Development of *Black to Success*: A Culturally Enriched Social Skills Program for Black Adolescent Males

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Development of *Black to Success*: A Culturally Enriched Social Skills Program for Black Adolescent Males

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ABSTRACT

Within schools across the nation, disproportionality in school discipline policies and practices continues to impact many racially and ethnically minoritized (REM) students. To combat the detrimental implications of discipline disproportionality, systemic changes to policies, practices, and accountability for teachers and school staff are required. Additionally, more culturally responsive social–emotional learning programs and interventions intended for Black males are needed to teach and promote culturally relevant prosocial behaviors. The current study sought to collect evidence from leading experts regarding the cultural validity of a culturally enriched social skills program for Black male adolescents titled *Black to Success* (B2S). Feedback from experts was integrated into the B2S curriculum to foster effectiveness and appropriateness for Black male participants. Results suggest that experts agreed or strongly agreed that the ten social skills and instructional strategies within B2S were important and culturally relevant, and included activities that promote positive racial/ethnic identity development of Black adolescent males.

IMPACT STATEMENT

Feedback from school psychologist with expertise in social skills, racial/ethnic identity development, and culturally responsive adaptations to interventions for Black male adolescents enabled modifications to improve the cultural relevance and effectiveness of a culturally enriched social skills program for Black male adolescents. Such interventions are needed for Black adolescent males to promote culturally appropriate prosocial behavior and help Black males navigate the systemic barriers such as discipline disproportionality found within schools.

EFFECTS OF EXCLUSIONARY DISCIPLINE

Exclusionary discipline practices such as suspension and expulsion can have long-lasting implications on Black students. For instance, a suspension is often the first step in a chain of events leading to short- and long-term consequences, such as repeat offenses, academic disengagement, academic failure, delinquency, and juvenile incarceration (Brown & Steele, 2015; Johnson et al., 2018; Skiba et al., 2014). Research suggests that for every one time a Black child was suspended, they are 50% more likely to be incarcerated (Brown & Steele, 2015) and considerably less likely to graduate from high school or enroll in college (Balfanz et al., 2014). As a result, the school-to-prison pipeline (ACLU, 2021) and the racial opportunity gap in achievement continue to be significant implications of disproportionate exclusionary discipline practices.

When schools use exclusionary practices as punitive responses to externalizing behavior, students are extracted from the learning environment, often without educational services, resulting in missed instructional time (Gregory et al., 2010; U.S. Department of Education, 2018a). In addition, students have increased access to opportunities to socialize with individuals engaged in illegal or risky behaviors (Hemphill et al., 2013). Although the implications of discipline disproportionality are significant with both Black female and male students (Blake et al., 2011), this article focuses on Black males due to consistent and long-standing evidence suggesting Black males are significantly more likely than any other groups to receive exclusionary discipline (U.S. Department of Education, 2018a). Black male students, with or without disabilities, are the largest proportion of students who receive exclusionary discipline (Losen, 2018). According to Skiba et al. (2016), even after controlling for individual, classroom, and school factors, Black males are significantly more likely than students in other identity groups to be removed from the classroom for office disciplinary referrals. Racial bias and cultural

misunderstandings between Black students and school personnel are primary contributors to differential exclusionary discipline of Black males (Kunesh & Noltemeyer, 2019). For Black male students, difficulties in the educational system such as cultural incongruence, implicit bias, and punitive school climate have created a hostile learning environment and significantly contribute to school failure (Gregory et al., 2010; Johnson et al., 2018; Kunesh & Noltemeyer, 2019), and disengagement from the educational process (Balfanz et al., 2014).

Schools are a microcosm of society where standards, expectations, and tolerance levels of teachers often align with societal norms (Johnson et al., 2018). Because the United States' teaching force is predominantly White and female (U.S. Department of Education, 2020), teachers are likely to misperceive Black male students' culturally specific behaviors as threatening or dangerous, resulting in Black male students receiving office referrals at disproportionate rates (Bryan, 2017). These interactions can be understood within the application of Critical Race Theory (CRT) to education (Ladson-Billings, 1998), which provides a theoretical foundation of this work. CRT allows for a thorough examination of school policies and practices that serve to marginalize and oppress Black students in schools, such as continued segregation of schools, inequities in school funding, and colorblind academic and social–emotional curricula (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Teachers are also more likely to incorrectly label Black students as angry (i.e., racialized anger bias; Halberstadt et al., 2020), which likely influences their interactions with Black students in schools. As such, Black students often report significantly lower perceptions of school climate (e.g., safety, peer support, adult support) than their White peers (Bottiani et al., 2016; Voight et al., 2015). Black students' experiences of racist and uncaring school environments influence their engagement and interactions in school, often leading to exclusionary discipline and ultimately closer into the juvenile justice system.

The major drawback of school suspension and expulsion is that it is often delivered to punish a previously-committed behavior and it solely removes the student from sight without a functional connection to the students' feelings, concerns, or behaviors that resulted in the referral (Raffaele-Mendez & Knoff, 2003). Typically, students who are suspended or expelled do not receive instruction on prosocial behavior (U.S. Department of Education, 2018a). The lack of exposure to social skills instruction through social–emotional learning (SEL) programming coupled with societal, political, and economic forces interact to place Black males at a disadvantage in the educational system (Johnson et al., 2018). The lack of culturally responsive social–emotional learning interventions is a significant gap in research. Thus, more culturally responsive social–emotional learning programs and interventions intended for Black males are needed to teach and promote culturally relevant prosocial behaviors (Graves et al., 2021).

CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE SOCIAL SKILLS AND BLACK MALES

Social skills can be a protective factor for Black male students to overcome barriers embedded within schools (Graves & Aston, 2018). Social skills are specific learned behaviors that are situation-specific, goal-oriented, and vary according to the social context and expectations which individuals operate (Gresham, 2002). Duran et al. (2011) found that students with high social skills were subjected to disciplinary exclusion less often than peers with lower social skills. Despite the many benefits of social skills, because of unique cultural differences of Black males, the effects of colorblind social skills instruction (SSI) (i.e., those without adaptations to fit the unique identities of the target population) may not be effective for racially and ethnically minoritized (REM) students (Castro-Olivo et al., 2016). Thus, culturally relevant, positive, and proactive SSI should be used to enhance social–emotional competency (Castro-Olivo et al., 2016) to further help Black males prevent contact with disciplinary exclusion (Lo et al., 2011).

