HOW INCREASES IN SOCIAL MEDIA USE AMID THE COVID-19 ISOLATION

PERIOD IMPACTED THE DEVELOPMENT OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE IN

BLACK FEMALE TEENS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

HOW INCREASES IN SOCIAL MEDIA USE AMID THE COVID-19 ISOLATION PERIOD

IMPACTED THE DEVELOPMENT OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE IN BLACK

FEMALE TEENS

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During and following the COVID-19 isolation period, millions of teens grappled with the sudden break in physical contact, which coincided with the natural changes occurring during adolescence. For Black female teens, the adolescent experience is unique from other teen groups as it is characterized by the sexualization and adultification of this demographic. Filling the void created by being physically isolated, the use of and the value in social media engagement increased exponentially. This has caused concerns about the mental health of teens as connections were drawn to heightened rates of anxiety and depression in this population.

Social isolation restrictions halted in-person schooling for millions of teens, causing an interruption in natural progressions of social and emotional development. Emotional intelligence, encompassing five key components of emotional development: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy and social skills, signifies the ability to both manage and understand the emotions of self and others. Underdeveloped emotional intelligence, I assert, lies at the root of manifestations of emotional dysregulation and consequent anxiety and depression exhibited in Black female teens.

Using the Causal Chain Theory to explore this phenomenon through the lens of the Black female teen, some root causes explaining increased anxiety and consequent

emotional dysregulation in this demographic were discovered. Causal chains illustrate the path of influence running from root cause to problem symptoms. It is within this chain of events that this project sought to enlighten current research on the connections between the perturbations existing among Black females, social media use, deficiencies in emotional intelligence and anxiety.

In this study, twenty-five Black females participated in semi-structured interviews, focus groups and observations. Approaching this project phenomenologically, the author was able to use the words of the participants to develop codes that guided recommendations made in support of an action plan. While the population site provides some resourcing to address social emotional learning (SEL), programs to align these practices with specific focus on components of emotional intelligence are lacking.

This dissertation delves into the intricate relationship between social media usage and emotional intelligence among Black adolescent females, with a specific focus on heightened anxiety and depression levels during and after the COVID-19 isolation period. Through an in-depth exploration of this topic, the study seeks to uncover the ways in which social media engagement influences emotional intelligence and its subsequent impact on the psychological well-being of this demographic. The final chapter of this work details recommendations for action steps to address anticipated outcomes, responses, consequences and implications for future related practice and research are described in the conclusion.

Dedicated to my parents, James and Carolyn Millerton, whose love, patience, and effectual prayers have covered and helped sustain me to the extent of my fifty years of life. Also dedicated to the memory of my late maternal grandmother, Melma Finney, and my paternal grandparents, John and Bettye Millerton. They were beautiful patterns of enduring love and strength, whose footprints in the sands of time will never be forgotten. Dedicated to my one and only brother, Twyman, my first friend and Hero. Dedicated to my only niece, Korryn, and my only nephew, Xavier, who make me a proud auntie every day. Dedicated to my fifth-grade teacher, Betty J. Cox, for being selfless in her duty to all the children she taught over her illustrious career as a teacher in the Dayton Public Schools. Dedicated to my godson, Azha Lanier Little, Jr., for loving his "Honey," may you always know how much I love you.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

COVID-19   Coronavirus Disease 2019 (SARS-CoV-2)

SM   social media

GenZ   Generation Z

EI   Emotional intelligence

SEL   Social emotional learning

RCA   Root cause analysis

SNS   Social networking sites

IRB   Institutional review board

PBIS   Positive behavior interventions and support

HSC   Hyper-sensitivity to criticism

BBL   Brazilian butt lift

PD   Professional development

BLT   Building leadership team

PDSA   Plan, do, study, act

PLC   Positive learning community

CHAPTER ONE

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Topic

This study explored how social media (SM) affected the emotional intelligence (EI) of Black female teens, heightening their levels of anxiety and depression during and following the Covid-19 isolation period. The teens in this study ranged in age from 14-18 and were categorized as Generation Z (GenZ). GenZ is represented as a whole by individuals between the ages of 10 and 25 years old (Àbíké-Íyímídé, 2021). Native to technology, particularly SM, GenZers are accustomed to instant access to a variety of goods, services and entertainment options through the swipe of the finger on their smartphone, ipad or tablet (Petrock, 2021). Missing, however, are important interpersonal socialization experiences that can only be garnered through the accumulation of human interaction.

