas until they would find him for the rest of the day.

Moving into seventh grade, LT carried with him some extra energy and fidgeted to cope. However, kids would complain to the teachers. “I would get told to stop shaking and doing my little fidgets. They wouldn't let me carry a fidget around like a ball or stress cube or whatever. None of that.” This forced him to survive another way. Concurrently, in seventh grade, they focused on not allowing him to roam the halls to escape the bullies. He had to find a new way to cope.

Furthermore, the School Resource Officer (SRO) caused further distress. LT shared, “He’s absolutely the worst. He would scream at students and me. He accused me of lying about things that were on security tapes, everything that he's witnessed, and called me a liar to my face. Yelled at me. Everything.”

At the same time in seventh grade, he continued to deal with bullying. “I would get messed with, shit talked. I've had my stuff stolen out of my locker a couple of times, and like I've had my lock taken off my gym locker . . . [and] like tossed into a toilet. It was terrible.” The bullying was taxing for LT, and he fought. LT stated, “I don't wanna hurt nobody. I had hated fighting, in all honesty,” but he had to survive and a couple of incidents stuck out the most, he shared:

> I got into a fight with this kid named SK on the bus. . . . I was in the wrong, completely, 100 percent. But, it was one of those situations where this kid had been bullying me for months now, and we had gotten physical a couple of times . . . but he was making fun of me on the bus, and I had already had a rough day, and I couldn't handle [it] anymore. And, I snapped, and I got up, and I hit him,

> and I just kept hitting him, and then, it got to the point of another kid had grabbed me, throw me off, and me and him got into a fight, and so that kept escalating.

Another incident occurred in the hallway at school, LT exclaimed:

> Two, three kids walked up on me in the hallway, talking shit, and then, one of them walked up and shoved me to the floor, and [being a] hormonal ass kid getting pushed, I'm going to be upset, and I got up, and I started hitting 'em, and then, it turned into a three-on-one fight.

A while later, LT and one of his friends got into a verbal and physical altercation in the locker room, where LT ended up saying, “Don't try this again. Next time, I'll stab you.” LT felt it was over and done, but later that year, he brought a small knife to school. LT did not mean to bring his grandpa’s dull knife and stated he was definitely not going to stab anyone. “I was too much of a bitch to actually stab somebody.” He was going to keep it in his pocket. However, on the bus, his friend saw he had it and informed the administration.

LT noted that most of his problems were with white kids, and he noticed a difference in his consequences and his peers. LT felt race was a factor “100 percent.” “I could understand how I got into a lot of my fights looking back on it. Yeah, I definitely got the worst of it 'cause I'm a man of color, and it's just not; the world is not built for me.” This was seen in response to the bus incident. LT ended up getting a “slew of charges” including attempted murder, which was dropped down to a misdemeanor, and also disorderly conduct.

In the above incident in the hallway, the consequences were racist, as he shared that two of the other students received two days of suspension and the other one was back in the classroom the next day. LT, however, got a much more significant consequence, "I got charged with assault put on probation for . . . six to nine months, and I was suspended for two weeks."

Most apparent were the inequitable consequences in response to LT bringing a knife. LT expressed how one of his friends had previously brought a knife to school. "He had accidentally brought his hunting knife, so like big motherfucker, and he accidentally brought his handgun; it was unloaded, thankfully, but he brought a gun, and they just let him go about his day, and he was white." Comparing it to his situation, he said, "I come in [with a] short, dull rusty ass pocket knife, and I get expelled." He was expelled and got a felony on his record. At this point, he had no choice but to change his mindset to cope, sharing:

> At that point, I gave up. I was done. I gave up on my dreams of being a mechanic, I was really done. I kind of accepted the fact, well, I got all this shit on my record. I'm gonna change schools again. No college is gonna want me with this record. No college is gonna want me with this academic background. I'm gonna be stuck flipping burgers. So, I just kind of forced myself to accept that at a young age.

I needed staff who invested in me.

The second theme from LT's follow-up interview was about needing staff who invested in him. The staff at his two setting-four schools gave him time, energy, and care. One way this was provided was through how the staff communicated with him. The staff

made time to talk with him but were straightforward, “no-nonsense,” and “straight to the point.” He found the school staff was invested in him, and not suspending students outside of school was one of those ways he found beneficial. He said he always favored out-of-school suspension as a kid as it gave him an escape, “Suspend me. Send me home. Please, please let me go and go watch cartoons for the rest of the day.” At his setting-four schools, though, they would not make it that easy, giving him time, energy, and care.

LT gained a feeling that his setting-four schools were invested in him, and “they were not going to get rid of me after a year.” This was apparent as teachers went above and beyond with their lessons. One teacher invested time and energy to help him academically and took multiple steps further by teaching him how to think through his everyday challenges. Another teacher helped him match his standardized test results with his class performance. The teacher shared with LT that he had much higher skills than the tests indicated and helped him with his test-taking skills. Another important lesson that a substitute teacher went out of his way to provide at the right time was through a 1:1 conversation. LT shared:

> It was a Black dude, and he saw that I was having problems in class that day, and he took me out of class, and he sat down, and we talked for like ten minutes about how if I don't fix what I'm doin’, and I don't get on my shit, I'm gonna just become another fuckin number. I'm gonna be another Black man dead by the cops, or I'm gonna be another Black man in jail, and that really helped open my eyes and realize that damn this world isn't meant for people of color. The U.S. is

> not meant for people of color. It really isn't, and that people of color have to work twice as hard to be able to get the same shit.

These investments were important to support his mindset, academics, and behaviors.

Summary of Themes

Through LT's initial and follow-up interviews, themes around his lived experiences were evident. The four themes realized from LT's interviews are noted in Table 4.3. These experiences made an impact on how he saw himself, his confidence, and what he was willing to share with others. These themes will be discussed further in Chapter 5.

Table 4.3

LT: Summary of Themes

LT: Summary of Themes
I had inadequate support.
I had responsive staff.
I survived independently.
I needed staff to invest in me.

Case Study 2: KP

Athletic. Funny. Smart. Joyful. KP is a ninth-grade student who looks out for those around him. He loves sports and may be best at baseball, but he also craves the opportunity to play organized basketball and football. He misses freedom. KP looks forward to navigating school freely without a badge or someone providing the opportunity to move from place to place again. In the future, he dreams of making a life

for himself, moving his mom out of (their current state), and having an active job, not just sitting down and working for someone else. He has had this type of job; it's not the right job for him. He wants to start a business, possibly mowing lawns or becoming a YouTuber.

Themes from the Initial Interview

I had a lack of freedom

Two themes emerged from KP's initial interview, as depicted in Table 4.4. One theme that surfaced was his sense of a lack of freedom. "I've been in special ed. schools since second grade. Started fuckin' up. Yeah. . . . Just kept fuckin' up. And, I started catching cases." In reflecting on his experience in elementary school, he did not remember too much. One thing did radiate, though: he missed freedom. "I didn't have freedom in schools since second grade," and when asked if he recalled much from before his time in a setting-four program, he said, "I just remember the big classes and the freedom."

Table 4.4

KP: Themes from the Initial Interview

Theme	Open and Axial Codes
I had a lack of freedom.	● I have been in a setting-four school since 2nd grade. ● My schools have many rules. ● I was sent into a locked room. ● I was sent to the Juvenile Detention Center when I made mistakes. ● I hope to be part of sports and in mainstream

	school, again. ● I feel like students should have more freedom.
I benefited from being connected to staff.	● I saw staff of color as better educators. ● A couple of my teachers were like family to me. ● I viewed my family and my teachers as friends. ● I appreciated staff helping me on my personal needs. ● Some of the staff I saw as good were part of my community.

Each of his setting-four schools had a room that students would be placed in when they made a mistake or needed to "reset." These small rooms had a locked door, and a student could not leave after entering unless the staff member unlocked it from the outside. Some of these walk-in closet-like rooms would also be in classrooms. The staff would put him into a room when he did something wrong. KP found it was used to control the students before they got too out of control. KP questioned the practice saying, "I don't understand why a school would have a jail cell."

In middle school, he became more aggressive and got into further trouble. "I was fighting and slapping, beating up people; everybody started pressing charges on me." In school, they struggled to help him. He found, "Every time I did something wrong, it was either the den (the cell) or JDC." He recalled one of the times he ended up going to Juvenile Detention Center (JDC):

> It was just a way [for] the Justice Center to get my name, to like know who I was, because I didn't do nothing. They fucked . . . I really pushed the police officer. I remember this shit. Yeah, I pushed the police officer 'cause she was stepping on my foot. I got charged with fourth-degree assault. I swear to God. Fourth-degree

> assault. She stepped on my foot, told me to go in one of the rooms that I was telling you about, right? I pushed her; she said move. She bring me to the ground. Handcuffed me. . . . Then, I had to do community service and go to a probation officer.

Throughout elementary and middle school, KP was arrested and made multiple trips to JDC. KP was charged with crimes and, for part of that time, had a restraining order in place against him. The restraining order caused him to be in a different location at the setting-four school, and he had to follow further restrictions. "I had to be programmed like out of my classroom, so like I work in that one-on-one space with somebody for the whole day" He continued, "They would bring me lunch, breakfast, and then, I'll go home from that place. I'd be the last [student to leave]."

