

The Development of a Black History- and Racial Identity-Focused Resiliency Intervention for Black Boys: A Pilot Study of Promoting Emotional Resiliency Skills In Small Teams (PERSIST)

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This article describes the systematic development of a resiliency intervention for Black boys that focused on Black history and racial socialization. PERSIST, which stands for Promoting Emotional Resiliency Skills In Small Teams, is based on the Black history knowledge model of coping and mental health and the phenomenological variant of ecological systems theory. The intervention was implemented in an urban school with Black boys in sixth, seventh, and eighth grades. Results demonstrated increases in positive aspects of racial identity: *centrality* (Cohen's $d = .5$), *private regard* (Cohen's $d = .6$), and *resiliency* (Cohen's $d = .4$). Additionally, participants indicated that the intervention's format, topics, and method of delivery were appropriate. Implications are discussed in terms of developing culturally specific, school-based interventions tailored for Black boys.

Impact and Implications

This project presents the development of a culturally specific intervention for Black boys to increase resiliency and racial identity. It highlights the impact that interventions with a specific focus on Black culture can have on Black boys.

Keywords: Black boys, Black history, racial identity, resiliency

Experiencing race-related trauma is a prevalent issue facing Black children today. More specifically, race-related stress is a form of psychological distress that results from direct and indirect exposure to racism when an individual's specific racial group is targeted (S. C. T. Jones et al., 2020). To many individuals, this may not seem to be an issue that is related to mental health given that 154 years have passed since Juneteenth (i.e., June 19, 1865), which signaled the arrival of General Granger's Union troops in Texas and the abolition of slavery for the remaining enslaved Africans (Smithsonian, 2019). Nevertheless, the current research in the psychological and public health domains documents a different picture. Racial discrimination against Black youth is a common occurrence with research indicating that approximately 90% of Black youth experience discrimination, with approximately 99% of these same individuals stating that this type of discrimination impacted their well-being (Lanier et al., 2017). However, there are gender differences in these occurrences. Assari et al. (2017) indicated that Black boys who

perceived that they were racially discriminated against demonstrated increases in anxiety and depression, but not Black girls. Relatedly, suicide rates, once thought to be an issue primarily centered on White youth, have been on the rise for Black children (Bridge et al., 2018). Subgroup analysis of national data demonstrates significant gender differences with Black boys being 71.4% of decedents among Black youth aged 5–17 years of age (Sheftall et al., 2022). There is also a carryover effect of these issues to the public school system. Black boys are far more likely to be suspended or expelled from school than their White peers in preschool and the K–12 system (U.S. Department of Education, 2022). Additionally, Black boys experience more school-based racial and gender discrimination than Black girls, which can have negative academic and social-emotional outcomes (Butler-Barnes et al., 2019; Cogburn et al., 2011).

Research indicates that Black males face unique obstacles that necessitate individualized interventions. This article describes a pilot study of a Black history-based intervention that was designed to improve aspects of racial identity and resiliency among Black boys. Examining the interconnectedness of resilience, racial socialization, and Black history knowledge offers a comprehensive lens to delve into the experiences and needs of Black boys based on their lived experiences. The concurrent examination of these constructs goes beyond deficit-based narratives, empowering researchers to understand Black boys' realities in a nuanced and holistic way. It reveals how Black boys navigate challenges with resilience, forge strong racial identities, and connect deeply to their rich heritage (Collins & Stevenson, 2023). These constructs are not isolated; they constantly interact with and influence each other. Black boys who demonstrate

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resilience, positive racial identities, and a deep understanding of their history are better equipped to thrive in the face of adversity (Wint et al., 2022). Delving into the psychological construct of resilience illuminates how Black boys overcome challenges, revealing protective factors that can inform school-based interventions (Johnson et al., 2023). Relatedly, exploring racial socialization sheds light on how Black boys develop their racial identity, shaping their cognitive, emotional, and behavioral responses within various societal contexts (Smith et al., 2020). This understanding is crucial for crafting interventions that foster positive self-perception, critical race consciousness, and antiracist practices. Furthermore, being exposed to Black history knowledge provides Black boys with essential contextual information for understanding the ecological landscape in which they construct their identities (Chapman-Hilliard & Adams-Bass, 2016). This combined knowledge informs educational and developmental approaches that celebrate Black heritage, promote critical thinking, and empower Black boys to not buy into the negative stereotypes and portrayals of themselves (Wint et al., 2022). The following sections describe the specific constructs of resilience, racial socialization, and Black history and how each of these constructs is related to optimal outcomes in Black boys.

Resilience and Black Children

Resilience is defined as the ability of a child to meet typical developmental goals despite facing adversity in their development (Luthar et al., 2000). Developmental science has recognized that resilience in Black youth is not an individual process but it is composed of several factors (Masten, 2021). As indicated by S. C. T. Jones et al. (2023), resiliency factors in Black youth can include factors such as racial socialization, community assets, and family support. The most expansive review of resilience and Black children was conducted by the American Psychological Association, Task Force on resilience and strength in Black Children and Adolescents (2008). The impetus for this report was the general lack of acknowledgment of the cultural complexity of the strength and resiliency of Black children in the research literature. More specifically, the literature's synthesis of the factors related to positive development and healthy adjustment revealed a lack of cultural relativism in studies of resilience, and the inclusion of unique cultural manifestations of constructs, such as oppression and discrimination, have been omitted when studying resilience in Black children. Consequently, it is imperative to acknowledge race-specific factors when developing school-based interventions to improve the outcomes of Black youth. To combat these issues, emerging research has indicated that the concepts of racial socialization and Black history can be used to target these specific issues.