Human interactions contribute to the natural maturation processes in physical, social, and emotional development in all stages of the human growth process (Allen et al., 2021). Social cues and other non-verbal communication is learned through human interaction to include body language, facial expression and voice inflection (Laskowski, 2018). Human interactions also develop the ability to appropriately process emotional response, which is a critical component in the adolescent maturation process (Health, 2020). Whereas social distancing during Covid-19 increased the uses for and reliance upon all technology in general, the effects of the suspension of in-person schooling and other interpersonal interaction caused rates of anxiety and depression to skyrocket among all teen groups (Hicks, 2022; Goodlet, 2022).

For millions of teenagers, the Covid-19 period of isolation coincided with one of the most crucial stages of their physical, mental, and emotional development: adolescence. Concerns in the mental health field about rising levels of anxiety, depression and suicide among teens that frequently engage in SM prior to the pandemic were only exacerbated by social distancing restrictions. Parents reported a 63% increase in their teens' SM use during the pandemic (Dworkin, 2022; Moyer, 2022). This project aimed to shed light on the intricate dynamics of how increased SM usage during the COVID-19 pandemic affected EI and its relation to elevated levels of anxiety and depression in Black teen girls. Understanding the role SM plays in the process of emotional development of teens is of paramount importance. Hence, this study examined the sequence of occurrences in which SM usage during the Covid-19 isolation period influenced the experience of anxiety and depression among Black females within the context of their distinct adolescent journey.

The Problem of Practice

Schools have served as primary institutions for social cognitive and emotional development of children since its inception (Gafoor, 2018). The social structure of schools lend themselves to generating opportunities to help students develop emotional intelligence (EI) to include age appropriate cognitive skills in the learning environment and social settings (Zhang, 2022). When schools shifted to remote learning during the pandemic, students were deprived of opportunities that the school setting provides to develop social experiences that support the development of interpersonal skills (Herrmann, 2021). This forced "hiatus" from the physical realm created a greater focus on the development of the virtual identity, which is greatly influenced by a variety of

societal and personal factors. Chief among these factors includes teens' use of and value in the engagement of SM.

The ramifications of the increased use of SM during the isolation period of COVID-19, when viewed through the distinct adolescent experience of Black females, manifested in heightened rates of anxiety and an underdeveloped EI within this demographic (Alhazmi & Kaufmann, 2022; Banks, 2021; Clark, 2021). The drivers and influences of SM use among teenagers exhibit a wide range of diversity. While some adolescents rely on SM to shape their social connections, others perceive it as a simple way to pass the time. I assert that teens' value in and dependence upon virtual identity changed how teens process human emotion. In the absence of human experiences during the isolation period, SM adapted its platforms to accommodate the sudden break in human interaction with innovative replicas to translate human emotions into virtual replacements.

SM platforms enable users to convey emotions through technological mediums such as emojis and memes, which serve as virtual representations of human reactions (Ganda, 2014). Emojis are symbols of various emotions through which users virtually respond to SM content. Multiple SM sites include variations of a "smiley face" which are virtual replications of commonly used human facial expressions that symbolize emotional response (Bates, 2023). The most universally used symbol is a "thumbs up" which represents a positive response or "like" of the content by the user. There are countless other forms of virtual representations of human emotion SM sites share. "Gifs" are captioned pictures of celebrities or short video snippets of trending events usually referencing a famous or witty quote associated with a specific human sentiment (2023).

Other shared forms of these virtual symbols include common household items, animals, objects in nature and a variety of hand gestures. The reliance upon these virtual interactions during the isolation period played a pivotal role in how Black female teens, simultaneously undergoing their unique adolescent experience, learned to navigate the communication landscape (Bates, 2023). The limitation of these virtual responses lies within the absence of immediate human feedback and the ramifications inherent in face-to-face interaction. It is within this context that the assertion of possible connections between SM's role in the manifesting of a lack of EI in Black female teens and the heightened rates of anxiety and depression in this population was conceived.

Schools have not adequately addressed the implications of how the lapse in EI experienced by Black females during adolescence has affected their ability to regulate their emotions. Evidence to support this is found in the database of referral offenses from this population where the research was conducted. The nature of the offenses suggests a severe lack of emotional management (Goodlet, 2022). Anxiety and depression are two manifestations of behavior in teens who exhibit deficiencies in one or more domains of EI (Hicks, 2022; Lasevoli, 2022; Karim, et al., 2020; Mosley & McMahon, 2020; Laskowski, 2018). Current literature addresses the rise in rates of anxiety and depression in the teenage population as a whole during the Covid-19 isolation period. However, this inquiry examined this phenomenon through the lens of the unique adolescent experiences of Black female teens and the role SM plays in this experience. Therefore, this study explored how social isolation during Covid-19 coupled with increased SM use impeded the EI of Black female teens in their unique adolescent experience resulting in higher levels of anxiety and depression.