At the same time, he did not appreciate many of the rules and expectations placed on him. He found some do not make sense. "Teacher's just doin' too much. They real strict about certain rules and certain things that we can and cannot do, and I feel like they should let up on some of those things." He brought up an example of this: "I was trying to get a computer, and the teacher was like, 'No. Everybody else [was] not done with their work.'" "I flipped the freak out on the teacher. . . . I felt some type of way, 'cause I was done with my work, and everybody else wasn't done with their work. I couldn't get no computer. I had to sit there and do nothing." He also believed phone policies should be changed as they are too restraining and do not make sense. "I'd be trying to charge my phone. You know you can't charge your phone, can't pull your phone out in class unless it's five minutes left." He said, "It's just certain rules. You can't wear a coat in school…

You can't wear [a] hat. You can't bring the blanket. You can't do none of that. You can't wear backpacks…" If you are suspected of breaking the rules like vaping or smoking, the SRO searches students and can write tickets. KP cried out, "It's fucked up."

He was restricted. To move from one room to another, someone needed to unlock a door for him. Students "gotta wait to get let into school." They "gotta wait to get into the bathroom." The students had to have a staff member give them access to leave one space and move into another.

KP was pushing through in search of his freedom. He said, "I've been in setting-four schools for almost like ten years. I'm ready, I'm trying to leave, trying to do better and stuff, and make my mom proud and shit. I wanna get back active in regular sports and do something with that, so I've been workin." He was now hoping to take the next step by joining his peers again in returning to a school that is not, as he put it, a "detention center."

I benefited from being connected to staff.

The second theme evident from the KP's initial interview was benefiting from being connected to staff. First, KP emphasized that people of color and Black staff, in particular, are better able to meet his needs, making his current school better than others. "I would say this school is decent because you got mixed staff. You got Black staff. You got white staff, and most likely the Black staff, they cool as hell, and they just, they teach you what you need to do or what not to do when." At his previous middle school, he also appreciated it as there were many Black educators. "They from the [direction]side, so I

don't really gotta explain it, ya' know. They just act different than a normal teacher would act, but that's just them."

In elementary school, KP remembered a couple of impactful teachers that were like family to him. He had a great relationship with one staff that was a "brother" to him as he would play basketball with him. Moreover, he appreciated a female teacher because she was a mother figure. This teacher would talk to his grandma, and he saw his grandma and the teacher as friends. The teacher also was part of the community and worked at a local park, and he saw her there. It appeared to be critical for KP to have a teacher be part of the community and connect to him and his family. In addition, this teacher helped him with school and personal problems outside of school. KP said, "Not everyone would talk to me. Not everybody helped me." He even has the opportunity to see this teacher in the community when he goes to the park. On top of that, that teacher has a current connection to a staff member in his current high school.

Another staff member in KP's current high school reminded him of his mom. KP recognized the social worker as critical to his success. "She tells me what I need to do, what not to do. She like my mom here, too. She'll curse me out." He said, "When you create a bond with a teacher, it's cool. Good thing you got somebody you can trust to tell somebody something like some teacher fucking with you." He said, "You got a teacher that can defend you. . . . She going to have your back."

KP appreciated the staff that he could see in himself. He appreciated having content that connected to his interests, like football players—Barry Sanders and OBJ. KP highlighted staff that were like family members, were connected to his community, had a

relationship with his family, and could support his needs both inside and outside of school, stretching beyond his schoolwork. In talking about another teacher, he shared about a staff that did her job right:

> She was real funny, real strict, but she can be funny and be straight at the same time. She know how to like really do her job, ya' know how some people, be over doing their job as a lot of people overdo. She know how to play both roles like when not to play around, when to play around. So, like, you gotta love those type of people.

Follow-up Interview Questions

The initial interview provided a footing to build this case. The follow-up interview took place 21 days after the initial interview. In the follow-up interview, the researcher pursued a deeper understanding of the lived experiences and the impact of those lived experiences on KP's "self." The below questions guided the follow-up interview.

1. What good things would people say about you? What are you good at?
2. What did/does a typical day/week look like for you in elementary, middle, and high school?
3. How were you personally impacted by staff, peers, and your actions?
4. How has school helped you grow in knowing yourself, handling your emotions, improving your relationships with peers and adults, and making responsible decisions?

5. You mentioned a point system. Could you talk more about these systems? Were they at each of your sites? How do they make you feel? Why?
6. In much of what you discussed in the first interview, you took responsibility for "Fucking up." Were there times staff helped you navigate before something got big? What could/did staff sometimes do well? What is something that they did not do well?
7. You said in the last interview the following: Sometimes that is hard as hell, and sometimes you wanna do no work." and "You don't want to be in class and don't wanna deal with nobody." How do/have staff respond when you feel like this?
8. You mentioned how you disagreed with the practice of having a room like a jail cell and SRO at school. How has this impacted you?
9. Is there anything else you would like to share?

Themes from the Follow-up Interview

I was imprisoned.

KP's follow-up interview revealed two themes as shown in Table 4.5. The theme of being imprisoned was derived from statements he shared about staff being unable to handle his behaviors when he was younger, so he was sent to the "den" or the police were called. At another school, he recalled staff gaining control of his behaviors in a new way. The teachers would handle it themselves. He shared that his mom had to sign a waiver to let them put their hands on him when needed. LT shared earlier that he saw "These big guys, grown-ass men fighting with middle schoolers." This caused him to be "scared as hell. I didn't want to do shit no more."

Table 4.5

KP: Themes from the Follow-up Interview

Theme	Open and Axial Codes
I was imprisoned.	● I was sent to the Juvenile Detention Center (JDC). ● The school called the police on me. ● I was put in the classroom/school cell. ● The school tried to impact my behavior using a point system.
I independently learned to self-manage.	● I taught myself to cope, calm down, and improve my behaviors. ● I used marijuana to keep calm and focused.

In KP's setting-four schools, staff also used a point system. This point system was built to help curb their behavior. He received a good or bad point for his behavior. If he would get a bad one, "I woulda went off on everybody 'cause then I know my mom going to hear . . . I'm going to snap on y'all."

In thinking about the impact of the locked rooms onsite and its impact on KP, he articulated:

> You see yourself in the cell. You see yourself out the cell. When you see yourself in the cell, you probably mad. When you see yourself out the cell, you gonna know you don't wanna be in that cell 'cause you locked in a room, and you can't get out, and there's somebody controlling that room, that you in, and they locking the door, and they opening the door. So, with that, you know that somebody is controlling your life basically. They tell you where you can leave, and we cannot leave with that, with you knowing that it makes you feel some type of way, to

> make you feel like you lost your freedom or something. Like you don't own yourself. You owned to somebody else, now. They got control of you. That's how I feel.

KP also spoke of how JDC maintained power over him. He noted that people started to remember his face. He talked through the process of arriving at the facility each time:

> They searching me, patting me down, then, putting me in a little holding cell, then give you a call to your mom. You gotta take a weight check, height check, take your picture, do your fingerprints, and then, you gonna sit back in your cell and wait 'til your court date, and watch everybody transition, and when they go on break, when they don't go on break, you're sitting out there watching the time, talking to the person above you. Yeah, that's it.

On one occurrence, he emphasized, "Dude grabbed me overly aggressive, I had to curse his ass out." He further stated, "Some people just like to have power over people so for they feel like they doing something." KP refused to attend class at JDC, but that did not stop the jail from governing where he went and when.

I independently learned to self-manage.

KP also revealed how he independently learned to self-manage, since he found that the school did little to support his behavioral and emotional needs. Their instruction did not seem to impact him, and the skills they were trying to teach did not make a difference. "School used to give me little skills like slow your breathing, play with a fidget, fidget spinners, and stuff." His belief was that the change occurred more internally

for him. He taught himself to "learn how to handle the situation" and "learn how to deal with the situation." He found this learning provided him the understanding that if he learned that he was "going to be successful."

Concurrently, KP found by using marijuana he was able to remain calm and focused. It supported his growth. "Smokin'. It helped me all the way. I just be calm, mellow. I don't care what everybody else is doing. I'm just focused on myself. That's all the difference." By self-medicating, the expectations and restrictions were more tolerable for KP. He shared that during a typical day he would be "Smokin'. Smokin' all day. Leaving this bitch high as hell." His self-medicating and his own learning played the largest factor in his progress.

Summary of Themes

Through KP's two interviews, he shared in great detail his experiences and the impact of those impacts on his "self." The four themes uncovered from the interviews are listed in Table 4.6. KP routinely spoke of his current reality of being locked up and restricted and the desire for more freedom. He appreciated most staff that looked like him and to whom he could relate because of the connection to his family and community. KP found that throughout his experience, staff sought power and control, and overall, he was the big reason why he was able to progress. In chapter 5, these themes are further discussed and analyzed alongside the themes of the other cases.

Table 4.6

KP: Summary of Themes

KP: Summary of Themes
I had a lack of freedom.
I benefited from being connected to staff.
I was imprisoned.
I independently learned to self-manage.