Cultural responsiveness refers to using REM students' knowledge and/or performance styles to make learning more relevant and useful (Gay, 2000). Colorblind social skills instruction often neglects the role of students' culture, heritage, and lived experiences (Lo et al., 2015). Culturally responsive SSI considers the cultural experiences and real-life challenges of REM populations (Lo et al., 2015). Robinson-Ervin et al. (2016) identified five essential features of culturally responsive SSI, including "(a) using culturally relevant materials, (b) including culturally competent peer models, (c) teaching important skills to the target population, (d) creating opportunities for students to apply learned skills within a natural environment, and (e) integrating student personal experiences" (p. 210–211). Robinson-Ervin et al. (2016) examined the effects of culturally relevant, computer-based social skills instruction on the social skill acquisition and generalization of six Black sixth graders with emotional and behavioral disorders. All participants increased their responses in following adult directions, participating in classroom activities, and entering conversations appropriately. Despite promising results, research examining evidence-based culturally adapted SEL interventions on REM students' outcomes is scarce (Castro-Olivo et al., 2016).

Frameworks for Cultural Adaptations

There is a growing urge to integrate cultural adaptations to evidence-based practices. According to APA, evidence-based practices in psychology (EBPP) integrates the "best available research with clinical expertise in the context of patient characteristics, culture, and preference" (American Psychological Association Presidential Task Force on Evidence-Based Practice, 2006, p. 273). Despite the growing need for cultural adaptations to EBPP, few frameworks were developed to help researchers and practitioners in systematically implementing cultural adaptations to interventions and supports for REM individuals and groups (Bernal & Domenech Rodriguez, 2012). The Psychotherapy Adaptation and Modification Framework (PAMF; Hwang, 2006) and the Formative Method for Adapting Psychotherapy (FMAP; Hwang, 2009) are two common approaches used for making cultural adaptations to interventions and supports from the psychotherapy literature. The PAMF is a top-down approach that utilizes theory and information about a particular culture to inform cultural adaptations. Moreover, FMAP is a ground-up approach that can be utilized for culturally adapting interventions and supports. The FMAP approach was developed specifically to aid the design of culturally adapted EBPP (Bernal & Domenech Rodriguez, 2012). The FMAP consists of collaborating with stakeholders to generate knowledge, integrate knowledge with theory, and the use of knowledge and theory to develop, revise, and test a culturally adapted intervention for a target population (Bernal & Domenech Rodriguez, 2012). Each approach encourages researchers and practitioners to be intentional regarding the specific cultural adaptations made to support a REM individual or group and also serves as a guide for accomplishing cultural adaptations (Bernal & Domenech Rodriguez, 2012). Bernal et al.'s (1995) Ecological Validity Framework is an another widely used framework for making cultural adaptations and encompasses a range of adaptable elements for increasing the cultural relevance of interventions and supports for a particular REM population (Bernal et al., 1995). Given the need for cultural adaptations to evidence-based interventions, specific adaptations to SSI must be integrated to further support Black students.

Culturally Responsive SSI and Afrocentrism

Integrating Afrocentric values into culturally responsive SSI is a cultural adaptation that has the potential to positively effect Black students' outcomes, as the SSI would reflect their unique values and lived experiences (Gay, 2000). Afrocentrism refers to the perspective of Africa as the origin of human civilization (Aston & Graves, 2016;

Denbo & Beaulieu, 2002). Culturally responsive practices incorporating Afrocentric values can empower Black students to navigate barriers such as oppression, racism, low social status, inadequate resources, and marginalization that currently hinder Black children's success in school (Denbo & Beaulieu, 2002; Gay, 2000). Because traditional American education often inadequately teaches Black students their history and culture, Black students may be culturally dislocated or disaffiliated, which can interfere with academic achievement, social and emotional well-being, and racial identity development (Gay, 2000). A significant benefit of utilizing culturally responsive practices that incorporates Afrocentrism is the potential to enhance Black children and adolescents' racial identity, which ultimately serves as a protective factor for academic, social, emotional, and behavioral well-being (Graves & Aston, 2018).

Racial Identity

Racial identity is the extent to which an individual feels connected with and an attachment to their racial group (Belgrave & Brevard, 2014). Positive racial identity is an essential characteristic for Black people because of the history and implications of discrimination, slavery, oppression, and racism, which continue to impede Black Americans' identity (Aston & Graves, 2016; Williams et al., 2014). A robust racial identity has been linked to a myriad of positive outcomes, including better academic performance (Altschul et al., 2006), improved self-esteem (Williams et al., 2014), and fewer externalizing behaviors in adolescence (Schwartz et al., 2007). Research suggests outcomes associated with a strong racial identity are more evident for Black students than other racial groups of students (Williams et al., 2014). Despite the research demonstrating numerous benefits of racial identity for Black children, there are few evidence-based programs developed specifically for Black children, particularly males, that address their social–emotional and racial identity development from an Afrocentric perspective (Belgrave & Brevard, 2014).

BLACK TO SUCCESS DEVELOPMENT

Black to Success (B2S; Heidelburg, 2020) is a culturally-enriched, group-based manualized social skills program for Black adolescent males between the ages of 12-16 years of age. B2S includes ten sessions that are intended to be implemented for 45-mins to an hour. B2S includes components such as guided practice, discussions, homework assignments, and peer collaboration to promote participants' development across the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) core social and

emotional competencies of self-awareness, social awareness, self-management, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (CASEL, 2005). Given the prominence of CASEL's five SEL competencies, B2S embodies these competencies through an equity lens to promote Black males' positive development (Jagers et al., 2018). For instance, B2S includes a mentoring component which allows participants to receive mentorship from positive Black male role models who share similar cultural backgrounds and experiences. Thus, participants can build their racial identity through self-awareness of positive and affirming beliefs regarding their racial group membership and the importance of race to their sense of self belonging (Jagers et al., 2018).