Justification of the Problem

In the effort to improve teaching and learning, schools must respond to the value of aligning specific EI to social emotional learning (SEL) resources into its curriculum for Black females in response to increased levels of anxiety and depression. Data analyzed from behavior referrals at the population site, Xavier High School, the pseudonym for this study, suggested that common emotional behavior irregularities exhibited by Black females provides the rationale for integrating programming to address underdeveloped EI. The data at the population site reflected that Black females are documented to have displayed more verbally and physically aggressive behaviors than their counterparts in other subset groups. These behaviors were marred with irrational, often extreme manifestations of anger and lamentation. Understanding the uniqueness of the adolescent experience of the Black female historically provides the basis for the exploration of this phenomenon (Burnett, et al., 2022).

The uniqueness of the adolescent experience for Black females is characterized by adultification and sexualization and contributes to negative social and emotional implications connected to anxiety and depression (Rogers, et. al, 2022; Horsford, 2021; Epstein et al., 2017). Schools must identify the connections between deficiencies in EI and manifestations of negative behaviors in Black females by addressing how SM use more acutely affects this population. Further, programming and policy change is needed to educate Black females on the connections between SM use on mood and the emotional response system and provide skill-sets toward EI responses in behavior. Direct and sustained programming for Black female teens to address these behaviors may lead to a positive impact on effective communication, behaviors, teaching and learning. This study

explored how increased SM use during and after the pandemic affected the EI Black

female teens resulting in increased anxiety and depression, and the organizations'

response to this challenge.

Deficiencies in the Organizational Knowledge Record

While Xavier High School does provide social emotional learning (SEL) services,

alignment with an EI component is lacking. When students returned to in-person

instruction following the lifting of Covid-19 restrictions, school leaders underestimated

the effects of underdeveloped social and emotional skills created by the nearly two

academic school years of physical isolation students encountered (Banks, 2021; Horsford,

2021; Mitchell, 2020; Quirk, 2020). Behaviors reveal a lack of social and emotional

development associated with components which represent EI (Hicks, 2022; Banks, 2021;

Gordon, 2021). The lack of these skills affects behaviors impacting the quality of

teaching and learning in the classroom as well as interpersonal development which

affects social interactions (Gordon, 2021; Hodgman, et. al, 2021).

While there have been modifications to school policies to allow time for

appropriate cell phone use during the school day, concerns about emotionally

dysregulated behaviors connected to responses from SM use remain (Chen, 2022; Weale,

2022). These concerns center around the students' inability to respond with emotional

appropriateness in interpersonal encounters. Specifically, how underdeveloped EI

resulting from SM use has affected rates of anxiety and depression in Black female teens

during and following the period of isolation, has not been adequately documented (Hicks,

2022; Wilder, 2020). Limited data exists which addresses how the adolescent experiences

of Black female teens' during and following the period of Covid-19 isolation affected the

development of their EI. This study was needed to explore those connections and devise

a plan of action against this trend. Aligning SEL and EI resourcing to support the EI of

Black females aims to decrease feelings of anxiety and depression in this population.

Audience

The audience, for the process and review of this study, included the following key

stakeholders: twenty-five Black female teens, ages 14-18, parents, school administration,

teaching staff, and district officials responsible for the adoption and implementation of

the suggested action steps for the change process. All stakeholders included in this study

benefited from understanding the implications of a two-year social isolation period on the

unique adolescent experience of Black females. Participants in this study most benefited

by understanding the connections between effective emotional management and behavior

management. Parents, school officials and district personnel found benefit in this study to

invest in concentrated efforts to assist students in effectively managing their emotions to

improve teaching and learning. Exploration of this phenomenon also provided insight on

the role of schools in developing programming to assist Black females to combat feelings

of anxiety and depression and improving overall mental health (Sun, 2021; Wolfman,

2021; Reyes, 2021).

Overview of the Theoretical Framework(s)/Methods/Research Questions

I chose to develop this phenomenological study using the Causal Chain

theoretical framework. Causal chains are literally the path of influence connecting

behaviors and actions to root cause problem symptoms (Karim et al., 2020). I chose this

framework because it best illustrates the impact of a sequence of events upon succeeding

events. Causal chains also seek to uncover root causes for the predictability of behavioral

responses based upon specific perturbations (Glazkov, 2021; Itani et al., 2022). To

discover root causes that explain this phenomenon, I conducted pre and post focus

groups, semi-structured interviews and observations at Xavier High School to analyze the

data collected into a cohesive action plan. Phenomenological studies seek to explore how

people experience events by examining mitigating factors surrounding those events

(Marshall, 2021). It helps us to understand the meaning behind people's lived

experience. It is with that understanding that research was constructed to develop

informed dialogue leading to improved practices (Banks, 2021; H & Delve, 2022). I

chose to approach this study phenomenologically as this method best illustrates how,

from the perspective of the participant, a series of root cause perturbations within a

specific group can be interpreted. The analysis of why something happens in human

behavior requires a clear understanding of how the components within a chain of events

are developed.   Additionally, semi-structured interviews, focus groups and observations

provided depth and scope to the participant's responses through other aspects of emotion

such as facial expressions, tone/pauses/inflection of voice and hand gestures.