Case Study 3: AJ

Kind. Funny. Outgoing. Honest. AJ knows when to be serious but also enjoys playing around. This high school senior had always been a big guy, which allowed him to be good at football as a linebacker. While AJ has an educational diagnosis of EBD, he shared he also has a learning disability and ADHD diagnosis. He said he has been impacted by anxiety, being bullied, and feeling trapped. At the same time, he feels like he is making progress—notably in his ability to learn and stay out of physical altercations. AJ has big hopes and dreams of graduating from high school and later earning an undergraduate and graduate degree to be a mental health therapist allowing him to give back to his community. AJ is also interested in being a forensic scientist to make a lot of money.

Themes from the Initial Interview

I was continually bullied.

AJ's initial interview revealed two themes shown in Table 4.7. Regarding bullying, which he began experiencing in second grade, he stated that students would

"fat-shame me," He proceeded, "and that stuff hurts. . . . When you are already insecure about your body, your face, your body, and all that, and people make fun of that, [it] makes ya' wanna kill themself." Recognizing his weight, he said, "I was kinda fat too, not [as] fat as I am now, but I was bigger. I was a big guy when I was younger." In elementary school, students would also take his food at lunch, which his mom made for him, and this evidently bothered AJ very much.

Table 4.7

AJ: Themes from the Initial Interview

Theme	Open and Axial Codes
I was continually bullied.	● I was called names, pushed, and punched. ● I was fat-shamed and called the N-word. ● I became truant because of the bullying.
I had a team that helped me.	● I appreciated the staff that —was encouraging. —told me what I needed to hear. ● My mom gave me advice, recognized a problem, and solved a problem. ● I needed one or two good friends.

The bullying continued through elementary school and into middle school. Some of his peers used the N-word to define AJ, causing him to "flip" and become unsafe with his body and words. The school was not a safe environment for AJ as students also hit and punched him. He experienced feelings of detachment and a lack of connection to the school.

In fifth grade, AJ started to skip school. He felt school was stupid. "I just didn't like going there," he said. The bullying continued. He saw his sister and his friends get bullied, all while he continued to be bullied. A significant event hit AJ hard. At age 11, he exclaimed, he was just starting to know about death when one of his friends committed suicide due to such bullying. With great emotion, he cried out,

> It affects people's lives. Everyone has a breaking point. You can't stop it. My best friend. I feel so bad he died. I really do. I could help him, and I didn't. I didn't do nothing about it. I just walked away.

This impacted him in multiple areas of his life and he still was processing it. For him, the bullying did not stop. "That's why I didn't want to go to school, sixth, seventh, and eighth grade. They bullying me. I kept missing school 'cause they be bullying me, and then, I got truancy." AJ continued:

> Through his twelfth-grade year, he continues to be challenged with bullying:
>
> A couple months ago, I was walkin' through, and one of the kids [said] You're fat cuss word, and I am like that's the way you feel; like I know, I'm bigger. I know I am big, but you don't have to say that. It literally didn't make me feel that great. I am insecure about my body enough. They call me fat. It's scary. It makes me feel insecure about my body and all that.

As a survivor, it made him feel better that there were consequences, but he found the bullying never stopped, saying:

> I am pretty sure even when I am going into adulthood; the bullying will never stop. People are going to find some way to bully you about [how] big you are, about how skinny you are, how nice looking you are. People will still bully you.

Looking into the future, he feels he can hopefully make an impact and curb bullying behaviors. He shared that he hopes to start a non-profit organization with his mom to support victims of bullying and mitigate the impact.

I had a team that helped me.

Regarding the second theme shared through the initial interview, AJ shared that he had a team of support around him, and each played a role. His team comprised his teachers, one or two good friends, and his mom.

AJ found the teachers most valuable when they shared what he needed to hear. AJ clarified this in his comments about one teacher in particular. She was "somebody that [I] could talk to." He recognized this teacher was great, not just because she was nice, but because "she would keep it real with me." He found that others did more coddling and did not say what he needed to hear. Those teachers acted like he was doing okay even though he was not. His favorite teachers kept it honest and helped him identify his mistakes and "fix it."

AJ also appreciated the encouraging staff. He benefited from one teacher, specifically, who pushed him to be the best he could be. She would say things like, "You are a strong, intelligent, Black man." She challenged him beyond what he thought was possible by exclaiming, "You can do what you can do when you put your mind to it." He said, "She definitely pushed me to be my best, too. She said I could be something greater

than people think I am, and ‘Don’t let people control you or listen to what they say. Prove them wrong.’”

While teachers also helped AJ learn to take deep breaths, do pushups, and wall sits to calm down, his mom probably made an even more significant impact, introducing him to journaling. He was resistant at first but found it essential to get his thoughts, feelings, and experiences out as he has filled out three or four journals.

His mom also supported him and informed him that one of his teachers was racist. While AJ was perplexed by the situation, AJ’s mom said, “You are good, but your teacher can’t see that.” She articulated, “She saw a Black man that she wanted to put down.” Lastly, his mom made an impact by continuously sharing facts he needed to hear. His mom shared with him that he can’t get a job if he is unstable, that he had to do the work as others could not do it for him, and something he wished was not true, that she could not trust him any longer because of his behaviors.

Lastly, he recognized that he did not need more than one or two great friends. One friend he has had for a long time. This friend was motivating, and AJ felt he would have his back for life. AJ shared an example of how his friend helped him: "When I was getting bullied a couple years ago, he’d always stand up for me.” Even though AJ’s a bigger guy, he appreciated someone being there. “When people bully me. . . . That’s my weakness. It makes me weak. I get mad when people bully me.” AJ continued, “I just don’t want to be the next one, the next person to go.” AJ’s buddy would say, “That’s my brother right there,” and that is what AJ needed to get his strength back. AJ’s team each worked separately, but all played an important part.

Follow-up Interview Questions

AJ's initial interview set the groundwork for this case. His follow-up interview took place seven days after his initial interview. In the follow-up interview, the researcher sought a deeper understanding of the lived experiences and the impact of those lived experiences on AJ's self-concept. The below questions guided the follow-up interview.

1. What good things would people say about you? What are you good at?
2. What did/does a typical day/week look like for you in elementary, middle, and high school?
3. How were you personally impacted by staff, peers, and your actions?
4. How has school helped you grow in knowing yourself, handling your emotions, improving your relationships with peers and adults, and making responsible decisions?
5. You mentioned that one of your teachers was racist and other students using the N-word. Has this been repeated in school? How has this impacted you? Has it impacted how you view teachers and school?
6. Based on your previous interview, your mom seems to be quite an influence. How do you see the teachers and staff partnering with your mom? Has that helped?
7. You mentioned truancy a couple of times. Can you speak to why you were not going to school? What did the school do to welcome you? What could they have done better?
8. Is there anything else you would like to share?

Theme from the Follow-up Interview

I needed to learn to control my anger.

In the follow-up interview, one primary theme came through, as presented in Table 4.8. AJ needed to control his anger. One of his teachers exclaimed that as a large Black man, he needed to help himself calm down. People could not do it for him. Police would be scared of him.

Table 4.8

AJ: Theme from the Follow-up Interview

Theme	Open and Axial Codes
I needed to learn to control my anger.	● As a Black man, I must find a way to calm myself down. ● I was most aggressive in middle school. —I got mad daily. —I hurt myself and others. —I destroyed stuff. ● In response, I met with the admin, was suspended, and got kicked out of school. ● I was placed in holds, handcuffed, and sent to JDC. ● I was taught/used coping skills and I met with adults to help support my needs.

AJ's middle school years were the most difficult for him. During this time AJ became angrier. In response, he would have recurring meetings with his administration and be put in ISS. The school's response to his behavioral outbursts became more restrictive as his behaviors became more aggressive. AJ shared:

> I would get mad five times a week. I was just a angry kid. I was just [an] angry kid. . . . In sixth grade, it was really bad. I was angry at everybody else, at even myself. I took my anger out on everybody else. I was mad at the school. I was mad at myself. Holds would happen every day.

AJ's anger issues caused him to wreck property and hurt others. He also found himself in the hospital for hurting himself. AJ's behaviors became increasingly aggressive. He found that when he did something wrong, staff would put him in a hold. They'd "hold you down," he said, and "put you in a hold physically. Sometimes, they called my mom to come get me." Some schools' responses were more serious. Some holds would involve holding his legs down, and others would restrict him from being able to breathe. Once, he heard his shoulder pop. The police would be called and put him in handcuffs. "I've hit people before, and they put me in JDC. . . . I was bad." In middle school, he said, "I would get in-school suspension (ISS) or go to JDC. . . . I've had people press charges on me before, charged as a minor, off record by 18, assault charges." He repeated, "I was bad. . . . I threw a chair at a teacher's head, and they got a concussion, and they kicked me out after that."

In middle school and up through ninth grade, AJ had multiple occurrences of charges pressed against him and was put on house arrest and wore an ankle bracelet. His most prolonged stay at JDC was one to two months. He said JDC "scared the heck out of me." People would push him down and threaten him with shanks. He needed to control his anger. His most recent significant altercation was in ninth grade. He hit a student in the face. AJ went to JDC for three days, Friday to Sunday. He described JDC as "very

scary" and that "I never want to go back there." He figured that jail and prison "has to be a whole 'nother thing." He felt it had to be worse than JDC. After this occurrence at JDC, he had significant consequences. First, he had a one-week suspension, and then he was on-site in ISS for two weeks.