Furthermore, B2S was designed to increase Black adolescent males' racial/ethnic identity, social skills, and appropriate behaviors while reducing problem behaviors and disparities in discipline referrals. B2S includes culturally enriched activities and direct social skills instruction with practice and mentoring specifically for Black males. While there are some evidence-based practices and strategies intended to support Black students' positive socio-emotional development, few evidence-based practices and strategies are developed explicitly for Black males. Most existing evidence-based practices and strategies are often designed for one group through a Eurocentric context and modified for application to target youth from other ethnic groups (Castro-Olivo et al., 2016). Other programs target both Black males and females (Graves et al., 2021), while few programs target either males or females of specific ethnic minoritized groups (Belgrave & Brevard, 2014).

Lastly, B2S was designed specifically for Black males and centers their unique experiences. For instance, B2S utilizes culturally integrated content specifically for Black males and adolescents around topics such as masculinity, racism, being a Black male in the United States, stereotypes and biases, and the media's role in perpetuating harmful stereotypes, all of which are relevant to Black males' development (Belgrave & Brevard, 2014). B2S was strategically designed to be implemented by Black men with an Afrocentric focus who are also dependable, youth-centered, caring, respectful, and empathetic (Hall, 2006), as they serve as both interventionists and culturally relevant mentors for participants. Research suggests that a program for Black adolescent males is more likely to be effective if delivered by a Black adult male rather than by a female or a person from a different ethnic/racial group (Belgrave & Brevard, 2014). Further, B2S was designed to be implemented within a school and include interactive, culturally enriched activities within every session. Programs held within schools and local communities are more accessible

than those delivered in university or medical settings, and programs that include energy and movement in activities are likely to be more effective than a lecture-type program (Belgrave & Brevard, 2014). Figure 1 (see supplementary material) includes a logic model displaying the relationships among the resources, activities, outputs, and intended outcomes of B2S.

Black to Success Implementation

Table 1 indicates an overview of the ten sessions included in the B2S program and associated social skills and goals. Each small-group session is aligned with one or more of the eight Principles for Black American Living (Belgrave et al., 2011) and presented to participants in English and Swahili every session. All B2S sessions utilize a structured format comprising an opening ritual, group work/SSI, and a closing ritual with fellowship and are intended to be implemented for 45-mins to an hour. During some sessions, participants engage in journal writing in response to culturally relevant prompts. Each session provides participants with social skills instruction for ten socio-emotional skills using a social modeling pedagogy of *Tell, Show, and Do* (Cartledge & Milburn, 1995). Social modeling is the methodology most social behaviors are learned and grounded on decades of research to promote prosocial behaviors (Cartledge & Milburn, 1995; Elliot & Gresham, 2008). The *Tell* phase is based on coaching, as the facilitator presents and defines the social skill and discusses its importance (Elliot & Gresham, 2008). The *Show* phase outlines the steps to perform the targeted social behavior, including models of positive and negative social behavior with videos, role-playing, and discussion (Elliot & Gresham, 2008). During the *Do* phase, students review the definition, importance, and skill steps of a particular social skill, then practice the skill with feedback and rewards to promote prosocial behaviors (Elliot & Gresham, 2008).

At the end of sessions 1 through 9, generalization cards are available to participants. Generalization cards were designed to be homework assignments based on the weekly B2S session and are intended to provide participants with additional practice with social skills outside of the B2S sessions and further understanding of the content discussed during each session. Students' experiences with completing generalization cards are discussed during the individual mentoring sessions occurring at least once a week. Students are also provided a reinforcer (e.g., preferred snacks) during each mentoring session for completing generalization assignment cards.

Table 1. *Black to Success*: Sessions, Social Skills, and Goals

Session	Primary social skill	Principles for black American living	Goal
1. *Orientation*	Introducing Yourself to Others	Umoja Heshema	This session introduces participants to the program, allows facilitators and participants to get to know one another, and introduce participants to the methods, vocabulary, and fundamentals of the group.
2. *Community Building*	Goal Setting	Umoja Ujima	This session is the development of group expectations in addition to community building. Participants continue building rapport, establish expectations for the group, plus become acquainted with the Principles for African American Living.
3. *Know Your History*	Gathering Information	Ujima Kuumba	This session aims to enhance students' knowledge of Africa and people of African American descent. In addition, this session aims to expand students' connection and appreciation of Africa and contributions made by African American men.
4. *The Inherited Battles*	Dealing with Contradictory Messages	Nia Kujichagulia	This session discusses a variety of issues and barriers that affect African American males due to the implications of American history. Participants will engage in comprehensive conversations on topics such as stereotypes, African American male identity, achievement gap, discipline gap, and school-to-prison pipeline.
5. *Coping with Stress and Pressure*	Asking for Help	Imani Kujichagulia Umoja	This session discusses African American male's mental health, and the stigmas and stereotypes associated with African American males and mental health. Participants will have the opportunity to identify individuals whom they feel comfortable asking for help to assist with the stress and pressure of being an African American male.
6. *My Responses Matter*	Making the Best Choice.	Kujichagulia Umoja Ujima	This session provides students with the opportunity to enhance their self-confidence and competency in positive decision making in order to successfully navigate difficult and challenging situations in everyday life.
7. *Educational Empowerment*	Concentrating on a Task	Nia Kuumba Imani	This session develops participants' awareness regarding the importance of education and how it leads to later success. Participants will think about their commitment, and accountability to education and how education can expand their opportunities.
8. *I Am My Brother's Keeper*	Helping Others	Kujichagulia Ujima Ujamaa Umoja	This session helps to develop and /or strengthen participants' connection and responsibility to themselves, each other, and the African American community at large. Participants will apply the Principles of African American Living to understand how unity, collective work, and taking responsibility for each other institutional barriers and obstacles to ultimately advance the African American community.
9. *Agree to Disagree*	Staying Calm when Disagreeing	Kujichagulia Ujima Heshema	This session will provide participants with the structured practice to enhance participants' competencies in anger control, conflict resolution, coping strategies, and positive communication with peers, and adults.
10. *We Made It! / Celebration*	Rewarding Self	Umoja Nia Kuumba Ujima	This final session celebrates the students' successful completion of the program.