　　　The research questions that this study sought to explore were: How did increases

in SM use by Black female teens during the Covid-19 social isolation period affect how

they experience anxiety and depression and, how was the EI of Black female teens

affected by increases in SM use during and following the Covid-19 isolation period? In

the following sections, I will provide further details about the framework and methods

that guided this study.

Limitations

The limitations of this study included the acknowledgement that the participants were pooled from one high school, Xavier, located in a suburban area in the Midwest. As such, the results might only be specific to Black teens girls living in this region of the country. The study is also limited in that the participants all share an interest in SM use. One hundred percent of the participants were engaged in SM to the extent that they actively engaged in more than one SM site at the time of the study (Radu, 2023). Additionally, the sample size limited the generalizability of the study. Further, the study may be limited in the sense that there is a great divide in thought between what is considered normal communication and including the attribution of characterizing what constitutes depression between the generations of the researcher and that of the participants.

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Review of Related Literature

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Framework Informing the Study

The Causal Chain theory explains a sequence of conditions or events, either hypothetical or empirically derived, that result in a particular effect (Itani et al., 2022). Causal chains provide a coherent visual framework that can incorporate solutions and outcomes from multiple sectors. Causal chains can also illustrate why logical and ordered sequences of emotional responses to actions and perturbations occur (Qiu et al., 2018). Using the data from the participants in this study, within this framework, yielded clear and specific connections between root causes and resulting behaviors. Within the analyses were found superficial and fundamental layers of influence which created a path traveling from root causes to problem symptoms (Bello et.al., 2018).

The complexity of identifying causal chains in human behavior is that a certain stimulus may produce varying responses for each individual. More succinctly, the level of EI present in an individual is a probable predictor of emotional response to a specific stimulus (Glazkov, 2021). The research elucidated the implications of increased anxiety associated with SM use by Black female teens during this time period. Focusing on the connections within these sequences provided the data needed to make the decision to use this framework for this study (Mosely & McMahan, 2020; Stokes, et. al, 2020; Quirk, 2020).

Examining root cause analysis (RCA) within the structure of the causal chain framework helped to construct sustainable recommendations for how to effectively integrate EI into current SEL practices at the population site. RCA is a tool used to determine the root cause of a problem to identify an appropriate solution (Sparta Systems, 2022). Using this tool collectively when examining responses from the participants helped to establish commonalities within the root cause of emotional responses to SM for this population. This study revealed the root cause of SM use, for each of the participants, varied in a variety of circumstances (Itani & Riley, 2022; Mitchell, 2020; Quirk, 2020).

Related Literature

Since the pandemic, the educational field has experienced an acute uptick in studies related to the emotional health of teens (Sun, 2021; Wall, 2021;Wolfman-Arent, 2021). Within this phenomenon, a variety of research has focused on the role of SM in the emotional health of teens nationwide (Steinsbekk et al., 2021; Weir, 2023). While these studies have been instrumental in helping schools enact policies and procedures

germane to address social emotional learning (SEL), the literature fails to reflect, with specificity, how current SEL strategies alone support Black females in their unique adolescent experience. Studies reflect connections between elevated levels of anxiety and depression among this distinct group that coincide with the Covid-19 period of isolation.   The related literature in the following section aims to fill in this gap by exploring how the unique adolescence of Black females' teens promoted anxiety and depression in conjunction with SM use resulting from undeveloped EI.

The Unique Adolescent Experiences of Black Female Teens

Black females, on average, enter puberty earlier than their non-black peers (Karapanou & Papadimitriou, 2010; Pflieger et al., 2013). The combination of contending with the emerging physical and psychological changes occurring during the isolation period further complicated the development of EI within this population. Messages and imaging embedded within SM place emphasis on the physical appearance of Black girls. Because Black girls on average are more physically developed.