Racial Socialization

Racial socialization is conceptualized as providing children with information, messages, and strategies that are focused on race (Hughes et al., 2006). These discussions about race are designed to provide Black children with the skill set to overcome negative racial encounters and incidents in their daily lives. One specific aspect of racial socialization is cultural socialization. Cultural socialization is defined as the transmission of knowledge, history, and values (Coard et al., 2004). This type of socialization includes speaking with Black youth about historical figures and events (i.e., Juneteenth, the Tuskegee experiment) and exposing them to significant, positive aspects (e.g., books, art,

plays) of their culture. Studies have shown that this type of socialization is a significant protection factor against racism (Henry et al., 2015; Neblett, 2023). From a school standpoint, racial socialization messages have been shown to mediate the relationship between school-based racial discrimination and children's self-concept regarding being Black over time (Butler-Barnes et al., 2019). Similarly, Ahn et al. (2021) examined how racial socialization (cultural pride reinforcement) impacted students' internalizing symptoms. Their results indicated that racial socialization had a positive impact on mental health. Consequently, the concept of racial socialization can have a significant impact on buffering the race-related stressors that Black children face.

Black History Knowledge

Although Black History Month is celebrated each year in February, the actual study of Black history in schools is limited to approximately—one or two lessons taught in United States-focused social studies classrooms each year (King, 2017). While limited in scope, there is a growing evidence base for the use of Black history as a tool for empowerment (Beasley et al., 2016). For instance, Chapman-Hilliard et al. (2016) evaluated how participating in culturally empowering courses impacted cultural identity development and academic outcomes among Black college students. Their results revealed a positive and significant growth in racial and ethnic identity after enrollment. Similarly, Chapman-Hilliard and Beasley (2018) examined how taking a course on Black studies impacted the psychosocial and identity development of Black college students. Their results indicated that by participating in these courses, self-determination and psychological empowerment improved, as well as participants' awareness of issues impacting the Black community. Relatedly, Kelly and Patrice (2019) sought to understand if incorporating images and references to Black people in an introductory psychology course would improve student outcomes. The authors found that Black students who were enrolled in a course with Black imagery had significantly higher grades than Black students who enrolled in the section with primary White images.

While it may seem obvious that Black children should learn about their own history, this has not been the case in teacher education programs. Studies have shown that social studies curricula often fail to provide a holistic representation of Black history and instead focus on slavery, reconstruction, and the Civil Rights Movement. Unfortunately, preservice teachers are not being taught how to teach Black history. This is a problem because research has shown that being exposed to more information about Black history can help to develop racial literacy and identity (King, 2017; Sullivan & Platenburg, 2017).

Gaps in the Current School Intervention Research Base

While the aforementioned topics (i.e., Black history and racial socialization) each have empirical documentation related to their significant, positive effects on Black children, a majority of school-based research has utilized color-blind and race-neutral intervention procedures (S. L. Graves et al., 2017). In the school intervention literature, there is a small, but albeit, growing research base that has shown positive effects for culture-specific interventions (e.g., Aston et al., 2018; J. Jones et al., 2018). As the aforementioned research indicates, issues such as discrimination toward Black boys are systemic and lead to poor academic and mental health outcomes. The current gaps in the school-based intervention literature, coupled with

the underutilized cultural aspects of the Black experience (i.e., Black history and racial socialization) have led to the conceptualization and development of the PERSIST (Promoting Emotional Resiliency Skills In Small Teams) intervention.

PERSIST Intervention

PERSIST is a strengths-based intervention focused on (a) Black history, (b) racial identity development, and (c) resiliency development. PERSIST was developed by the first and second authors who are college professors with extensive histories of conducting research on Black children (Aston et al., 2018; S. Graves & Aston, 2018; S. L. Graves et al., 2017; S. L. Graves et al., 2021). Both developers have earned doctorates in psychology and are licensed psychologists by their respective state board of psychology. The intervention was developed to help provide coping strategies for managing negative experiences that Black boys are subjected to in schools and communities. The following steps were undertaken in the development of PERSIST.