The school supported him in restoring the relationship. He apologized and now described himself and the other student as friends. He described the incident as a wake-up call, realizing, "I need to stop being the way I am." He felt he could do something with his life, and his behaviors could limit his future if he did not change. In the future, he wanted to do things like graduate high school and attend college. He knew he would derail such aspirations if he did not change his behaviors. After going to JDC for the last time, he said, he was forced to come to school due to truancy issues. He found this helped because the school was able to support him with impactful educators for his academics and in supporting his growth in controlling his anger. To make a change, he tried to improve his ability to control his anger. "I don't try and bottle it up. I try and talk about my anger." AJ used his journal and talked to the staff. He also coped by screaming into a pillow, taking deep breaths, and doing little exercises. As AJ was preparing for his high school graduation, progress was evident as AJ had not been back to JDC. AJ still carried with him anger but had done a better job coping.

Summary of Themes

Through AJ's initial and follow-up interviews, three themes came to light, as listed in Table 4.9. AJ had to cope with several things throughout his time in school. He was subjected to much bullying. Concurrently, he needed to find a way to combat his

anger. AJ had a team around him, but it was on him to make a change. Further discussion about AJ's themes is provided in the next chapter.

Table 4.9

AJ: Summary of Themes

AJ: Summary of Themes
I was impacted by bullying.
I had a team that helped me.
I needed to learn to control my anger.

Case Study 4: JC

Open-Minded. Goofy. Understanding. Caring. Ambitious. JC, a high school senior, defined himself as "nothing extraordinary, you know, just the average, typical guy." JC's education journey "has been a long, interesting process" where he has been to many schools but found that overall his experience has been "good." JC likes basketball, food, and hanging out with friends. At the time of the interviews, he was finishing up his last year of high school and serves on the student council. JC's message to educators was, "don't let those kids who are in situations that are different from others feel left out." He has a deep passion for understanding others. "It's good to understand people where they come from and who they are as people." He continued, "I think that's a beautiful thing to be able to understand people." In the future, he doesn't want to be stuck doing a job he

would dread just for the money. He enjoys writing music and wants to eventually have his own talk show because he loves to entertain.

Themes from the Initial Interview

I valued deep, individualized connections with my teachers.

From the initial interview, two themes were uncovered, as seen in Table 4.10. First, JC valued staff with the mindset of “I'm not just somebody that's here giving you papers to learn.” JC found he was better able to connect with vulnerable staff who took the time to share about them and know about him. Simply noticing that a student had his head down one day while they typically are alert and engaged was not enough, he said; he needed more. JC wanted a teacher to be part of his life where both student and staff would share their experiences and genuinely know about each other. Generally, this was the case at his high school, and he highlighted one teacher specifically. She took the “time to get to know you, to understand you, and know your story aside from other people.” He felt that made the relationships more authentic and stronger.

Table 4.10

JC: Themes from the Initial Interview

Theme	Open and Axial Codes
I valued deep, individualized connections with my teachers.	● I wanted a relationship beyond classwork. ● I valued staff that could relate to students and is a positive role model. ● I wanted the teachers to know deeply about me. ● Deep relationships helped me academically as they helped me feel more comfortable with the person teaching me.

I needed staff who responded with care.	• I appreciated staff providing meaningful feedback • I valued staff responding to my needs and getting to the root of the problem/need. • It is essential for me to have staff that understands before reacting.

Counter to this narrative was his experience in mainstream schools and at his first setting-four school. He distinctly remembered hating his first setting-four school. JC refused to go on the bus because he did not feel there was a connection as they were looking at what was wrong with him rather than getting to know him. JC sought a deep, authentic relationship with staff members. He thought it was crucial for all students to have this relationship with staff so he would feel comfortable enough to ask questions and ask for help. JC stated, “[You] gotta be comfortable with who you are getting the knowledge from.”

JC highlighted one more educator who was a younger, “chill” and “laid-back guy” who played college sports and is now a gym teacher. JC viewed him as kind of a big brother. He appreciated his positivity and noted, “If you got a problem with him, you probably just having a bad day or kind of being a bitch yourself.” JC added, “You could talk to him about things and then go play basketball with him.” He saw this staff member as something even more for some students, saying:

> For people who don't have that outside of their house, may not have a big brother or just a positive male influence in their life, in general, sometimes that can be provided here so you can learn certain things that males teach young men, and that's just like how to approach certain things in life as a young man.

I needed staff who responded with care.

Illustrating this theme was JC's finding that the staff at his high school "show that they care for you first." This was notably seen in how one teacher shared honest and constructive feedback starting with the positives. The teacher would say, "You're doing good. You're doing good, but also let you know, like hey, when you're slacking. You gotta pick it up. You gotta do this. You gotta do that." She would look out for him, support and hold him accountable. He stated, "I respect her for that."

Furthermore, even though JC felt like he could relate to and had good relationships with his peers at his current school, conflicts erupted at times. JC expressed how staff responded to student conflicts. JC noted that instead of allowing it to turn into a big issue, the staff quickly got to the root of "what's going on." The teachers helped the peers figure it out. JC saw his high school as "really just like every other school, but there's more support."

JC brought up one more staff member who demonstrated responding with care in another way. Throughout JC's life, he always spoke loudly, and people often thought he was angry or an "asshole." He did not even realize it until she pointed it out. She took it one step further and shared this observation with others to help support him. "Yeah, he's loud, but he's just trying to let it out. . . . Sometimes, he just needs to get that out of there. He's not yelling at you. He's not trying to hurt you."

Lastly, in middle school, JC provided counter-examples of responding with care as he was subjected to and witnessed responses from an SRO that was racist. In reflecting on the events, he stated:

> I think, if you're gonna have SRO in school . . . you need to make sure working with some of these kids that got behavior issues, especially young Black men, young Black girls, kids from the inner city . . . [they] need to be able to understand. You know what I'm saying, and not just react.

Follow-up Interview Questions

JC's initial interview provided a strong foundation to build for this case study. In the follow-up interview that took place 24 days later, the researcher pursued a deeper understanding of the lived experiences and the impact of those lived experiences on his "self." The below questions guided the follow-up interview.

1. What good things would people say about you? What are you good at?
2. What did/does a typical day/week look like for you in elementary, middle, and high school?
3. How were you personally impacted by staff, peers, and your actions?
4. How has school helped you grow in knowing yourself, handling your emotions, improving your relationships with peers and adults, and making responsible decisions?
5. You said the SRO working in the inner city with Black young men and girls needs to understand and not just react. Were there times that teachers or administrators did this as well?
6. You mentioned how your friends were a positive influence. How did the schools help foster this?
9. Is there anything else you would like to share?

Theme from the Follow-up Interview

I was made a criminal.

In JC's follow-up interview, one theme, I was made a criminal, became apparent depicted in Table 4.11. JC was part of a number of events and experiences that led to the label of "criminal." The first event occurred in his mainstream elementary school. He was continuously bullied by one student specifically. JC said, "I was such a nice kid, like I was the type of kid [that only if] you put your hands on me [or] somebody I care about, that's the only way you get me to snap. You can talk all the crap you want in the world; I don't care." After his mom saw the bullying firsthand, though, JC received orders from his mom that he could not let the bully do that to him anymore. At recess a week later, the bully was giving him a hard time again. In reflecting, he does feel bad for how far he took it, but not for doing it. "I was picked on constantly, you know, and I didn't want to do nothing, [but] to make everybody happy and make everybody feel good." He continued, "I put him in a chokehold, slamming him to the ground." JC recalled, " He got right back up, you know, he was crying, but he got right back [up]. I didn't snap his neck or nothin."

Table 4.11

JC: Theme from the Follow-up Interview

Theme	Open and Axial Codes
I was made a criminal.	• After being routinely bullied, I put a student in a chokehold. —I was put in a setting-four school.

	● I was sent to a locked room for long durations of time and sent to a mental hospital. —I was traumatized. ● After being hit with a pencil and antagonized, I punched a student —I had to serve community service and probation. —I was anxious at school; it impacted the way I thought and moved —I was seen as a criminal.

JC remembered his case manager being on his side, knowing he should not have taken it so far, but understanding that he had been picked on repeatedly. JC recalled the principal proclaiming a different message at another meeting, “We can't have kids who act like that, that have that behavior.” JC was sent to a setting-four school.

At the setting-four elementary school, he felt staff were, “waiting for you to do something bad,” adding, “It felt like an asylum, like a prison, sometimes.” JC recalled repeatedly going into a locked room. He expressed, “There would be times I’d be sitting in there for hours, even if I cooled down. They just didn't feel like dealing with me and giving me the chance. . . . They had just locked me in there.” JC remembered the time that he felt most distressed was when he was not having a good day. “Not only did they lock me in that room, they called my mom, called the ambulance, and got me in a damn mental hospital.” He further shared, “My mom, looking back now is even like, yeah, that’s messed up. You didn’t even need that.” JC explained that while most students spend at least three months in there, he was out in two weeks. He felt that people shared the idea when he was at the hospital that “There's no reason for this dude to come here. He's not, you know, trying to harm himself. . . . He's not extreme. He's not mentally

unstable." JC concluded about his experience at that school "So, it was very traumatizing. Just, I felt like there's a lot of things they put me through that I just didn't need. . . . I hope nobody ever has to experience that school, man."