The Georgetown Law Journal (2019) explains that the adolescent experience for Black females is unique because they experience adultification bias resulting in beliefs and practices which suggest they are less innocent and therefore less deserving of a high level of emotional nurturing (Banks, 2021; Burnett et al., 2022). These biases are rooted in ties to slavery, wherein Black girls were raped, bore and cared for children at very early ages (Mahon, 2022; Payne et al., 2019).   Children that are thrust into situations where they are emotionally overwhelmed evoke responses that reflect a lack of emotional maturation. This may explain the impact on how Black females' teens struggle to emotionally regulate with appropriateness in school and other social settings (Burnett et

al., 2022; Collins, 1970; Cuncic, 2022). The interruption to the socialization process

during adolescence for Black female teens created a deeper emotional attention to and

dependence upon their connections on SM which resulted in elevated levels of anxiety

and depression (Ganda, 2014; Hicks, 2022). SM has filled a vacuum of emotional need

for black females that is characterized by certain behaviors (Clark, 2021; Olayinka,

2021). These characterizations heavily influence how Black girls respond emotionally to

a variety of stimuli proliferating stereotypes commonly associated with this population

(Mullett, 2022).

Specific stereotypes of black women in SM places a heavy emphasis on attitude,

physical beauty and sexuality. Black girl magic is a phrase that has been coined to

describe the ways in which Black women are characterized through with the physical

characteristics reflected in women with accentuated facial, body and personality meant

to exemplify a certain assertiveness (Olayinka, 2021). Make-up, hair extensions, figure

enhancing mechanisms such as corsets, waist wraps, butt pads and plastic surgery

procedures are all components of the specific images attributed to what has been

accepted in the vernacular as Black girl magic. The thematic manifestation of these

stereotypes manifests into themes which coincide with responses generated from the

semi-structured interviews and observations conducted in this research.

Two prominent themes that accentuate a uniqueness to the adolescent experience

and development of Black female teens is documented in the sexualization and

consequent adultification of this population (Horsford, 2021; Ja, 2021). Studies reveal

that internal biases about the advanced physical maturation of Black girls stems from

these girls being less innocent than their white counterparts. Because Black girls tend to

look older than they actually are, the assumption is that they are emotionally more advanced than other girls their age. Therefore, Black girls are not given the same consideration of innocence that girls from other races are extended. Contending with these historic and cultural biases in the midst of physical, emotional, hormonal and social changes occurring during adolescence is the essence of what makes the experience of Black female teens unique (Crooks, et. al., 2019). For a large portion of the participants, behaviors are heavily influenced by the happenings within their physical environment. Home life, school, SM and television, individually and collectively shape opinions and perspectives for these teens and how they respond to people and events in the course of their daily lives.

Environmental factors, for a large percentage of this population, contribute to how they see the world. Black female teens who live in impoverished environments are more susceptible to attitudes and behaviors of aggression, sexual promiscuity and violence (Mahon, 2022; Horsford, 2021; Mullett, 2022). For many of these Black girls, emotional responses are influenced by the actions of others in their environment.

Generation Z and Social Media (SM)

Generation Z includes individuals aged 10-25 years. At earliest, they represent children entering the 5th grade and to those young adults who are from two to four years out of college (Ingall, 2023). This is the first generation to be born into a world where social network sites (SNS) are the primary source of providing rapid, mass and continuous forms of connected information. The term Social Networking Sites (SNS), as its name suggests, is any digital platform that transmits various forms of communication. These forms include: texts, tweets, posts, "snaps," and "twitch," all having the ability to

reach millions of connected, or networking sites instantaneously (Chen, 2022; Ganda, 2014). Within this broad definition is the term social media SM, which is an on-going barrage of threads, or chains of communication by a variety of users on specific talking points, images, and responses that encourage and influence user interaction (Mees, 2017). Notifications of incoming communications on SM range from standard audio alerts to vibration and bright, flashing lights. As digital advances continue to evolve in SM, more avenues of influence are created to keep teen users engaged (Gordon, 2021). These most common forms of communication between SM sites have been normalized within Generation Zers as a primary source of connection to their local and global community (Kahwagi et al., 2022).

SM feedback on all platforms share two distinct characteristics, frequency, and publicity. With more "down-time" created by social restrictions during Covid-19, the use of a variety of social networking and social media platforms became the sole outlet for people to stay connected to others (Pandya & Lodha, 2021). Common feedback on these platforms include: "likes/unlikes," "loves," "follows/unfollow/block," "reposts/shares" and "opinionated commentary." The value in and the frequency with which these responses are generated, interpreted and internalized greatly contributes to rapid levels of fluctuations in mood, resulting in a complex alteration in feelings about the "self" (Karim et al., 2020). Black female teens' increased use of and value in social media during the Covid-19 period of isolation, created behaviors consistent with deficiencies in the attributes of EI thereby increasing levels of anxiety and depression (Santos et al., 2021). This study explores how deficiencies in EI created by SM use during and after the Covid-

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19 isolation periods affected levels of anxiety and depression in the unique development experiences of Black female teens.