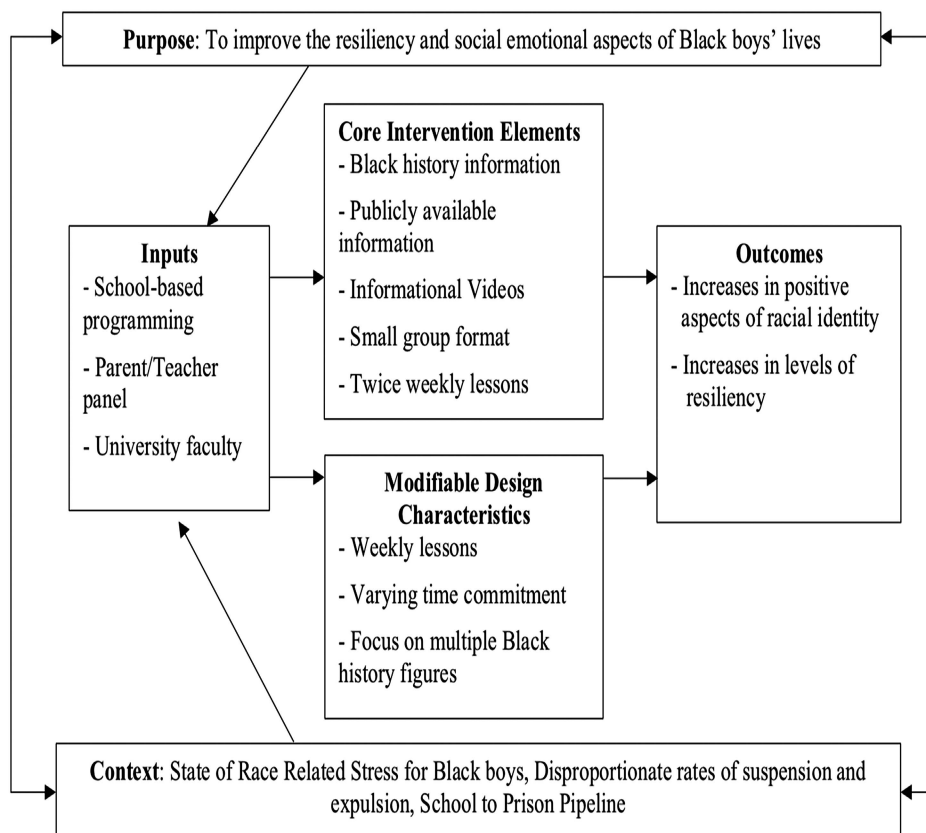
Step 1: Identify Theoretical Framework for the Intervention

The logic model for this intervention is documented in Figure 1 and was guided by the Black history knowledge model of coping and

mental health (Chapman-Hilliard & Adams-Bass, 2016) and the phenomenological variant of ecological systems theory (PVEST; Spencer et al., 2003). According to the Black history knowledge model of coping and mental health, Black history knowledge is significant for Black children's well-being and psychological liberation. More specifically, Chapman-Hilliard and Adams-Bass (2016) indicated the goals of introducing Black history knowledge to children are to provide accessible and transparent information to liberate Black children and to help change their environment. Hypothetically, this would provide coping strategies for decreasing race-related stress, which would lead to increased resiliency and adaptive skills.

Additionally, PVEST was designed to focus on the resiliency and strength of adolescents during their identity formation in the face of obstacles such as racial discrimination (Spencer et al., 2003). PVEST was an ideal theory to utilize because it accounts for the context of Black youth lived experience, including race-related stress and disproportionate suspension, which are rooted in discrimination. Furthermore, PVEST stipulates that individuals form their identities based on unique perceptions drawn from their distinctive environment (i.e., racism, school disparities), which influences identity formation. This allows PERSIST to fully integrate Black-specific historical information in the intervention development process. As such, the core intervention elements that are listed in Figure 1 will provide cultural socialization that promotes resiliency and positive identity

Figure 1
PERSIST Logic Model



Note. PERSIST = Promoting Emotional Resiliency Skills In Small Teams.

development, which are core elements of the Black history knowledge model of coping and mental health (Chapman-Hilliard & Adams-Bass, 2016) and PVEST theory (Spencer et al., 2003).

These were chosen because they are freely available to the general public. Intervention curriculum modules are presented in Table 1 and described in the following section.

Step 2: Development of Intervention Materials

Intervention materials for PERSIST were derived from two texts: *The African-American Century: How Black Americans Have Shaped Our Country* (Gates & West, 2002) and *100 Greatest African Americans: A Biographical Encyclopedia* (Asante, 2002). These texts were chosen because they presented unique profiles of some of history's most influential African Americans. Individuals were chosen with the goal of providing children with a variety of positive African American experiences rather than the typical monolithic examples that children are exposed to (i.e., Martin Luther King Jr.'s *I Have a Dream* speech and athletic figures). To ensure that the intervention was engaging, we also used videos to accompany each lesson and practical articles from Biography.com and Wikipedia.com.

Module 1 (Agreeing to Disagree but Focusing on Empowerment)

This module focused on Dr. W. E. B. Du Bois and Booker T. Washington. This module explored how Black community members can have different views on solving problems and still be productive. It featured independent videos on Du Bois and Washington's philosophies on empowering the Black community.

Inclusion Rationale. These individuals were chosen because they had different strategies for Black economic and social progress. The video discusses their opposing viewpoints on how to end racial inequities, such as suspensions, expulsions, and disparate police contact.

Table 1
PERSIST Content

Historic figure	Video
Dubois versus Washington	Biography.com https://www.biography.com Title: Booker T. Washington: Founder of Tuskegee University and Champion for Civil Rights https://youtu.be/07cspyOhWQ (3 min 30 s in duration) Title: W.E.B. Du Bois: Activist Leader in Niagara Movement and Co-Founder of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People https://youtu.be/TGOEED_MexI (3 min 46 s in duration)
Alain Locke	Wikipedia https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alain_LeRoy_Locke Ossie Davis speaking on the influence of Alain Locke: https://youtu.be/7Qq9mvU0CHM (5 min 29 s in duration) Interviews with Dr. Stewart who wrote the biography of Dr. Locke https://youtu.be/KCaE_jQAPa0 (1 min 29 s in duration)
Fannie Lou Hamer	Wikipedia.com https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fannie_Lou_Hamer Biography.com https://www.biography.com Public Broadcasting Service American Experience https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/freedomsummer-hamer/ Interview on trying to register to vote in Mississippi and being jailed/beaten https://youtu.be/9tdsLK2GIQA Congressional Testimony that President Johnson tries to get taken off of national TV on voting rights https://youtu.be/07PwNVCZCcY (3 min and 41 s in duration)
John H. Johnson and Earl Graves	Wikipedia.com https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_H._Johnson https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Earl_G._Graves_Sr. Atlanta Business League Tribute to Earl Graves https://youtu.be/FdBUjGouwT8 (2 min 34 s in duration) The biography of John H. Johnson https://youtu.be/HvHRCcXxWVs (3 min 20 s in duration)