JC elaborated on an incident he discussed in the first interview. He had been hit with a pencil and encouraged over and over by the initial aggressor and his peers. JC asked for support from the teacher, but the teacher said he was busy as he was on the phone. JC eventually punched the student and was arrested. He added:

> Nobody just looks at me like, "Hey, that's a mixed man." They see my brown skin or my curly hair or when I got my Afro up, and they see a Black man, and if they don't see that, they see me as Mexican 'cause I look Mexican, too. So, either way is gonna, I'm gonna be shown discrimination.

JC found the intersection of the judicial system and school impacted his focus. He said this was because "I had to do community service, I was on probation for a year, man. I had to do things that you're normal every day 12-, 13-year-old don't really have to worry about." Outside of school, he had to make "sure I'm behaving real good . . . I don't get in trouble." He continued:

> I had to stay real cautious, and it affected my learning because I went to school, and I'd be weary of the officer. . . . I didn't feel cool for that because I felt like that's all I was constantly reminded of and seen as was, damn, this is a kid out here starting off his life with a criminal record.

JC, reflected on the incident and the impact it had on him. JC said that each time he was around family or friends, he was reminded and seen as a kid with a record. In thinking

about it years later, he stated, “I can't always do everything about something. There's certain things where you just have to live with that understanding that man, at this point in my life, I was really screwed over. I know it was messed up. It is what it is.”

Summary of Themes

Throughout JC’s educational experience it was evident that his experiences impacted how he saw himself. He added that race was also a factor partially illuminated in the theme of responding with care. Further discussion about the themes, shown in Table 4.12, intersectionality, counter-storytelling, and the self-concept are provided in Chapter 5.

Table 4.12

JC: Summary of Themes

JC: Summary of Themes
I valued deep, individualized connections with my teachers.
I needed staff who responded with care.
I was made a criminal.

Multi-Case Study Themes

LT, KP, AJ, and JC took part in two interviews addressing the impact of their lived educational experiences on their self-concept. The students shared an array of experiences. Parts of their journeys were similar to one another, while others conflicted. LT, AJ, and JC found race was a factor in their educational experiences. KP, AJ, and JC had encounters with the judicial system and their educational experience. LT, AJ, and JC

were all impacted by bullying behavior. All the students found similar teacher qualities that were helpful to them. All possessed goals and were optimistic about reaching them. The themes from each student's interviews are found in Table 4.13.

Table 4.13

Summary of Themes

LT: Summary of Themes
I had inadequate support.
I had responsive staff.
I survived independently.
I needed staff who invested in me.
KP: Summary of Themes
I had a lack of freedom.
I benefited from being connected to staff.
I was imprisoned.
I learned to self-manage.
AJ: Summary of Themes
I was continually bullied.
I had a team that helped me.
I needed to learn to control my anger.
JC: Summary of Themes
I valued deep, individualized connections with my teachers.
I needed staff who responded with care.
I was made a criminal.

Conclusion

In this chapter, the researcher examined the students' words to discuss the findings of two research questions.

1. What are the lived experiences of Black male students diagnosed with EBD?
2. How have the lived experiences of Black male students diagnosed with EBD impacted their self-concept?

The qualitative text revealed the students' lived experiences in their own words. From the transcripts, themes were drawn from each case.

In Chapter 5, the research draws conclusions about intersectionality, counter-storytelling, and self-concept.

CHAPTER 5

Discussion

The purpose of this qualitative multiple-case study was to build an understanding of the lived experiences of four Black male high school students diagnosed with EBD and to understand how such experiences impact their self-concept. The intersection of race, gender, and disability was investigated through counter-storytelling. The primary research questions were:

1. What are the lived experiences of Black male students diagnosed with EBD?
2. How have the lived experiences of Black male students diagnosed with EBD impacted their self-concept?

Collectively, the four case studies produced 14 themes. By synthesizing the cases, the researcher created a theory about the school experiences of Black male students diagnosed with EBD and how the students' self-concepts were impacted. The theory includes four overarching themes about the school experiences of Black males diagnosed with EBD:

- I was treated inhumanely.
- I benefit from invested staff who build individualized connections with me.
- I require responsive support.
- I independently need to cope.

Concurrently, the construct of race was intertwined into all aspects of the students' experiences. From the students' perspective, racism was apparent in relationships with

staff and how staff inhumanely responded to the students. They were forced to cope independently.

This chapter provides an interpretation of the findings, alignment to the conceptual framework, implications for practice, and suggestions for further research. Specifically, the interpretation of findings focused on answering the two research questions by discussing the themes and alignment with prior research.

Interpretation of the Findings

Throughout the remainder of this section, the four overarching themes are shared in further detail, collectively producing a theory of the students' lived experiences and the impact on their self-concept. The researcher answered the two research questions by intertwining the current study with previous research and the conceptual framework.

I Am Treated Inhumanely

The Black male students diagnosed with EBD in this study described being subjected to the following burdensome experiences: bullying, being restrained and locked in a small room, facing law enforcement in schools, and being subjected to restrictive rules and school practices. Their self-concept was impacted by the experiences, and the experiences were impacted by the self-concept.

Bullied. The majority of the students in this study experienced bullying. In previous studies, bullying is also apparent for Black students and those diagnosed with emotional or behavioral needs (Brown Hajdukova et al., 2015; Sullivan et al., 2014). Malecki et al. (2020) found that students diagnosed with EBD are more likely to be victimized by bullying behavior. Furthermore, students with EBD have a lower

perception of the school climate and identify as having more mental health problems, according to Salle et al. (2018). Like the students in this multi-case study, Brown Hajdukova et al. (2015) found that students in general education settings ridiculed and made fun of students diagnosed with EBD, causing social isolation, sadness, and distress. Three of the students in this study shared that bullying played a factor in how they felt about themselves. Spilt et al. (2014) stated that internalizing social rejection might impact students' self-concept. In addition, Rose et al. (2016) found a positive relationship between victims of bullying, a lower level of self-esteem, and higher levels of depression. Because of this, students' participation in the classroom may be impacted (Sullivan et al., 2014), and may cause students with EBD to react by punching, throwing desks, and kicking others (Brown Hajdukova et al., 2015).

Restraint and Seclusion. In this study, multiple students spoke of being physically restrained, handcuffed, and locked in a small room (secluded). According to the U.S. Department of Education (2012), "physical restraint and seclusion should not be used except to protect a child or others from imminent danger of serious physical harm." Gage et al. (2020) found students in setting four are "almost guaranteed" to be restrained or secluded. Furthermore, the same study found students with disabilities had a higher likelihood of being restrained (seven times) or secluded (four times) more than their peers (Gage et al., 2020).

The seclusion efforts resemble solitary confinement; the only difference may be less allotted time. According to an article by the American Civil Liberties Union (2014), juvenile facilities often call these rooms by other names, similar to the students in this

study. In the current study, KP spoke of how he felt "owned" by someone else being confined to the school "jail cell," and JC shared that he was traumatized as he experienced occasions where he would remain in seclusion for a long. These restraints and seclusionary actions have caused injuries, psychological trauma, and even death (Gage et al., 2020). Solitary confinement can cause an increased risk of suicide, physical harm, developmental harm, and exasperate trauma and abuse, particularly for children with disabilities (2014). Thus, these practices can cause immense harm and minimal benefit; in fact, Gagnon et al. (2017) found that utilizing seclusion and restraint may not reduce the behavior but re-enforce it.

Law Enforcement in Schools. Black males with EBD described being subjected to inhumane practices due to the union between law enforcement and education. In this study, students were subjected to SRO oversight and harassment, and two students were further impacted by being arrested and going to JDC. Many studies have reported data describing SROs' negative impacts. These include frequent negative SRO interactions with students, criminalizing school discipline issues, and perpetuating the school-to-prison pipeline. Students of color and students with disabilities are specifically vulnerable to being identified as "potential criminals" (Renbarger, 2022). Furthermore, many students from this study were suspended, both in and out of school from a very young age. This disciplinary action may label the student similarly as a "troublemaker," impacting their identity both now and in the future. These perceptions may continue to impact students, increasing the likelihood of them being assigned an alternative school placement and later in a juvenile detention center (Vanderhaar, 2022). The incarcerated

environment can cause the teenage brain to incur negative implications on the self-concept because their identity and self-esteem are permeable (Lane et al., 2002).

In all, this study illuminated that Black males diagnosed with EBD may be treated inhumanely. As described by the students, there appeared to be a significant bullying problem that impacted the students' behaviors and their self-concept. Concurrently, the students explained that restraint and seclusion were used frequently, and seclusion, in particular, may have been used not only for safety but possibly as a way to punish the students or, at minimum, as a way not to have to "deal" with the student. Lastly, the presence of SROs and students being sent to JDC was another way the students were subjected to inhumane treatment. Altogether, each of these experiences appeared to impact the students' self-concept and possibly left a lasting impact on their lives.

I Benefit From Invested Staff who Build Individualized Connections With Me

The students from this multi-case study elaborated on the need for educators who invested in them and created deep and meaningful relationships. The students described benefiting from positive experiences with the staff of color. They found value in staff from within their community who had strong relationships with their families.