In the digital world, relationships among communities of users are measured within the response mechanisms embedded within the specific site. The impact is that these platforms make it more accessible for people to gather information about each other and create forms of business networking social relationships (Adams, 2011; Hutchinson et al., 2009). While advances in technology have provided exponential strides in the efficiency and immediacy of communication, networking and relationships, the value in and necessity of the development of interpersonal skills has suffered. It is within this phenomenon that the term virtual identity is used to reflect the shift Generation Z has experienced as a result of their native connection to technology.

The shift in total reliance upon the virtual identity to provide validation and other emotional components of measurement signifying acceptance and connection of the Black female adolescent has had significant implications on this experience (Ganda, 2014). SM and SNS are systematically imbued with images and messaging which can spur a multitude of feelings including personal validation and acceptance to rejection and inadequacy in Black females (Jones et al., 2021). Anxiety and depression is disproportionately experienced by Black female teens who perceive their virtual identity to lack the frequency of and positive responses toward the content in which they most often interact (Mosley et al., 2020). Further, prolonged use of SM can cause lapses in teens' ability to cultivate meaningful interpersonal relationships (Kahwagi et al., 2022).

Virtual Identity and Emotional Intelligence

Virtual identity can be defined as the manifestation of one's self in the digital world of e-commerce, e-mail, and social networking. The value in the virtual identity for teens is likened to the concept of status or reputation found in physical community structures (Wallace, 2016). The virtual identity provides its users unimpeded access to be seen, heard and accepted as assets within the digital community (Brown et. al, 2022). It is commonly agreed among teens that the accumulation of assets amassed through interactions in the digital realm enhances the value of an individuals' virtual identity. These assets are perceived through several areas: physical appearance, financial status, accumulation of material possessions and individual style. Levels of enhancement reflected in the perception of these assets are determined by the extent to which a person can influence and/or align with common behaviors within the virtual community (Brown et. al, 2022).

SM relevance served as the most valued measurement of connectedness and acceptance during the COVID-19 period by teens (Banks, 2021). Black female teens, through the lens of their unique adolescent experience, grappled with the acute effects of already existing anxiety Black females felt during the isolation period (Clark, 2021). Teens adapted to being restricted to virtual expressions of emotional response provided by SM sites. SM allows users to post commentary and emoji responses positive and negative responses a person receives as a result of the content they post. Posts which receive an accumulation of 1,000 or more views or responses to specific content have achieved what is known as *viral* status. To "go viral" is to achieve the ultimate level in measurement of virtual popularity for those who engage in intense SM use (Dean et al.,

2022). While small percentages of the population rarely achieve this level of widespread acclaim with their content, the recognition received provides a tremendous feeling of validation for the user.

Examples of the manifestation of this phenomenon rests in a popular SM platform called "Tik Tok." These three-minute videos allow users to showcase their acting, singing, dancing and memories of past and present events in a segmented format (Roach, 2022). Other SM sites such as Facebook and Twitter provide users with opportunities to post pictures, messages and other audio-visual content which give their community insight into their real-time activities, memories, interests, and talents. The increased frequency of interaction promoting the virtual identity during and following periods of isolation of Covid-19 is reflected in behaviors that coincide with decreases in the maturation of interpersonal skills which reside in the natural experiences that human interactions provide. It is within these experiences that the development of EI is fostered.

Emotional intelligence (EI) refers to the ability to understand, use and manage emotions in positive ways to relieve stress, communicate effectively, empathize with others, overcome challenges and diffuse conflict (O'Connor et al., 2019). The natural development of emotional intelligence is reflected in experiences that include the ability to: accept criticism and responsibility, move on after making mistakes, sharing feelings with others, conflict resolution, the development of empathy and listening skills (Lasevoli, 2022). Exploration of this phenomenon provides evidence of SM accounting as a substitution for the lack of human connectedness upon which Black girls depend for a healthy sense of self awareness and efficacy (Glazkov, 2021; Nunn, 2016). Being physically isolated during the critical stage of adolescence, where many physical,

psychological and emotional changes occur, hampered their opportunities to develop appropriate levels of EI. SM changed how this population learned what it means to be connected and how to respond to the void created from this physical absence. This series of events forced a total immersion into a virtual existence. I assert that the virtual existence learned during this period has limited this population's ability to adapt to human emotional stimuli appropriately.