Afrocentric Mentoring Sessions

Mentoring is a positive relationship with a non-parental adult to a young person (Gordon et al., 2009). Research demonstrates that mentoring can serve as a protective factor for Black males (Hall, 2006), and when mentoring is combined with Afrocentrism, mentoring can also enhance social skills instruction (Cartledge & Milburn, 1995). Mentoring sessions in B2S are school-based, student-centered, and include conversations about personal responsibility, positive character development, and social and cultural values. Through a student-centered approach, students' needs, issues, and voices are at the center of mentoring sessions (Hall, 2006). Research suggests when students feel cared for and respected by adults in school,

students may elicit a greater willingness to cooperate with school expectations and adult direction (Gregory et al., 2010). Mentoring in B2S provides mentees with a safe and supervised space where they can experience support and positive interactions from adults within the building, as well as an opportunity to be vocal about their lives and areas where they may need support. During each mentoring session, the mentor individually meets with each participant to ensure every session is student-centered. The mentor asks the mentee six core questions: "How are you doing?" "How are your grades?" "How is your behavior in school?" "What did you learn from the generalization card assignment?" "Are there any issues bothering you?" and "Do you need anything to help you to be successful in school?"

Initial Pilot Study of *Black to Success*

The initial pilot study of B2S implementation investigated B2S with nine Black male students in seventh & eighth grade in an urban school setting in the Midwest (Heidelburg, 2020). Results indicated an increase in academic engagement and mixed results for racial identity, social skills, and office discipline referrals following B2S implementation. Findings from this study suggest that culturally enhanced social skill instruction with Afrocentrism and mentoring may increase prosocial behaviors while reducing problem behaviors for Black males. Visual and statistical analysis showed that from baseline to implementation of B2S, all three groups displayed a decrease in in-school suspension referrals, an increase in the centrality scale of the Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity (MIBI; Sellers et al., 1997), which measures the extent to which individuals felt race was important to their self-concept. Most participants also demonstrated increases in academic engagement and teacher ratings on the Social Skills Improvement System - Rating Scale (SSIS-RS; Elliot & Gresham, 2008). Further, results assessing the social significance, importance, and appropriateness of B2S demonstrated high social validity from Black male participants (Heidelburg, 2020). Despite the promising findings, results varied across participants and groups for office discipline referrals, social skills, and racial identity. For instance, two of the three groups increased in ODRs during the implementation of B2S, only one of the three groups' average rating on the self-assessed social skills measures increased from pre- to post-assessment, and only one of the three groups displayed an increase in the Private Regard scale of the MIBI, which assess the extent to which individuals feel positively or negatively toward African Americans and their membership in that group (Heidelburg, 2020). As a result, further investigation was warranted to evaluate the effectiveness of B2S for Black participants.

Building upon Heidelburg (2020), the current study sought to collect evidence from leading experts regarding the validity of B2S as an appropriate culturally enriched social skills program for Black adolescent males. Thus, experts on culturally relevant interventions were asked to review the entire curriculum and provide feedback on the cultural relevance of the program for Black males. The feedback was used to make changes to the program to foster the effectiveness and appropriateness of B2S for Black males. The following research questions guided this study: *How do experts rate the cultural relevance of the B2S curriculum? What feedback can they provide to improve the cultural validity of the program?*

METHODS

Research Design

A modified Delphi method was used to collect feedback from experts regarding the B2S curriculum. The Delphi method is a research design that usually involves numerous rounds of surveys distributed to a panel of experts, with each round informing the responses of the previous round to ultimately reach a consensus among experts (Hsu & Sandford, 2007). The Delphi model is useful because it allows for a rapid consensus to be achieved, for individuals to be able to express their own opinions, are relatively low cost to administer and analyze, and beneficial when knowledge about a phenomenon is incomplete or scarce (Hsu & Sandford, 2007; Jacobs et al., 2014). The Delphi method is a widely used and accepted method for gathering data from experts within a specific domain to improve an educational practice (Hsu & Sandford, 2007). For instance, Rowe and Bozalek (2013) used a Delphi method to develop a technology-mediated teaching strategy for practitioners. Key features of a Delphi study include participants being able to freely and anonymously respond to questions, refine their views based on the progress of the group each round, receive a summary of the results of previous rounds, and lastly, statistical group responses are included for an analysis and interpretation (Jacobs et al., 2014). Furthermore, there is no set criteria upon which to determine the nature of the "expert," the selection criteria of the panelists, or the ideal panel size in a Delphi study (Hsu & Sandford, 2007).

This study utilized a modified Delphi method. Participants were able to respond freely and anonymously to qualitative and quantitative questions and participants received a summary of the results; however, due to consensus during the first round of survey administration, only one round of data collection was needed.

Participants

The study's experts were strategically selected based on the experts' reputable scholarship and experience in one or more of the following areas: social–emotional development, Black students, racial identity development, and/or behavioral intervention. Ten experts were identified as potential participants for the study and were sent an invitation via email requesting participation in the study. Participation in the study consisted of completing a survey before a set deadline. A final total of three experts' responses were included in the study. Data including

demographics and knowledge level were gathered to provide insight into the study's experts and reported below.

Expert One was a Black or African American female with a doctoral-level degree currently working as a university faculty member in the Western US. Expert One has been in their current role for five or more years and is credentialed as a Nationally Certified School Psychologist and a Licensed Psychologist. Expert Two was a Black or African American female with a doctoral-level degree currently working as a university faculty member in the Southern US. Expert Two has been in their current role for three to four years and is credentialed as a Certified School Psychologist. Expert Three was a Black or African American male with a doctoral-level degree currently working as a university faculty member in the Southern US. Expert Three has been in their current role for two years.