Note. PERSIST = Promoting Emotional Resiliency Skills In Small Teams.

Module 2 (Protecting and Promoting Your Identity)

This module explored the life and work of Dr. Alain Locke, the first African American Rhodes Scholar and one of the architects of the Harlem Renaissance. He earned his doctorate from Harvard and was the chair of the Department of Philosophy at Howard University. The module featured two videos: one with actor Ossie Davis discussing Locke's national influence and the other with Locke's biographer Jeffrey Stewart.

Inclusion Rationale. Locke was one of the architects of the Harlem Renaissance, a movement that promoted Black art and culture. He believed that each culture group has its own identity and is entitled to protect and promote it. This is still relevant for adolescents today, as Black youth need to be able to protect and promote their identity in the face of racial discrimination.

Module 3 (Being Informed and Advocating in a Positive Manner)

This module explored the life and work of Fannie Lou Hamer, a civil rights leader who fought for African American voting rights. The module featured two videos: one of her congressional testimony on voting rights, which President Johnson tried to ban from national television, and the other of an interview about her journey to register to vote.

Inclusion Rationale. Fannie Lou Hamer risked physical danger in order to register to vote. She was chosen for this intervention because she spoke out against injustices that African Americans faced. This type of resolve is needed to be resilient in the face of the issues that Black students are exposed to today.

Module 4 (Understanding There Are Positive Images of African Americans)

John H. Johnson, the founder of Johnson Publishing Company, the parent company of Ebony and Jet magazines, and Earl Graves, the founder of Black Enterprise Magazine, were the focus of this module. The video for Earl Graves provided a description of his life accomplishments and what led him to start his publishing company. John Johnson's video was also biographical in nature, and it described his modest upbringing to how he established his cosmetics (Fashion Fair) and magazine empire.

Inclusion Rationale. A majority of images provided to youth via television are negative as they relate to Black boys (Dixon & Maddox, 2005). As such, this module discussed historic Black-owned media and the role it played in the development of positive racial identity in African Americans, in comparison to the negative images of Black boys that are in the media today. In this instance, the first author provided the participants with examples of Ebony and Black Enterprise magazines to aid in the discussion.

Format for PERSIST

The first author, a university professor, led each PERSIST session in a school classroom. Sessions were 1 hr and 40 min long, but due to time constraints (class hours, lunch, mandatory reading periods), one PERSIST lesson was implemented each week and split into two 50-min sessions over 4 weeks. PERSIST's fifth week included postintervention focus groups. The first 20 min of each week was

devoted to a support group, which allowed the boys to express issues they are dealing with and receive emotional support from the professor and other group members. The final 30 min was spent discussing the lesson topic, which was supported by a historical figure(s). The following script was used for the final 30 min:

5 min: Introduction of the figure by the group facilitator.

10 min: Video of the historical figure was watched by the group.

15 min: Discussion of the video by the group.

Homework assignment: Students were asked to rewatch the video and were given a printed copy of the Wikipedia or Biography.com article on the historical figure of interest to read for discussion during the next session.

During the second weekly session, the format of the first 20 min was the same as the first weekly session, with a group discussion about general issues in the participants' lives. However, the final 30 min followed a slightly different script:

5 min: Group facilitator initiated the discussion with a practical example centered on the weekly topic and how it was relevant to his life (e.g., How Booker T. Washington's philosophy that education is true individual freedom heavily influenced the first author to obtain his PhD and obtain licensure in psychology).

25 min: The group facilitator opened up the floor to the participants and asked them the following questions: How do you think today's concept relates to your life? What thoughts do you have about the homework reading and the video that we watched?

After the development of the PERSIST intervention, we sought to answer the following research questions:

1. Does the implementation of a Black history-focused intervention increase the levels of racial identity, specifically racial centrality, and private regard in Black boys?
2. Does the implementation of a Black history-focused intervention increase the levels of resiliency in Black boys?