Deep Individual Relationships. They favored staff who fostered relationships with them and knew them beyond classwork and school. They wanted staff to know them as people. Similarly, Yeager et al. (2020) found that students sought teachers that knew them "personally" and genuinely showed care. Consequently, these strong teacher-student relationships can lead to positive student self-esteem and psychological well-being. As Sarkova et al. (2014) found, there is a statistically strong relationship between a

positive teacher-student relationship and self-esteem and psychological well-being. Additionally, Morin et al. (2013) found that interpersonal relationships can positively promote students' self-esteem.

The importance of fostering a meaningful relationship may be magnified with Black males with EBD. Murray & Zvoch (2011) found that students with emotional or behavioral needs demonstrate less trust and connectedness to staff. The students in this study described forgiveness and trust when the staff had short memories and forgave them for their mistakes. Forgiveness is part of fostering that positive relationship. Boucher (2016) stressed the practice of building a solid relationship as a daily journey of reflection, purposeful interactions, and continued maintenance. The building of positive relationships between students and teachers can then lead to positive impacts on students' self-esteem (Akin & Radford, 2018).

The students in this study appreciated staff who showed an investment in them, knowing that they may have "issues" but seeing them as people with potential. They just have to put "in the effort." The students in this study stated that with a strong, trusting relationship with the teachers, they more readily asked questions and asked for help. At the same time, Hattie (2012) found that relationships are essential for academic achievement. Positive relationships between students and teachers can improve a student's academic success and self-efficacy.

Educators of Color. Students shared that having teachers of color, specifically Black staff was valuable. The Black staff who had positive relationships with these students were effective. Milner (2006) contended that staff of color could support

students of color by connecting their teachings to their own life experiences. In contrast, Caton (2012) and Hackett et al. (2018) discovered that from the perspective of both high school students who dropped out and future college students, racial differences and perceptions of them as Black males were barriers in the teacher-student relationship. These racial and cultural barriers could impact students' sense of self. In comparison, a racially and culturally responsive classroom could provide a student with something else entirely. It could be a place where students could “actually learn” and “feel comfortable” (Slaten et al., 2016, p. 28).

Family and Community. The students in this study revealed that a deep connection became even stronger when the staff were from the same community. Additionally, some great educators were highlighted who fostered a positive relationship with the students’ home lives and families. The combination of connecting with the family and community, coupled with a personal relationship with the student, appeared to lead to an extension of the student’s family at school. Multiple students even referred to staff at school as their school grandma, brother, or mom. Schlein et al. (2013) found that staff’s relationships with their family could cause a student to go from being disengaged socially and academically to one that contributed and learned. Furthermore, in the current study, three students shared that some staff acted as role models who played and talked about sports and formed meaningful relationships. JC shared that because of difficult home circumstances and stressors and possibly a lack of a male role model, having a mentor at school could be especially significant.

Collectively, the students in this study shared how they benefited from invested

staff who built individualized connections with them. By having a deep relationship with the staff, the students found that they were more comfortable learning and asking for help. They shared that a connection to their family was essential and staff from the same background and culture amplified their effectiveness, all of which can positively impact the student's self-concept.

I Require Responsive Support

The students shared that they needed responsive support from staff for their academic, social, emotional, and behavioral needs. They required ongoing encouragement, support that extended beyond classwork, and responsive educators to support them with conflict. They felt that these factors led to progress in school and saw themselves more positively.

Ongoing Encouragement. The students in this study shared that positive reinforcement went a long way to reaching success. One student found that with great encouragement and responsive teaching, he made multiple grade levels of growth in reading in one year. According to a study that gathered the Black male perspectives about educational experiences at an alternative high school, Slaten et al. (2016) reported that students appreciated the flexibility in pacing and taking in student feedback. Concurrently, Downs et al. (2018), who investigated the teacher's use of positive and negative reinforcement and the impact on students with EBD, discovered that encouragement significantly supported students with EBD needs. However, Silva et al. (2015) found that Black male students were the least likely to receive positive reinforcement. Positive reinforcement and successful past experiences can impact the

students' self-efficacy as it is greatly influenced by persuasion, coaching, and encouragement (Bandura, 1994).

Another student in this study, AJ, discussed the impactful actions of one staff member: "She definitely pushed me to be my best . . . [so] I could be something greater than people think I am." This staff member not only provided a possible boost in self-esteem and self-efficacy but may have lowered students' likelihood of internalizing racist stereotypes. This experience aligns with Bandura's (1994) work which found that a person's self-efficacy is impacted by such positive reinforcement. Furthermore, according to Bandura, this change in self-efficacy could significantly impact their academic performance over skill and ability.

Beyond Academic Support. The students in this study also spoke of staff being available and more responsive to other things beyond their academics. For example, one helped a student realize how he was perceived (as angry) by others and helped others understand him beyond the initial impression. Another act of going beyond academic support was demonstrated by providing another student with an opportunity to take a nap and go back to class. Staff also were responsive in helping students control their emotions and sometimes helped the student process difficulties in their homes.

Response to Conflict. The students in the study talked about peer conflict and bullying and how they received adequate and inadequate support depending on the school and individual staff members. LT, for example, named his first-grade teacher, who often supported him by addressing the bullying immediately. He added that even if it happened again, she responded. This quick response was mentioned by multiple students in their

setting-four high school, where the staff immediately separated the students and got to the root of the situation.

On the other hand, CJ and LT shared that they were subjected to staff who demonstrated bias in responding without understanding events, resulting in the students of color receiving inequitable, more grievous responses. The outcome and process impacted how others saw them and how they saw themselves. For example, CJ shared:

> Every time we went around with family or some of our friends, I was reminded of it. I didn't feel cool for that because I felt like that's all I was constantly reminded of and seen as was damn, this is a kid out here starting off his life with a criminal record. Yeah, I didn't feel like I wanted to be seen as that. For me it worried me alive and made me anxious of like my every move.

The Caton (2012) study supports this evidence, noting inequitable disciplinary practices where Black males received a more severe consequence. Findings in the Wynne et al. (2013) study support these ideas, with parents' beliefs that school was a contributor to unsuccessful outcomes due to a negative environment and a lack of support.

In the current study, the students stated that they require responsive educators who provided encouragement and responded to both needs beyond the classroom and to conflict. The staff played a critical role in supporting the students and meeting their individual needs. By meeting their individual needs, it may help the students build a better sense of self and improve their academic, social, emotional, and behavioral skills.

I Independently Need to Cope

The students in this study described how they were forced to cope independently

when faced with restrictive and harmful school environments, racism, ineffective practices and systems, and their SEL needs. These students all demonstrated aggressive behavior yet found their way to persist through their educational journeys.

Aggressive Behavior. Each student coped by engaging in self-harm, damaging property, or physical violence—fighting with other students. Students described their reasons for fighting as responding to other students who started it, recurrent bullying, a lack of staff support, and anger. Similarly, Crowther et al. (2019) found that students may fight because they need to protect themselves, be accepted by others, and contest victimizing. They added that fighting could become part of a student's identity and may not be easily changed.

Persist. Each student in this study shared that they had progressed beyond fighting and physical violence. Throughout their education journey, however, they had to persist through significant challenges. The continuous bullying, locked doors, suspensions, restraints, and racist practices took a toll on the students. Peguero and Bracy (2014) investigated factors that lead to students dropping out. They found school discipline (such as suspensions), perceived unfairness of rules and discipline practices, and increased school security were all associated with a higher likelihood of students dropping out. The students in this study, however, did not drop out; they persevered and were forced to find their way to cope. This individual burden may play a part in why Sacks and Kern (2008) found that the quality of life for students diagnosed with EBD was significantly lower than that of their peers.

In the current study, the students coped by leaving class early, walking the halls,

and making jokes. LT was forced to find new ways to cope after staff restricted his ability to roam the halls and stopped allowing him to shake his legs or fidget in his classroom. While KP noted that staff provided him with a fidget or showed him how to take a deep breath, he largely credited himself with teaching himself and altering his mindset to focus and remain calm, including using marijuana. AJ started journaling and talking out his feelings to cope with his anger. Ultimately, all the students found that they needed to act a certain way. As Black males, the school and world were not built for them. They needed to continue to find ways to help them survive.

As Baumeister (1998) exclaimed, the self exerts control over itself and its environment by taking action based on motivation. This exertion seems to have occurred for the students in this study, reaching for their dreams. They dreamt of becoming an auto mechanic, a difference maker, free, and accomplishing “crazy” and “wild things.”

The students in this study needed to cope independently through their education journey. They persisted, and although at times they fought, they matured and found their way to navigate their school experience as Black men diagnosed with EBD in a world that was not made for them to succeed.

Alignment to Conceptual Framework

This study's conceptual framework was built on the students sharing their counterstories. These counterstories illuminated how the students were impacted by the intersection of race, gender, and ableness. At the core of the conceptual framework for this study is critical race theory (CRT). According to Ladson-Billings (1998), CRT identifies the systematic way that people of color are oppressed and exploited in every

area of American life to maintain White supremacy and privilege. The two CRT tenets focused on in this study were counter-storytelling and intersectionality.