Further, experts were asked to rate their level of knowledge regarding (a) social skills of Black male adolescents; (b) racial/ethnic identity development of Black male adolescents; and (c) culturally responsive adaptations to interventions for Black male adolescents, using a Likert scale of 1 (*not very knowledgeable*) to 5 (*very knowledgeable*). Average ratings indicated that experts were very knowledgeable regarding Black male adolescents' social skills ($M = 4.33$) and racial/ethnic identity development of Black male adolescents ($M = 4.33$) and were knowledgeable regarding culturally responsive adaptations to interventions for Black male adolescents ($M = 4.00$).

Procedure

Each expert received an individual invitation via email to participate in a web-based survey via Qualtrics.com. Participants were emailed individually so that none of the recipients could see who the other experts were. The email contained background information regarding the study, the process for data collection and receiving the $30 incentive for participation, and a link to a PDF version of the B2S curriculum and the Qualtrics survey. The Qualtrics survey was divided into three sections. The first section included questions about participants' demographics and level of knowledge. The following section sought to answer the question: Are the components of B2S effective for promoting social skill and racial identity development? Thus, this section asked participants to rate three statements for each of the B2S sessions using a Likert scale of 1 (strongly disagree) – 7 (strongly agree): (a) the primary social skill is important for Black adolescent males; (b) the social skills steps are culturally responsive; and (c) the activities promote positive racial/ethnic identity development for Black

adolescent males. Additionally, participants provided written responses regarding recommendations to enhance the program's culturally relevant elements and its validity to improve students' racial identity and social skills. The final section included nine questions for participants to provide their overall opinion of the B2S curriculum using the Likert scale outlined above.

A reminder email was sent to identified experts to complete the survey by the set deadline, approximately two weeks after the initial email was sent. Experts were not required to participate in this study and could choose not to participate by not completing the survey at any stage. Nonparticipation had no adverse effects on those who were invited, and all responses were anonymous. After the deadline, data were analyzed to determine the level of agreement among participants. The level of agreement was determined appropriate if the experts' average rating was more than five (somewhat agree). This criterion was used for agreeance since an average rating of six suggested participants agreed and an average rating of seven suggested participants strongly agreed. Due to the high level of agreement during the first round of survey administration, only one round of data collection was implemented. Once data were analyzed, a summary of the results was sent to the experts.

Data Analysis

Participants' responses were analyzed, and averages were calculated and assessed for level of agreement. Qualitative responses regarding recommendations to enhance cultural responsiveness, racial identity or social skill of the ten social skills were gathered and used to make changes to the B2S curriculum. Bernal et al.'s (1995) eight elements for culturally adapted clinical research interventions were applied to experts' feedback to make cultural adaptations to B2S, including *Language, Persons, Metaphors, Content, Concepts, Goals, Methods, and Context.* Bernal et al.'s (1995) eight elements serves as a guide for adapting culturally responsive practices and interventions for REM groups. Based on the experts' feedback, cultural adaptations were made based on the eight elements to support the overall effectiveness of B2S.

RESULTS

Table 2 displays experts' average ratings on the three questions assessing the ten social skills within B2S. Overall, results suggest that experts agreed or strongly agreed that the ten social skills within B2S were important for Black adolescent males, the social skills steps were culturally

responsive, and the activities promoted positive racial/ethnic identity development for Black adolescent males.

Table 3 displays all of the experts' recommendations to enhance cultural responsiveness, racial identity, and/or social skills for each of the ten social skills in B2S. Cultural adaptations incorporated in the curriculum based on the experts' feedback are also displayed in Table 3. Most feedback included general or specific ideas to enhance the B2S sessions. All feedback was taken into consideration, and most feedback provided was used to make cultural adaptations to the curriculum based on Bernal et al.'s (1995) Ecological Validity Framework.

Table 4 displays experts' overall rating of the B2S curriculum. Overall, results show that experts strongly agreed (M = 7) that B2S is effective for Black males' social skill development, addresses the unique cultural experiences of Black male adolescents, could decrease Black males' discipline infractions while increasing Black males' academic engagement, and lastly, is grounded in research-based on Black males' development regarding racial/ethnic identity and social skill development.

DISCUSSION

This study aimed to gather experts' opinions regarding the cultural validity of a culturally enriched social skills program titled *Black to Success* (B2S) for Black adolescent males. Results suggest that experts agreed or strongly agreed that the ten social skills and instruction within B2S were important, culturally relevant, and included activities promoting positive racial/ethnic identity development for Black adolescent males. This study's findings are consistent with prior research suggesting B2S as an effective culturally enriched social skills program. Heidelburg (2020) found an increase or mixed results for academic engagement, racial identity, and social skills for the Black male students who participated in B2S. In the same study, results indicated strong social validity for participants, suggesting B2S as a socially significant, necessary, and appropriate intervention for Black male students. According to Castro-Olivo et al. (2016), to consider school-based SEL programs adequate, they must generate positive effects on

participants' important outcomes and allow participants to feel that the instruction applies to their daily lives, needs, and environment. Therefore, using the Bernal et al.'s (1995) Ecological Validity Framework, feedback from experts was incorporated to make cultural adaptations to B2S to foster the appropriateness for Black males. Cultural adaptations included overall modifications to the content and implementation procedures.

Content Adaptations

Specific adaptations to the content in B2S were made to further enhance the cultural relevance and effectiveness of B2S for Black male participants. For instance, in the first session, cultural reframing of language was integrated to ensure positive terminology and concepts. For example, wording such as "rules" was changed to "expectations." In session five, culturally specific examples regarding a typical racial stressor scenario that Black male students face were added to one activity to enhance contextual fit for students. In addition, in session three, given the context of students' developmental stages, social factors, and values and goals of the intervention, information regarding slavery was minimized and modified to promote a better and more nuanced understanding of Africa and the African diaspora. Furthermore, in the same session, one activity was adjusted to include images of notable LGBTQIA2+ Black male leaders to promote inclusivity and representation of the diversity within Black males' identity. Lastly, the content was modified to include additional questions regarding social factors (e.g., communication with others, the media) and how social factors influence messaging on Black males.