Method

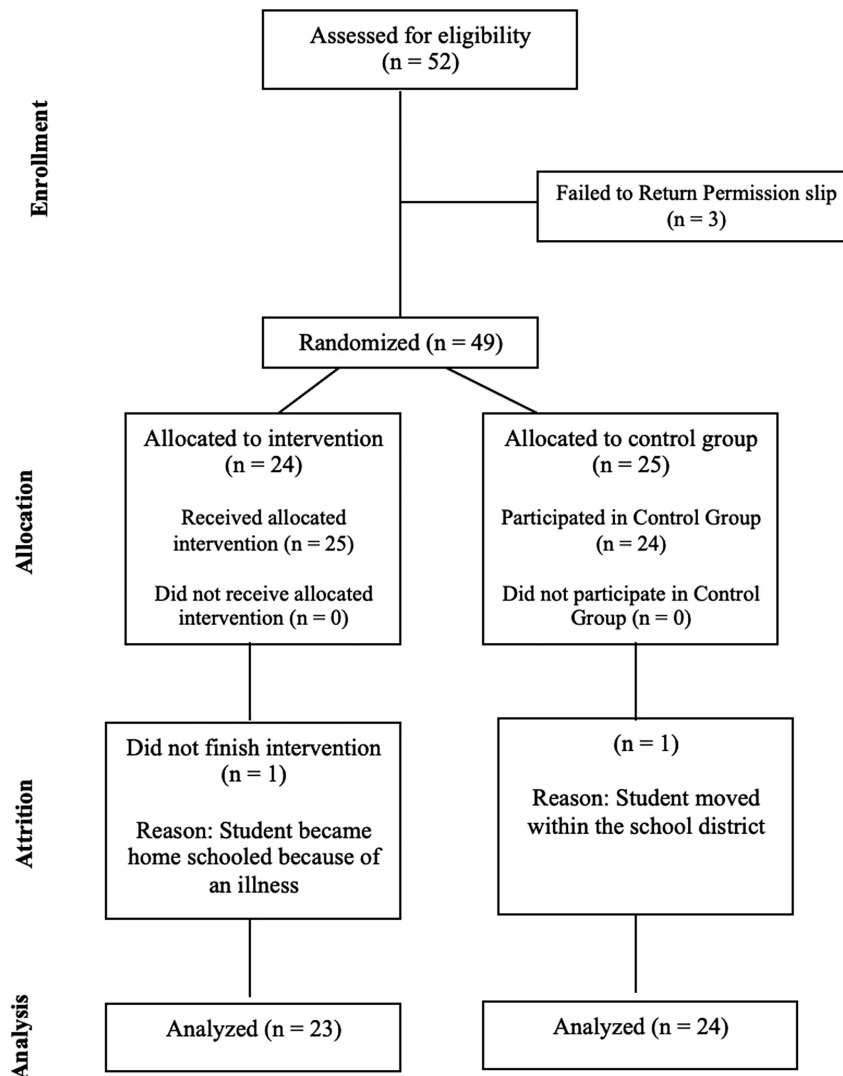
Setting

PERSIST was conducted in a predominantly Black (97.0%) urban public school in the Midwest serving students in Grades K–8. Ninety-eight percent of the students were eligible for free or reduced lunch and 59% were boys. This school had an existing partnership with a local school psychology program as a practicum placement site.

Participants

Forty-seven students (23 intervention and 24 wait-list control) participated in the pilot study of PERSIST. Students were randomly assigned to the PERSIST intervention or the delayed control group, which was delayed for 5 weeks (see Figure 2 for procedures). All of the students self-identified as Black. To recruit students, a permission form was sent home to parents of all sixth-, seventh-, and eighth-grade Black boys after institutional review board approval. There were seven

Figure 2
Consolidated Standards of Reporting Trials Flowchart PERSIST



Note. PERSIST = Promoting Emotional Resiliency Skills In Small Teams.

6th graders, eight 7th graders, and eight 8th graders in the intervention group. The average age of the participants was 13.7 years. Students who returned signed parent permission forms were allowed to participate. No clinical cutoff scores, on any measures of behavior, were used in selecting the students. There were four groups for the intervention, with three groups having six members, and one group having five.

Participants completed pre- and postintervention assessments. Preintervention assessments were completed at the beginning of the initial intervention session. Postintervention instruments were completed during the fifth week before the start of the postintervention focus groups. At the conclusion of the intervention, participants received university logo pens, university logo pencils, and university logo cardholders for cell phones for their participation. The group facilitator was the first author who is a self-identified Black male and is a college professor.

Measures

Racial Identity

Racial identity was measured by two scales from the Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity–Teen (MIBI-T; [Scottham et al., 2008](#)). Items on the MIBI-T are rated on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*really disagree*) to 5 (*really agree*). Consisting of 21 items, the MIBI-T was designed to assess the following three dimensions of racial identity in Black youth: (1) race centrality, (2) private regard, and (3) public regard. Racial centrality assessed the extent to which racial group membership is emphasized as part of an individual's self-concept (e.g., I have a strong sense of belonging to other Black people). Private regard measures an individual's feelings toward being a member of their racial group (e.g., I feel that the Black community has made valuable contributions to society). For this study, public regard was not measured as the research focus was not

on any external views of how Black people are viewed. The reliability coefficients for the private regard were .75 and .75 for race centrality in this sample.

Resiliency

To measure resiliency, the Social Emotional Assets and Resilience Scales–Short Form (SEARS-SF) was used (Merrell et al., 2011). The SEARS-SF comprised 12 items and scored based on a 4-point scale from 0 (*never*) to 4 (*always*). The Cronbach's α for the SEARS-SF was .85 in this sample.

Participant Acceptability

To determine the group acceptability, the researcher developed a participant evaluation questionnaire. This 10-item scale was scored on a Likert scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). The acceptability scale was developed to evaluate the participants' view of the specific history lessons per module, the group format, the facilitator, and if they would recommend the intervention to other students. The questions for the participant acceptability measure were developed by focusing on the intervention format and the specific lesson for each week.