Counter-Storytelling

The CRT tenet named counter-storytelling provides a platform and amplifies the voice of the marginalized (Caton, 2012). The marginalization of people on the basis of race began in the 1400s when the color of a person's skin started to be utilized as a weapon to name one group of people as less than another. These people of color were forced into a life of servitude (Zurara et al., 1896). Since then, Black males in the United States have been subjected to slavery, Jim Crow laws, inequitable schooling, and inferior social systems. Black males are depicted as violent (Hays et al., 2010), unintelligent, and subhuman (White & Cones, 1999). These stereotypes persist today as Black male middle school students from Hacket et al. (2018) shared that when you see a Black man, you see someone who is unsuccessful, quick-tempered, and someone who fights. The students from this study may or may not have internalized these messages, but they have been impacted by structural racism. From the current study, LT expressed his understanding of the construct of race and its impact when he stated, "I'm a man of color. . . . The world is not built for me." The participants of this study wrote their own stories by living their lives. They navigated a world burdened with racism yet pursued their own lofty goals. Sharing it in this work provided their account to produce their counterstory—a different story that reflects their truth. AJ shared his story through his case as he gained control of his anger through the use of journaling and KP in making progress toward achieving his freedom. Also, CJ persisted through significant challenges to be part of the student

council and graduate high school, and LT continued to take steps toward his goal of being an auto mechanic. Through sharing their truth and their stories, these students revealed their resilience, care, humanity, and incredible growth.

Intersectionality

The students in this multi-case study were subjected to the intersection of race, gender, and ableness. Crenshaw (1989) identified the combination of race and gender as something that intersects to compound disenfranchisement. To further understand the impact of intersectionality, this study also examines disability as an added form of oppression that complicated the lives of these Black male students. From previous research, students with EBD are twice as likely to be suspended than their grade-level peers. Similarly, Black students are 1.5 times more likely, and males are 1.2 times more likely to be suspended (Anyon et al., 2014).

Collectively, the three oppressive elements in the students' lives in this study—being Black, male, and diagnosed as EBD—could have been responsible for an even higher rate of suspension than all three would experience individually, producing a different outcome than the individual identities. Like suspension, the intersecting oppression between the three variables may further alienate this group of students in areas discussed earlier in the literature review, including praise/reprimand ratios (Downs et al., 2018), referral rates (Anyon et al., 2014), and graduation rates (McFarland et al., 2018).

Alignment to Current Study

Through the remainder of this discussion, major takeaways will be discussed by

utilizing the lens of the conceptual framework. The existence of racism produced unique lived experiences for the students. Each student's self-concept was affected, in part, by their educational experiences and the intersection of race, gender, and ableness. The opportunity to hear from these students through their counterstories provided a distinctive firsthand account of their lived experiences and self-concept.

Restrictive Practices. KP articulated, "I don't understand why a school would have a jail cell." By listening to the students and hearing their counterstories, staff can look beyond norms and rethink the premise of restrictive practices. Even though KP later shared a more holistic understanding of why this disciplinary action existed at his school, the question is fair. The mere existence of a room used to isolate these students is cause for concern. At a minimum, there are less restrictive practices that can better support a child's humanity. Restrictive practices caused harm to this group of students and appeared to affect how they saw themselves.

Racism. An additional element integrated into each of the themes was being subjected to racism. LT, AJ, and JC referred to staff who treated them differently due to the color of their skin. LT and JC saw a difference in responses to incidents and consequences between them and their white peers. AJ recognized a particular educator as racist after conversing with his mother. Inhumane and discriminatory treatment as described by three of the students brought to light the racist practices they felt they experienced and how it may have impacted them. Black males are especially at risk for negative development of self because of intersecting obstacles (Sullivan & Esmail, 2012). LT and JC both had to navigate the feeling of being targeted as a criminal, and AJ felt

labeled as a bad person even though he was behaving well.

JC reflected on an incident in the classroom where he was unsupported and felt unfairly arrested and charged. He said that when he was around family or friends, he was reminded and felt seen as a kid with a record. In thinking about it years later, he stated, “I can't always do everything about something. There's certain things where you just have to live with that understanding that, man, at this point in my life, I was really screwed over. I know it was messed up. It is what it is.”

Institutional racism also played a role in the students' lived experiences. Schools produce inequitable outcomes. Students in this study had different lived experiences that may have resulted in a higher likelihood of being diagnosed with EBD in the first place, being closely watched over, suspended disproportionately, physically restrained, and sent to a locked room or JDC at a disproportionately higher rate. The staff within their schools reinforced these racial inequalities.

Persist and Overcome. Through the counterstories, the students shared assets that helped them persist and overcome. At times, they coped independently. They persisted by finding ways to cope and overcome restrictive practices and hostile school climates where the students were bullied. The students also shared the benefit of having responsive staff who built deep relationships with them. The responsive staff stepped in in a timely matter to support the students by isolating their biases and creating a space where the students could succeed. The deep relationships allowed them to learn from someone they could trust. These staff members built deeper relationships with the students that went beyond the classroom.

Conclusion

Because of the prevalence of racism and the intersection of race, gender, and ableness, students in this case study had a unique and troubling educational experience. The students' counterstories illuminated that they were treated inhumanely. They benefited from responsive support and invested staff who built individual connections. Concurrently, they learned how to cope independently.

Implications for Practice

This study revealed experiences and practices that hindered and benefitted Black males diagnosed with EBD. Such findings show a need for the continued evolution of how schools operate and how educators practice.

Training and Educator Practices

This study has found that this sample of Black males diagnosed with EBD go through significant negative experiences. Combined with previous research, it is clear that this population in particular, are subjected to racist practices that have resulted in adverse outcomes such as suspension, more significant consequences, and lower graduation rates. Because of this, it is evident that further training on anti-racist practices, identifying one's biases, and research like Yvette Jackson's research (2011) on all children being gifted must be a priority for all (teachers, ESPs, office staff, SROs, and administration) in our school systems. Training in best practices to support all students, especially Black males with EBD, must be enacted, practiced, monitored, and maintained systematically.

Relationships

Deep relationships between students and staff were identified as critical by students in this study. These understandings match findings from previous research. All staff who work with Black males diagnosed with EBD have a responsibility to serve students, starting with a deep relationship grounded in belief, care, and understanding of the student beyond that of the classroom setting.

Responsiveness to Students and Fostering a Positive Learning Environment

One school, a setting-four high school in the study, was highlighted by its remarkable capacity to maintain a positive learning environment and staff able to respond quickly, effectively, and thoroughly to peer conflict. This responsiveness should be the goal of all academic institutions. Mainstream schools with restrictive settings should revise practices and do everything in their power to build a more positive learning environment for all students. Staff, including teachers, ESPs, SROs and administration, play critical roles in creating such an environment and being responsive to student needs. Staff need to be responsive to students' needs. If there is a peer conflict, bullying, or even if a student is tired, schools have an obligation to respond in a timely and thorough fashion to provide students with a safe, nurturing environment that meets their basic needs.

Imprisonment and Freedom

This sample of Black males diagnosed with EBD experienced significant restrictive practices that limited their freedom and impacted their self-concept and ability to succeed. School systems must look closer at practices that are unnecessary or

overaggressive. Some of these practices could include practices of placing students in locked rooms, placing students in holds, having SROs and police on school grounds, and school removals, suspensions, and expulsions. Policies associated with these practices must be scrutinized, reviewed, and revised. Practices thereafter need to be monitored, and staff held accountable for such practices.

Suggestions for Further Research

While this research provides a starting point for understanding the lived experiences of Black males diagnosed with EBD and the impact of such experiences on their self-concept, more research is necessary. This study included the stories of four students who provided a detailed account of their experiences. Future research needs to seek a larger sample size, measure self-concept beyond interview data, provide data on the intersection of race, gender, and ableness, and provide further counterstories of marginalized people.

Sample size

A larger sample may reveal additional perceptions and experiences to more fully understand how schooling impacts this population.

Measure Self-Concept

Concurrently, in this multi-case study, self-concept was investigated purely through interviews. Utilizing a self-concept scale for additional data could support a more extensive understanding of the self-concept of Black male students diagnosed with EBD.

Data

Additionally, there is a lack of data on the intersection of race, gender, and

disability. The data associated with the intersection is critical to more fully understand the outcomes for these students. Currently, most data only reflects gender or race, or a disability diagnosis. Some studies detail data in terms of the intersection of race and gender. What are the graduation rates, suspension rates, and test scores for Black males diagnosed with EBD? How does that compare to other populations? In addition, what percentage of students are Black and male diagnosed with EBD, and what percentage of students in each setting are Black males diagnosed with EBD? What percentage are female?

Counterstories

Lastly, more studies that collect and examine the counterstories of the youth and marginalized communities throughout our educational system are needed. The outcomes and intricacies of institutional, systematic racism must be further understood, specifically in education. These populations need to be heard for such understandings to come to fruition.

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APPENDIX A

Formal Invitation

We need to hear from you. We need your perspective. You have ideas we have yet to realize. How has your educational experience impacted you? How could it be better? What do we need to know?

Dear student:

This is an invitation to take part in a study and provide needed information on your educational journey as a Black, male students with emotional or behavioral needs. I appreciate this opportunity to invite you to participate in my study, which I am conducting as a doctoral candidate in the Department of Educational Leadership at Minnesota State University, Mankato. This study is being completed alongside my faculty advisor, Dr. Melissa Krull.

Your voice, experience, and insight need to be heard in educational research. It is my goal to improve educational experiences and outcomes for all. This study is about amplifying your voice.