Covid-19 and Remote Learning

The global pandemic, also known as Covid-19, forced periods of isolation for all teens (Tao et. al, 2021). While social media is native to Generation Z, the frequency of interactions resulting from the increased dependence upon the development of the virtual identity became more prevalent during this time. The development of EI that in-person learning experiences creates became underdeveloped during and following the Covid-19 periods of isolation (Goodlet, 2022). Coping with the loss of community through physical contact with friends, family and school created the anxiety and depression that has been reflected in the data with which black girls contend more acutely than their counterparts (Butler-Barnes & Inniss-Thompson, 2020). Over time, the value of the virtual identity took precedence over the in-person identity because of the time and energy invested in the development of the virtual identity, leading to lacking interpersonal skills by which EI is measured (Wall, 2021).

Some purposes of human interaction are designed to enhance the interpersonal experiences that provide emotional context in communication. Body language, facial expressions, tone of voice, are recognized as representation of emotion associated with these components (Banks, 2021). Embedded within SM are platforms that provide users

the autonomy to publicly express private thoughts, opinionated speech, and to give and receive general information, in the absence of or in lieu of physical interactions throughout the course of a day (Chen, 2022). As the isolation period drew on, the emotional components associated with physical human interactions waned and became underdeveloped, the effects of which are borne out in the increases of negative interactions with others, found to be more acute in the Black female population (Keck et al., 2022; Shannonhouse, 2022; Quirk, 2020). Commonalities among the participants with respect to responses to negative stimuli extend to the gap in the research in how this phenomenon specifically affects Black girls in their unique adolescent experience.

Anxiety and Depression

Anxiety is defined as the intense, excessive, and persistent worry and fear about everyday situations (Wade et al., 2022). People who experience anxiety may encounter physical symptoms such as rapid breathing, accelerated heart rate, sweating and feelings of general fatigue ("Anxiety Disorders: Types, Causes, Symptoms & Treatments", 2020). Sufferers of anxiety often report an overall sense of being overwhelmed by thoughts about common interactions humans experience daily. Social media use in combination with the motivation to avoid face-to-face interaction is associated with higher rates of anxiety (Koo et al., 2015). Prior to the pandemic, the average teen spent 3 to 4 hours per day on social media and messaging sites. As Covid-19 restrictions decreased face-to-face interactions, the total number of hours spent on-line increased to as many as 8-12 hours per day (Berthold, 2021).

The constant notifications generated by SM can also cause mental and emotional distractions throughout the course of the day. These interruptions can be mood-altering,

causing fluctuations in the quality of a variety of social and interpersonal interactions. Black female teens are documented as experiencing more complications with mitigating these constant fluctuations (Breland-Noble et al., 2022; Singh et al., 2020). These complications are connected to the shift in interactive activity upon which this community thrives. Research also suggests that black teens' unique experiences in coping with cultural inequities to include the media, wealth and achievement gaps greatly exacerbates their specific need for validation and gratification (Hicks, 2022; Hodgman 2022). The failure of the school to enact measures to offset the effects of the loss of physical interactions within the community, fundamentally changed the emotional and physiological development of the black female. These changes become apparent in the ways black female teens approach, deal with and resolve issues of challenge, concern toward emotional growth and social acceptance. These feelings can often lead to extreme frustration and anxiety because the inability to respond with emotional appropriateness is absent.

The sense of being overwhelmed with the stress that is created from the convergence of the multiplicity of emotions creates the link between anxiety and depression. Depression is defined as the state of being dejected and despondent ("Anxiety Disorders: Types, Causes, Symptoms & Treatments", 2020) Black female teens who experience anxiety and depression and who also engage in intense social media use often develop feelings of isolation. Being quarantined from physical interactions during Covid-19 compounded these feelings in this population as evidenced by data which includes spikes in rates of anxiety, depression, and suicide (Hicks, 2022; Reyes, 2020). Whereas

schools have resumed its interpersonal delivery of instruction, assessment of the impact

that the isolation period has had on all students has been severely underestimated.

The Role of Schools

The primary role of schools is to provide the best environment for teaching and

learning to occur. Schools, by design, are institutions which promote structure, discipline

and opportunities for social and emotional development (Turkkahraman, 2015). It is

within this structure that students are challenged to engage in activities that prepare them

to progress intellectually and socially. School leaders also strive to create iterative

processes to identify and address a variety of obstacles which hinder student

achievement. Classroom disruptions during lessons prohibit the continuity of the flow of

learning, thereby creating interruptions in teaching. Teachers denoted sharp increases in

the number of classroom interruptions caused by students' cellular devices since

returning to in-person learning (Gordon, 2021). While schools have placed restrictions on

student cell phone use during class, teachers still report that an overwhelming amount of

instructional time is lost dealing with students being distracted by SNS notifications.