Interobserver Agreement and Fidelity

Interobserver agreement was measured by the school psychologist who was assigned to the school at which the intervention took place during the second session to determine if the intervention script and topical focus on the lesson were followed. Interobserver agreement was computed by taking the number of agreements between the independent observers and dividing it by the total number of agreements plus disagreements multiplied by 100; that is, interobserver agreement = no. of agreements/(total number of agreements + disagreements). In this study, a disagreement occurred when the two observers did not indicate that the proposed script for PERSIT was being followed. An agreement occurred

when the observers agreed that the script had been followed. The interobserver agreement was 100%.

Data Analysis Plan

Microsoft Excel was used to obtain means, standard deviations, and paired sample *t*-test results. Once this information was obtained, the researchers used the *Practical Meta-Analysis Effect Size Calculator* (<https://www.campbellcollaboration.org/calculator/>) to calculate the effect size measure Cohen's *d*. Effect sizes were evaluated using Cohen's guidelines: $<.20$ = not meaningful, $.20-.49$ = small, $.50-.79$ = medium, and $\geq .80$ = large.

Results

The intervention and wait-list group were compared using the independent *t* tests, and no statistically significant differences in outcome variables were observed. As indicated in Table 2, significant changes were demonstrated in *centrality* between conditions: $t(23) = 10.7$, $p < .05$. This was also evident for *private regard* between conditions: $t(23) = 8.2$, $p < .05$. This indicates that after PERSIST participation, students had a higher endorsement of the extent that race was an important part of their lives and increased positive feelings toward their racial group. From a practical perspective, this resulted in medium effects for *centrality* (Cohen's $d = .52$) and *private regard* (Cohen's $d = .67$).

In the area of resiliency, PERSIST resulted in a significant effect between conditions: $t(23) = 3.12$, $p < .05$. This indicates that after completing PERSIST, students had demonstrably higher levels of social resiliency. This equates to a small-to-medium effect size (Cohen's $d = .40$).

As displayed in Table 3, participants' ratings of the intervention were favorable. Mean ratings indicated that participants liked the lessons on Black history, the group format, activities, and homework assignments (i.e., reviewing the videos presented during the session to discuss them more in depth during the second session). Participants liked the facilitator and felt that he was knowledgeable about the

Table 2
Descriptive Statistics of Dependent Measures Between Conditions

	Pretest	Posttest			95% CI	
Questionnaire	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	Paired <i>t</i>	Cohen's <i>d</i>	<i>LL</i>	<i>UL</i>
MIBI-T						
Private regard				.67	.39	.95
Intervention	3.45 (0.52)	4.05 (0.57)	10.74			
Control	3.55 (0.65)	3.74 (0.65)	3.86			
Centrality				.52	.24	.80
Intervention	4.62 (0.50)	5.12 (0.60)	8.26			
Control	4.73 (0.49)	4.93 (0.66)	3.39			
SEARS-SF						
Resiliency				.40	.14	.66
Intervention	30.70 (7.37)	28.79 (8.83)	3.12			
Control	30.91 (7.64)	32.30 (8.79)	1.55			

Note. CI = confidence interval; LL = lower limit; UL = upper limit; MIBI-T = Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity–Teen; SEARS-SF = Social Emotional Assets and Resilience Scales–Short Form.

Table 3
Participants' Acceptability of PERSIST

Question	<i>M (SD)</i>
I liked learning more about Black history	4.8 (0.4)
I liked the lesson on Dubois versus Washington	3.8 (0.8)
I liked the lesson on Fannie Lou Hamer	4.3 (0.8)
I liked the lesson on Alain Locke	2.8 (0.7)
I liked the lesson on John Johnson and Earl Graves	4.1 (0.7)
I liked the homework assignments	3.4 (0.9)
I liked the group format	4.1 (1.2)
I wish the format was one-on-one	1.8 (1.1)
I liked the group leader	4.9 (0.3)
I would recommend that other Boys my age participate in this group	4.5 (0.6)

Note. 1 = *strongly disagree* and 5 = *strongly agree*. PERSIST = Promoting Emotional Resiliency Skills In Small Teams.

intervention content. Based on the mean ratings, the participants would recommend the PERSIST program to their peers.

Postintervention Focus Group Interviews

To gather more specific information about participants' views of the intervention, one additional evaluation session was undertaken with each group. All participants who participated in the intervention lessons participated in the focus groups. Each session was audio recorded using the QuickTime app on an iPad and then transcribed. After reading interviews and transcripts, the researchers classified samples that fit the themes. This procedure followed Elliott and Timulak's (2021) *Generic Approach to Descriptive-Interpretive Qualitative Research* (Elliott & Timulak, 2021; Timulak & Elliott, 2019). This method is designed to develop an understanding of understudied concepts (e.g., the combination of Black history, racial identity, and resiliency). In this exploratory qualitative study, the researchers used an emergent coding process to identify and group responses into thematic categories. The steps taken included the following: (a) formulation of objectives and research questions; (b) determining the sample population and how data will be collected; (c) preparing data (e.g., organizing field notes and transcription of interviews, coding of field notes); (d) initial data analysis (e.g., identifying themes); (e) interpretation and refinement of themes; (f) review our interpretation of data to ensure transparency and decrease bias; (g) colleague verification checks to ensure the trustworthiness and credibility of the findings; and (h) presentation of findings.