In agreeing to participate, you will take part in interviews. You will share your perceptions of how systems, people, and practices impacted your educational journey.

I greatly appreciate your time and interest. If you would like to participate, you and your parent need to review and sign the attached informed assent form and consent form and email/mail it to James Menke. If you have any questions about what is involved, please email (james.menke@mnsu.edu) or call me at 952-807-7538. Thank you very much for your consideration.

Sincerely,

James Menke

Minnesota State University, Mankato
Doctoral Candidate

(MNSU IRBNet ID Number: 1649322)

Your child's perspective is needed. How has their educational experience impacted them? How could it be better? What do we need to know?

Dear parent/guardian:

This is an invitation for your child to take part in a study and provide needed information on their educational journey as a Black male students with emotional or behavioral needs. I appreciate this opportunity to invite them to participate in my study, which I am conducting as a doctoral candidate in the Department of Educational Leadership at Minnesota State University, Mankato. This study is being completed alongside my faculty advisor, Dr. Melissa Krull.

Your child's voice, experience, and insight need to be heard in educational research. It is my goal to improve educational experiences and outcomes for all. This study is about amplifying your child's voice.

In consenting for your child to participate and your child agreeing to do so, your child will take part in interviews. Your child will share their perceptions of how systems, people, and practices impacted their educational journey.

I greatly appreciate your and your child's time and interest. If your child would like to participate and you consent, please review and sign the attached informed assent form and consent form and email/mail it to James Menke. If you have any questions about what is involved, please email (james.menke@mnsu.edu) or call me at 952-807-7538. Thank you very much for your consideration.

Sincerely,

James Menke

Minnesota State University, Mankato
Doctoral Candidate

(MNSU IRBNet ID Number: 1649322)

APPENDIX B

Consent Form

Title and Purpose of Study

The lived experiences of Black male students with emotional or behavioral needs: A qualitative study on self-concept

Your child is being asked to take part in a research project that will help adults understand what school is like for them. Your child will be asked to answer questions about their school experience and how it has impacted their self-concept. In all, they are being asked to participate in two 45-minute interviews during the school day. Their answers will be audio recorded to make sure that we do not miss any of their ideas. If they decide that they do not want to finish all the questions or no longer wish to participate, they can stop at any time without penalty.

If you or your child would like more information, please reach out to James Menke via email at James.Menke@mnsu.edu or phone 952-807-7538. If they are willing to participate and you consent, please submit this parental/guardian consent and a signed assent form to the district administrator who will forward it to James Menke.

Investigator/Researcher and Contact Information:

Melissa Krull,
Principal investigator
Department of Educational Leadership
Minnesota State University, Mankato
7700 France Avenue So., 5th floor
Edina, MN 55435
melissa.krull@mnsu.edu
952-818-8864

James Menke,
Student Investigator/Researcher
Ed.D. Candidate
Department of Educational Leadership
Minnesota State University, Mankato 7700 France Avenue So., 5th floor
Edina, MN 55435
james.menke@mnsu.edu
(952-807-7538)

If you have questions about this study, contact the researcher, James Menke, at 952-807-7538 or james.menke@mnsu.edu. You may also contact the principal investigator, Dr. Melissa Krull, at 952-818-8864 or melissa.krull@mnsu.edu. If you have questions about participants' rights and for research-related injuries, please contact the Minnesota State University Institutional Review Board at (507) 389-1242 or irb@mnsu.edu.

Study Procedures

Each participant (your child) will take part in an initial 45-minute interview. The interviews will take place at school at a time that works for your child. After the initial interviews, a follow up 45-minute interview will take place during the school day. The purpose of the follow up interviews is to affirm, revise, and add to the content gathered during the initial interviews. At any time, your child may choose to leave the study or not to participate/answer a question. Your child may leave before the start of interviews, during interviews, or after they have finished taking part in interviews.

Initial here to indicate you have read this page: _________

What should you know about this research study?

- Whether or not your child takes part is up to you and your child.
- You and your child can choose not to take part.
- You and your child can agree to take part and later change your mind.
- Your decision will not be held against you or your child
- You and your child can ask all the questions you want before you decide.

Confidentiality:

Every effort will be made to keep the content gathered from the interviews confidential.

- The researcher will assign code names/numbers for participants to be used on all research notes and documents.
- The researchers will keep notes, audio recording, interview transcriptions, and any other identifying participant information in a locked file in the researcher's possession.
- After the researcher completes the study, the materials will remain in possession of the principal investigator to write about the study. All such content will be deleted no later than July 2024

Risks and benefits of being in this study

We anticipate minimal social or emotional risk in this study. We define minimal risk as harm, not beyond what is encountered in everyday life. However, should any form of stress or discomfort emerge, your child may take a break or discontinue at any time. The process of sharing their perspective will provide them with the opportunity to give voice to the thoughts and feelings they have experienced.

Voluntary participation

Your child's participation in this study is voluntary. If they decide to take part in this study and both the assent and consent forms are signed, your child is still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason by contacting the principal or student investigator. Their decision whether or not to participate will not affect your or their relationship with Minnesota State University, Mankato, and refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits.

Initial here to indicate you have read this page: _________

If you or your child would like more information, please reach out to James Menke via email at James.Menke@mnsu.edu or phone 952-807-7538. If they are willing to participate and you consent, please submit this parental/guardian consent and a signed assent form to the district administrator who will forward it to James Menke.

Student's Name ______________________________________

Guardian's Name ______________________________________

____ _________________
Guardian Signature Date

A copy of the assent/consent form may be obtained by contacting James Menke via 952-807-7538 or james.menke@mnsu.edu.

(MNSU IRBNet ID Number: 1649322)

APPENDIX C

Assent Form

Title and Purpose of Study

The lived experiences of Black male students with emotional or behavioral needs: A qualitative study on self-concept

You are being asked to take part in a research project that will help adults understand what school is like for you. You will be asked to answer questions about your school experience and how it has impacted your self-concept. You are being asked to participate in 2 interviews lasting 1.5 hours. Your answers will be audio recorded to make sure that we do not miss any of your ideas. If you decide that you do not want to finish all of the questions or no longer wish to participate, you can stop at any time without penalty. The questions are not a test, and there are no wrong answers.

If you would like more information, please reach out to James Menke via email at James.Menke@mnsu.edu or phone at 952-807-7538. If you are willing to participate, please submit a parental/guardian consent and this signed assent form to the district administrator who will forward it to James Menke.

Melissa Krull,
Principal investigator
Department of Educational Leadership
Minnesota State University, Mankato 7700 France Avenue So., 5th floor
Edina, MN 55435

James Menke,
Student Investigator/Researcher
Ed.D. Candidate
Department of Educational Leadership
Minnesota State University, Mankato
7700 France Avenue So., 5th floor
Edina, MN 55435
james.menke@mnsu.edu
(952-807-7538)

Investigator/Researcher and Contact Information: If you have questions about this study, contact the researcher, James Menke, at 952-807-7538 or james.menke@mnsu.edu. You may also contact the principal investigator, Dr. Melissa Krull, at 952-818-8864 or melissa.krull@mnsu.edu. If you have questions about participants' rights and for research-related injuries, please contact the Minnesota State University Institutional Review Board at (507) 389-1242 or irb@mnsu.edu.

Study Procedures

Each participant (you) will take part in an initial 60-minute interview. The interview will take place at school at a time that works for you and other students. After the initial interview, a 30 minute follow up interview will be scheduled and take place at a time that works for you. The purpose of the follow up interview is to affirm, revise, and add to the content gathered during the initial interviews. At any time, you may choose to leave the study or not to participate/answer a question. You may leave before the start of interviews, during interviews, or after you have finished taking part in interviews.

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What should you know about this research study?

- Whether or not you take part is up to you and your parent/guardian.
- You can choose not to take part.
- You can agree to take part and later change your mind.
- Your decision will not be held against you.
- You can ask all the questions you want before you decide.

Confidentiality:

Every effort will be made to keep the content gathered from the interviews confidential.

- The interviews will take place in a private location in the school building
- Students are asked to keep participation and others participation confidential.
- The researcher will assign code names/numbers for participants to be used on all research notes and documents
- The researchers will keep notes, audio recording, interview transcriptions, and any other identifying participant information in a locked file in the researcher's possession
- After the researcher completes the study, the materials will remain in possession of the principal investigator to write about the study. All such content will be deleted no later than July 2024

Risks and benefits of being in this study

We anticipate minimal social or emotional risk in this study. We define minimal risk as harm, not beyond what is encountered in everyday life. However, should any form of stress or discomfort emerge, you may take a break or discontinue at any time. The process of sharing your perspective will provide you with the opportunity to give voice to the thoughts and feelings you experienced.

Voluntary participation

Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you decide to take part in this study and sign this assent form, you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason by contacting the principal or student investigator. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your relationship with Minnesota State University, Mankato, and refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits.

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If you would like more information, please reach out to James Menke via email James.Menke@mnsu.edu or phone at 952-807-7538. If you are willing to participate, please submit a parental/guardian consent and this signed assent form to the district administrator who will forward it to James Menke.

Student's Name ____________________________________

____ _________________
Student Signature Date

A copy of the assent/consent form may be obtained by contacting James Menke via 952-807-7538 or james.menke@mnsu.edu.

(MNSU IRBNet ID Number: 1649322)