IMPLEMENTATION PROCEDURES

Specific modifications to the implementation methods of B2S were made based on expert feedback. In session two, methods were modified to instruct the facilitator to use personal examples of goal setting and apply the social skills

Table 2. Average Rating of B2S Individual Sessions (1 Strongly Disagree – 7 Strongly Agree)

	Session									
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
The primary social skill is important for Black adolescent males.	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	6.67
The social skills steps are culturally responsive.	7	7	6	7	7	7	7	7	6.33	6.33
The activities promote positive racial/ethnic identity development for Black adolescent males	7	7	6	6.67	7	6.50	7	7	6.33	6.33

Table 3. Experts' Feedback for Individual Sessions

Session 1—Orientation	
Recommendations to enhance cultural responsiveness, racial identity, and/or social skills for this session?	**Cultural adaptations made to enhance overall effectiveness of B2S**
Expert One: This is a productive session and a useful [social] skill. I would like to see "expectations" over rules *Expert Two:* I like the introduction of the Eight Principles *Expert Three:* I recommend adding less respectability terminology for greetings. Along with "shake hands" language like dap, pound, fist bump, or my favorite the universal Black head-nod of solidarity	*Language* Cultural reframing of language was integrated to ensure positive terminology and concepts. For example, wording was changed from rules to expectations. Further, culturally explicit examples were added to social skills instruction to include more culturally relevant content, such as specific metaphors that reflect Black students' unique traditions

Session 2—Community building

Recommendations to enhance cultural responsiveness, racial identity, and/or social skills for this session?	**Cultural adaptations made to enhance overall effectiveness of B2S**
Expert One: LOVE this! *Expert Two:* Perhaps providing an example of effective goal setting of a recent historical figure (even a clip of a figure describing how they set goals) *Expert Three:* Avoid using rules. Keep cultural norms, expectations, or agreements. Infuse more restorative logic, perhaps state that this list is to help inform us about boundaries and standards that we have for our behavior and others. When those boundaries and standards are violated and cause harm this list is referenced for use to facilitate repairing harm	*Methods* To enhance cultural content, methods were modified to encourage the facilitator to use personal examples of goal setting and to apply the social skills instruction to the personal example(s) provided *Language & Methods* To help facilitate cultural methodology, cultural reframing of language and steps were integrated to reduce cultural conflict. For instance, group expectations are coupled with the B2S pledge to promote racial identity development further

Session 3—*Know your history*

Recommendations to enhance cultural responsiveness, racial identity, and/or social skills for this session?	**Cultural adaptations made to enhance overall effectiveness of B2S**
Expert One: Is there a way to work in information about the Diaspora more deliberately (all the places we landed including central and south America) and the distinction of the [American Descendants of Slavery] (ADOS) experience? *Expert Two:* Can you gamify session 3? As you know, there are many young people who will not identify with African or African history. How can you design those sessions to be as inclusive as possible given the variety of versions of Black identity? Also, I would remove Emmitt Till as this was a tragedy. In the Africa questions, deemphasize slavery- not for erasure because they hear plenty about slavery in other settings *Expert Three:* The noble Black men not include any openly gay, bisexual, or queer black males. I think representation of the diversity that exists within the identity of "Black Male" needs to be represented or this program needs to be specific about intentions for cisgender heterosexual Black males	*Content* Questions were incorporated in the activities to further promote understanding of the African diaspora and a positive perception of Africa *Context* Given the context of students' developmental stages and social factors, the information in activities regarding slavery was minimized and modified to integrate an understanding of the African diaspora. Furthermore, one activity was adjusted to include images of notable LGBTQIA2+ Black male leaders to enhance inclusivity and representation of Black male identities

Session 4—*The inherited battles*

Recommendations to enhance cultural responsiveness, racial identity, and/or social skills for this session?	**Cultural adaptations made to enhance overall effectiveness of B2S**
Expert One: I love this one so much! I want more explicit acknowledgment of the generational wealth gap and how that influences these contradictory messages *Expert Two:* In the "Black Males, Good or Bad"- Perhaps differentiating what they believe to be true about black male's vs what they've heard/media images might be helpful. Provide counter narratives her to empower students to reject the stereotypic narrative about themselves and their communities *Expert Three:* Great session. Here is a quote from Black men that could help ground this session: "All my life I had been looking for something, and everywhere I turned someone tried to tell me what it was. I accepted their answers too, though they were often in contradiction and even self-contradictory. I was naïve. I was looking for myself and asking everyone except myself questions which I, and only I, could answer. It took me a long time and much painful boomeranging of my expectations to achieve a realization everyone else appears to have been born with: That I am nobody but myself. RALPH ELLISON	*Content* Information was integrated into an activity to enhance participants' understanding of cultural concepts and how they impact Black males. For example, additional opportunities to discuss the generational wealth gap and its implications on Black males were included. Further, the content was modified to include additional questions on social factors (i.e., communication with others, the media) and how social factors influence messaging pertaining to Black males

Session 5—*Coping with stress and pressure*

Recommendations to enhance cultural responsiveness, racial identity, and/or social skills for this session?	**Cultural adaptations made to enhance overall effectiveness of B2S**
Expert Two: Perhaps formally spend some time unpacking the roots of the stigma for AA to show emotion (perhaps a discussion following the videos)? *Expert Three:* I think an example of responding to intentionally racial stressors would help	*Content* Culturally specific examples regarding a common scenario of a racial stressor were added to one activity to further enhance contextual fit for students

Session 6—*My responses matter*

Recommendations to enhance cultural responsiveness, racial identity, and/or social skills for this session?	**Cultural adaptations made to enhance overall effectiveness of B2S**

Table 3. continued.