Themes were identified by the frequency of specific responses across participants. Frequently identified responses were recognized and reported as themes, which were noted by at least 10 participants. Common phrases, words, and topical statements were labeled by the first and second authors individually. The researchers then met to discuss similarities and differences and their rationale for these judgments. The initial intercoder agreement between the first and second authors was 85% and rose to 100% after discussion, which is acceptable for open-ended questions (Campbell et al., 2013). During these discussions, a consensus on the following themes was reached: *I wish I knew this information before* and *good to talk about my issues*. *I wish I knew this information before* was defined as the way participants indicated that they did not have knowledge about the

specific individuals that were highlighted in the PERSIST intervention and was identified by 20 participants. The theme of *good to talk about my issues* was defined as having the ability to discuss issues related to students' well-being and was identified by 16 participants.

During the sessions, the following questions were asked:

1. What did you like about the PERSIST Group?
2. What would you do differently about the group in the future?

In the area of *I wish I knew this information before*, a student stated:

We never hear about these people in none of my classes. Even during Black History month all we here about is Martin Luther King.

Another student indicated:

The topics on Black History made me feel good. You know for Black History we do stuff in school and my church, but I liked getting even more information about Black people doing good things. I want to do more of this in school so we all can know about successful Black people.

Similarly:

I play football, so I like sports and everything but that's all the teachers really talk about with us when they really try to sit down and see what's up. After listening to everybody I think more information like this would be good too.

Another student stated:

I aint never really talked about race in school for real. Most of the teachers are White so maybe they don't want to talk about it. They hang up posters and stuff doing Black history month but these people in our group we don't talk about. I realize it's a lot about African Americans I don't know.

In this area, one of the students indicated:

I didn't know who these people were or what they were about, so it was a good learning experience.

Another student stated:

It's good to find out about other African Americans who did good things in life. On TV they always make us look like we've always doing bad stuff.

Similarly:

I really liked learning about all of the successful people. I want to own my own car business and I didn't know there used to be a Black magazine just for business people [Black Enterprise] that we learned about. It's a lot of things out there, but it's like people keep it from us so we won't know about it.

Another student replied:

We talked about this earlier, but when we had homework I also did more searching on the topic myself. There was a lot of information on Ebony magazine and my Grandma said everybody in her neighborhood growing up used to read it.

Good to Talk About My Issues

Within the group discussion, this was the most common theme that was discussed. As one of the participants stated:

I really liked coming to talk about things that are going on. At first I was nervous because I didn't know what to expect, but then once we got into it I liked coming to talk about the lessons.

Another student indicated:

Each of days I liked the things we went over. Like I don't get along with everybody all the time, but I've learned to just say we can agree to disagree and keep it moving [Du Bois and Washington module].

Similarly, as stated by another student:

I liked that we did this as a group. Mr. J (school security officer) is cool sometimes but it was good that we had another Black man that's regular. Sometimes Mr. J will talk to us in general but it's usually bad things like get out of the hall or move along.

Also, according to another student:

It was good to connect with the other people in the group and I feel like we had a good connection because we see the same things about what's going on in school. And I think we maybe should do this for all of the boys in the whole school.

Similarly, another student stated:

When we have time to talk about school stuff I can see how it goes with the people we talked about. We fight each other all the time and it's the same stuff we talk about in our groups, but they handle it different. Talking about me getting mad at my people in my class was good for me.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to describe the development of PERSIST, a Black history-focused intervention designed to increase the levels of racial identity while improving the overall levels of resiliency. To date, no studies have examined whether Black history-oriented group interventions implemented in schools impact Black boys. The results of this pilot study indicate that the development of a Black history-focused intervention may be a promising method to increase the resiliency and racial identity of Black boys. By foregrounding these interconnected constructs, researchers can move beyond simplistic narratives and contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of Black boys' experiences. This knowledge can inform interventions and practices that empower Black boys to navigate the world with resilience, pride, and a profound connection to their rich history and heritage.

Although Black history has been utilized by higher education professionals and teachers in K–12 school settings, its use as a school-based intervention has been neglected. By drawing on specific, historical Black figures as assets within the Black community, PERSIST was able to combine the empirical research from social studies education (King, 2017) and psychology (Beasley et al., 2016; Chapman-Hilliard & Beasley, 2018). This type of multidisciplinary approach is necessary to help to alleviate the multisystemic (ecological stress, school discrimination, environmental racism) ways that hinder the development of Black children. This was supported by the interview data collected that indicated the group participants enjoyed learning about Black history and indicated that they wish their teachers discussed this topic more in schools.

Also, the participants discussed the fact that they enjoyed having a space to discuss the issues that they were dealing with in their personal lives while also interacting with a Black male group leader.

This was directly related to our use of the PVEST model. More specifically, PVEST stipulates that individuals form identities based on their unique perceptions drawn from their distinctive environment (i.e., racism, school disparities), which influences identity formation. This is congruent with the fact that racial identity development is a lifelong process so having these types of conversations long term is beneficial for Black boys.