Expert One: Despite the value of accepting personal responsibility, our culture places an exorbitant amount of responsibility on Black men… I would like to see more appreciation for an external locus of control with a "gray" approach to morality. Is there really ever a "right" choice? The notion of right and wrong are socially constructs and dripping with White Supremacy *Expert Two:* I like the emphasis on having students design their own "code" of ethics and base it on what they want to be – what is best for the community etc. Have facilitators prepared to provide authentic, specific counter narrative to any negative or stereotypic stuff that comes up *Expert Three:* great session. To culturally responsive to this generation the mirror taste could be adapted to a selfie/photo	*Content* The content was modified in this session to include a quote provided by experts to support contextual fit. *Goal* The title of this session was changed to promote positive development and introspection further. *Methods* Given the context of students' developmental stages and to further enhance the goal of B2S, methods were adapted with a cultural reframing of language to accommodate potential negative comments regarding participants' self-image

Session 7—*Educational empowerment*

Recommendations to enhance cultural responsiveness, racial identity, and/or social skills for this session?	**Cultural adaptations made to enhance overall effectiveness of B2S**
Expert Two: You might want to include some techniques to gradually increase the amount students can concentrate on a task (e.g., teach them self-management and behavioral shaping). Leave space for students who have an excellent plan that doesn't involve a Bachelor's degree (e.g., electrician, UPS driver, mechanic etc.) *Expert Three:* I think collegiate organizations could be established here and a connection to Black males from the previous session who graduated from HBCUs could be highlighted	*Content* To enhance the association between this session and previous sessions, content and methods for one activity was modified to improve participants' cultural knowledge by strengthening the connection between notable Black men, education, and Historical Black Colleges Universities (HBCUs)

Session 8—*I am my brother's keeper*

Recommendations to enhance cultural responsiveness, racial identity, and/or social skills for this session?	**Cultural adaptations made to enhance overall effectiveness of B2S**
Expert One: LOVE this piece! *Expert Two:* Help students identify methods and goals of resistance to the systemic and structural barriers they face. So often, I think the sheer weight of the barriers can feel insurmountable and lead young AA folks to give up. How do we show them their power and present a stronger counter narrative to what they're receiving about their "powerlessness" and "unworthiness"?	*Content & Methods* Aligning to contextual fit, activities within this session were adapted to enhance cultural content by including participants with an opportunity to brainstorm solutions to barriers impacting African Americans

Session 9—*Agree to disagree*

Recommendations to enhance cultural responsiveness, racial identity, and/or social skills for this session?	**Cultural adaptations made to enhance overall effectiveness of B2S**
Expert One: Mindfulness and self-compassion would fold in nicely here *Expert Two:* Be sure to be clear with students that the way officers feel about AA folks and treat them is deeply messed up and It's Not Their Fault. Also, you may want to provide a trigger warning before showing anything about police brutality and the killings of young Black people and explicitly state the unfairness of AA students being expected to be perfect with respect to anger and managing emotions *Expert Three:* There is a comment here that I'm hesitant to endorse as it could be used to further advanced respectability politics if implying youth responses needs to better the African-American community at large. Young males need to understand that they are responsible for the African-American community, but also do not need to internalize every mistake of not as a reflection of the whole community	*Content* Activities were modified to incorporate mindfulness activities and concepts to enhance the effectiveness of the session. *Language & Context* In consideration of the cultural context, cultural reframing of the language used for the social skills steps were adapted to promote self-management. Furthermore, a trigger warning was provided given the sensitivity of the content regarding Black males and the ample negative police interactions

Session 10—*We Made It! / Celebration*

Recommendations to enhance cultural responsiveness, racial identity, and/or social skills for this session?	**Cultural adaptations made to enhance overall effectiveness of B2S**
Expert Two: To align rewards with goal setting and behavioral self-management strategies, introduce some goal setting earlier in the program and then use this session as a call back. I do like the idea of encouraging "Black Boy Joy" in regards to sometimes we set goals	*Methods and Content* The session layout was modified to include content to enhance the connection between this and previous sessions and increase social skill effectiveness by building the association between goal setting, self-management, and self-reward

steps to the personal examples provided to increase the significance and appropriateness of the social skill instruction. In session nine, cultural reframing of the language used for the social skill instruction was adapted to promote self-management. Furthermore, a trigger warning was provided given the sensitivity of the content regarding Black males and the ongoing negative police interactions. Lastly, in session four, information was integrated into one activity to enhance participants' understanding of cultural concepts and how they impact Black males. For example, additional opportunities to discuss the generational wealth gap and its implications on Black males were included.

Table 4. Experts' Overall Average Rating of B2S (1 Strongly Disagree – 7 Strongly Agree)

Question	Average Rating
1. B2S is effective for Black males' social skill development.	7
2. B2S addresses the unique cultural experiences of Black male adolescents.	7
3. The activities in B2S are culturally responsive and aligned with Black male adolescents' experiences.	6.67
4. Given the research on social–emotional development as an alternative to suspension, this program could decrease Black males' discipline infractions.	7
5. B2S is beneficial for Black males' racial/ethnic identity development.	6.67
6. Given the research regarding social skills instruction promoting academic success, this program could increase Black males' academic engagement.	7
7. The mentoring sessions in B2S are useful for Black adolescent males' social and racial/ethnic identity development.	6.33
8. The Generalization Assignment Cards in B2S provide an efficient home-to- school collaboration to further promote social and racial identity.	6.67
9. This program is grounded in research based on Black males' development regarding racial/ethnic identity and social skill development.	7

STRENGTHS, LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

After an initial pilot study demonstrating the potential of B2S to support important educational outcomes of Black males, the present study was conducted to establish the content validity of the program through the lens of expert reviewers' feedback. The racial/ethnic identities of the expert reviewers (all Black or African American) is a significant strength of this manuscript, as the participants were able to apply both their research expertise and lived experience to their evaluation of the B2S program. Another strength is the positionality of the research team, as it consists of two Black males who have spent considerable time reflecting on their own positionality in the development of this curriculum. Although the research team and the intended recipients of this intervention share important identities around being Black and male, Black males are not a monolith, and a number of other identities are relevant to Black boys' lived experiences, school-based experiences, and receipt of this intervention. As such, changes made to the intervention as a result of this expert validation study will address the variety of identities that Black males have and how those identities intersect with systems of marginalization and oppression in schools.