While not a specific focus of the intervention, there was a racial/ethnic match between the group leader, who was a Black male, and all of the participants. Research has demonstrated that when Black students are paired with Black teachers, they have higher levels of achievement, more favorable teacher ratings, and are more likely to graduate from high school (Gershenson et al., 2018; Redding, 2019). From a therapist standpoint, research has demonstrated that Black therapists may have a distinct sense of solidarity with Black clients based on their lived experience which may improve outcomes (Goode-Cross, 2011; Goode-Cross & Grim, 2016). Relatedly, Greer and Cavalhieri (2019) examined coping strategies that Black men used when they faced institutional racism. The authors indicated that coping strategies that involved self-reliance were indicative of greater mental health problems. Although our sample is with Black boys, our intervention can provide an outlet that is adaptive and may allow Black boys to not exclusively utilize self-reliance strategies like their older counterparts. Although the aforementioned studies were not conducted with adolescents, they do lend support to the racial-match support that was demonstrated in this research, which indicates a greater need for this type of research in school-aged populations.

The three targeted constructs of this pilot study: private regard, centrality, and resiliency all increased over the course of the intervention. Empirical research has shown that these constructs are related to optimal outcomes for Black children. Within the developmental psychological literature, there is also a growing research base that supports the inclusion of Black history knowledge in the positive youth development framework (Chapman-Hilliard & Adams-Bass, 2016). Furthermore, the measurement of social-emotional assets is relatively new as an outcome measure for prevention and intervention programs that focus on Black children. For instance, in their systematic review of psychological and prevention interventions for Black youth, S. C. Jones and Neblett (2016) found that a majority of outcomes in this domain focus on the measurement of an Afrocentric worldview. In comparison, only three out of 17 studies included aspects of racial socialization in their intervention materials. This was also demonstrated in Nichols and Graves's (2018) survey of American Psychological Association-accredited training programs' inclusion of strength-based methodologies in their curriculum. Their research indicated that while faculty thought assets-based practices are beneficial, a majority of faculty did not expose their students to the types of constructs from a manualized intervention or standardized assessment standpoint.

With the notable exceptions of intervention work based on Afrocentric concepts (e.g., S. Graves & Aston, 2018; Heidelberg & Collins, 2023; J. Jones et al., 2018), there is a significant gap in the school-based intervention research that attempts to understand if their work has a direct impact on racial identity and other social-emotional strengths. This is unfortunate because the socialization of Black children plays an important role in how they respond to incidents of racism. By increasing aspects of racial identity such as centrality and private regard, it may help Black children to better

understand racial discrimination and buffer them from its harmful effects (Leath et al., 2019).

This pilot study was conducted with boys only, and the next steps will be to evaluate PERSIST with a group of Black girls to determine its effectiveness. This is important because the school-based literature on interventions that include Black culture is varied as it relates to gender. For instance, S. Graves and Aston (2018) found that implementing the Brothers of Ujima resulted in an increase in Afrocentric values, but not in racial identity or resiliency for Black boys. However, when Afrocentric interventions have been implemented with Black girls, increases in racial identity have been documented (Aston & Graves, 2016; J. Jones et al., 2018). As such, further evaluation of PERSIST with Black girls is essential to determine how intervention effects vary and what modifications are needed to ensure that Black girls and boys can increase their Black history knowledge given noted gender differences in intervention outcomes.

As indicated in Table 3, aside from the lesson on Dr. Alain Locke, the students enjoyed the topical focus and the lesson themes as indicated by their acceptability ratings. As such, this type of research tailoring is gaining momentum in schools as a method to increase efficacy and validity. In regard to why the specific lesson on Dr. Locke was not as well received as the other lessons, it was hypothesized that he was perceived as elitist by the students. Literature on Dr. Locke indicates that he had difficulty interacting with other Blacks in college based on his views of their lower socioeconomic status. Future iterations of PERSIST will include focus groups with Black boys, prior to the intervention to maximize relevancy for this population.

Limitations

Although the results from this research are promising, there are improvements that can be made in future iterations of PERSIST. While the current PERSIST modules were developed for sixth-, seventh-, and eighth-grade students, the goal is to develop a complete intervention system that is developmentally appropriate for elementary through high school students. Additional research will be required to understand how to develop materials focused on specific, historical Black figures that can account for an individual child's developmental level. Additionally, more outcome measures will be included in future research on the PERSIST intervention. With adequate funding, our goal is to gather more information from an advisory board of parents, students, and faculty experts on intervention content through an iterative process. The first author was the group facilitator, so in future iterations, independent researchers should lead the PERSIST intervention to ensure replicability. This pilot study used a randomization procedure from one school. The next steps will include a multischool implementation process to give further credence to our initial results. Finally, PERSIST sessions were broken up into two weekly sessions because of school-specific time constraints (e.g., mandatory reading periods). Future iterations should examine if the intervention is as effective in an after-school one-weekly session version or in a community setting format.

Conclusion

Issues such as zero-tolerance policies, teacher bias, low teacher expectations, and school pushout due to racial bias can result in oppressive school experiences for Black boys. These issues contribute

to race-related stress, which are major issues that Black boys face daily, and these discriminatory schooling experiences also contribute to negative mental health outcomes. By helping students form positive views about themselves and their backgrounds, we can reframe some of the negative stereotypes about Black boys that are prevalent in the media.

School implementation research has attempted to adopt an evidence-based practice framework; however, these frameworks do not always include cultural aspects of student's lives that lead to positive outcomes. As such, implementation scientists should be encouraged to conduct multidisciplinary research to understand the factors that lead to positive youth development in Black boys and incorporate those constructs into school-based interventions.

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