Despite the findings suggesting that B2S may be a culturally relevant curriculum for Black male students, this study has certain limitations. First, despite the researchers' immense efforts to minimize bias throughout the research process, it is important to note that all research is an extension of the researchers and should be attuned to potential biases/assumptions. Next, the limited sample size and inherent selection bias should be considered. Although there are no established criteria for panel size or selection of experts (Hsu & Sandford, 2007), a larger sample size could have influenced the results. Moreover, using a set criterion such as a specific number of publications in a particular area to identity experts may increase the number of experts. However, it is important to note that there is a limited number of experts with proficient knowledge in social–emotional development, racial identity development, and/or behavioral intervention for Black male students. Individuals who would likely have expertise in such content areas may be Black Americans with training as health service psychologists; however, according to American Psychological Association, Black or African Americans only comprised roughly five percent of active faculty in APA-accredited doctoral programs (American Psychological Association Commission on Accreditation, 2020). As a result, researchers were limited in selecting psychology experts with known knowledge evident by scholarly research and experience. Future research should aim to expand the panel of experts as much as possible to include a larger sample with various experts in school psychology, such as Black practitioners, and across disciplines, such as education, counseling, sociology, and other psychology fields.

Further, unlike a traditional Delphi study, there was only one round of survey distribution due to the high agreement level among experts. As a result, experts did not have to progress through various survey distribution rounds and had limited opportunities to review and change responses. Since the study aimed to determine consensus, participants' limited opportunities to review or change their responses unlikely affected the study's outcome. Finally, only three of the ten identified participants completed the survey. This is likely due to the considerable time it took to review the entire B2S curriculum and answer multiple questions about each session, as well as the overall curriculum. Future research may include a more streamlined survey, as well as a larger pool of potential experts to gather additional data.

Since social competence and racial identity are lifelong learning processes and require ongoing development, future research must continue to investigate the effectiveness of B2S implementation following the changes made to the curriculum based on experts' feedback. Providing adolescents with a strong foundation enables them the ability to further develop their social competence and

racial identity. In addition, future research should aim to collect feedback from participants through youth-led participatory action research focused on culturally responsive intervention development. Because of lived experiences, Black male participants may serve as content experts, and feedback from participants could be used to continuously improve the effectiveness of B2S.

Lastly, to continue investigating the effectiveness of B2S implementation, qualified individuals must be trained to implement the curriculum. Black male educators must be trained to provide interventions supporting Black students in school. Such training should incorporate direct instruction of the curriculum and include opportunities for practice, role-playing, modeling, and performance feedback. Furthermore, the MIBI could be used to provide information regarding potential facilitators' racial identity levels. Since B2S aims to increase participants' racial identity, the facilitator and mentors must have a strong racial identity before conducting B2S with students. Utilizing Black men with strong racial identity to implement B2S and/or serve as mentors will help ensure participants are provided appropriate support and role models to cultivate students' racial identity and social skill development. Although it is crucial to train Black men as educators to support Black youth directly, it is important to note that there are a few Black male educators in schools, and schools may have to incorporate outside consultants or community members to serve as facilitators or mentors. In addition to providing direct support for students, simultaneously, systems-level supports should be integrated to further support Black males.

Embedding culturally responsive practices and pedagogy within MTSS can help reduce the discipline gap and serve as a protective factor against environmental variables impeding students' success (Johnson et al., 2018). For example, culturally enriched social–emotional programs such as B2S developed specifically for racial and ethnic minoritized students can be implemented with identified students as a Tier 2 intervention. While it is important to incorporate student-level supports, systems-level and teacher-level interventions and supports should be implemented to mitigate bias among staff in schools. Key stakeholders must examine the culturally-biased assumptions held within themselves and the education system to ensure adult-driven behavioral support practices center students' unique identities and needs. Ongoing professional development on cultural awareness and teaching, implicit bias, empathic problem-solving approaches to discipline, and inclusion of students, families, and communities' voices in solutions to increase cultural competency among adults should be implemented in combination with student-level support to further promote equity within schools. Although student-level supports are warranted to improve their skills and outcomes, a failure to address systemic racism and bias in schools would continue to uphold a system of oppression inhibiting students' success.

CONCLUSION

Within schools across the nation, disproportionality in school discipline policies and practices continues to impact many Black students. According to the U.S. Department of Education (2018a), Black male students represented 8% of the total enrolled students, yet Black males accounted for 23% of students expelled in the 2015-16 school year. First, school systems need to be rebuilt to best support the development of Black males rather than pushing them into the juvenile justice system. Staff need to be held accountable for appropriately supporting and interacting with Black males and limiting the effects of their biases on their treatment of Black males. In addition, Black male adolescents must receive interventions and support targeting their positive social–emotional competencies and racial/ethnic identity, to improve their academic, social, emotional, and behavioral well-being.

This Delphi study enabled helpful insight and feedback to improve the cultural relevance of B2S for Black male participants. Feedback from experts was applied to adapt the B2S curriculum to foster effectiveness and appropriateness of B2S. B2S, among similar interventions designed specifically for Black males such as Brothers of Ujima (BoU; Belgrave et al., 2011), could support prosocial behaviors while reducing problem behavior(s) for African American children. A notable strength of this study is the solicitation of feedback from Black content experts to further refine an intervention built specifically for Black students. This practice is valuable in centering Black voices to validate the cultural relevance of the intervention, and should also be implemented when adapting evidence-based but colorblind interventions to fit various populations and contexts. Given the limited research, future research should continue to examine culturally responsive SSI and practices to effectively support positive outcomes in Black male students.

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