These notifications can include incoming calls, texts, tweets, and social media alerts.

Teachers report their frustration with having to redirect student behaviors as a result of

these interruptions (News, 2021). Changes in these behaviors, however, can be made in

providing positive reinforcements as a means to modify overall personal behavior

management.

Guiding positive adolescent behavior at this crucial time of their social and

personal development can be a daunting task for schools. Black female teens are

particularly impressionable in this stage of their development and rely heavily upon

society and community structures to guide their perception of what is seen as socially acceptable (Gwon & Jeong, 2018). Social media floods its sites with images related to beauty, fashion, romance and sexually explicit imaging. The lens through which black girls see themselves in comparison to the images that social media projects as socially acceptable is a contributing factor in why they may suffer from anxiety and depression (Steinsbekk et al., 2021). Being socially isolated during the period of Covid-19 eliminated many face to face opportunities to display assets which are valued as contributing to social capital in the black culture. When school dances, athletic events, and a host of other communal activities were suspended, black females resorted to extended social media use via the cell phone as a way to pass the hours of confinement and isolation (Sun, 2021). Black females entering adolescence at the height of these restrictions did not develop the social skills to adjust to the changes in social interactions which naturally occur during this stage of development (Wolfman-Arent, 2021).

Action Research Design and Methods

Positioning of Study

To understand how black female teens experience anxiety and depression in relation to SM at Xavier High School, action research was required (Itani et al., 2022). The following section reflects in detail the research design utilized to complete the research.

Action Research Approach

To specifically address the questions posed in this study, I conducted action research utilizing qualitative methods with a phenomenological approach. Qualitative research seeks to understand the circumstances surrounding the lived experiences of the

participants with the aim of providing data to bring about change (H & Delve, 2022).

Additionally, qualitative research provides specificity to the perspective and therefore

consequent behaviors associated with approaches to specific phenomenon (Marshall,

2021). For this study, the aim was to use the actual words of the participants to justify

the need for specialized programming to address the problem of practice. To understand

how SM has affected the EI of Black females, I used a phenomenological approach to

add value to current literature surrounding the uniqueness of the adolescent experiences

of this population.

Phenomenological studies allow researchers to use a variety of verbal and non-

verbal cues to extract reasoning and depth to understanding human perspective and

motivation (Neubauer et al., 2019). Providing the context behind personal experiences

seeks to uncover root causes for how perturbations produce effects in countless

occurrences in human reality (Alhazmi & Kaufmann, 2022).   Approaching the

phenomenon of the intersection between SM use, EI and anxiety and depression, through

the lens of Black females, offers clear and convincing data to support the findings in this

research.

Site or Population Selection

Xavier High School is a small, suburban school of 840 students located in

Southwest Ohio. Ninety-five percent of the students enrolled in this school identify as

African American, with the remaining five percent including Latino and White students.

The school has approximately 490 black females, many of whom have a variety of

commonalities in demographics. While the school is classified as suburban, over ninety

percent of the students qualify for free or reduced meals at school. Nearly all of the 490

black female students in this school own or have access to a cell phone or electronic device through which they can readily connect to SM outlets.

Participants

A purposive sampling technique was employed to select twenty-five Black female teenagers for participation in the study. Purposive sampling involves the deliberate selection of subjects who are readily accessible and convenient for the researcher (Palinkas et al., 2015). This method expedites data collection, offers a cost-effective approach, streamlines the research process, provides readily available participant samples, and is characterized by minimal procedural constraints (Simkus, 2022).

This methodology was chosen to ensure the identification of a credible and sustainable participant cohort. Additionally, it serves to preemptively address potential instances of participant withdrawal from the study. By adopting purposive sampling, the researcher retains the flexibility to substitute participants, if necessary, both during data collection and analysis stages of the research process (Huang, 2014). To acquaint the target audience with the study, I employed both SM posts and paper poster advertisements. The SM post was directed at mothers of potential participants within the schools' community, aiming to pique their interest in the subject matter and secure their support for the study. Additionally, a visually engaging paper poster was prominently displayed on the bulletin board adjacent to the Commons area for a span of two weeks before the initial focus group. The intent behind this approach was to stimulate conversations regarding the topic and assess interest levels through informal student discussions. This strategy proved instrumental in fostering positive connections with the

student body, especially considering my recent appointment as an administrator at the site.

Subsequently, I organized an interest meeting conducted within the school's "Commons" area, attracting forty-eight Black female students. During this meeting, I provided a comprehensive explanation of the study's objectives and scope. Employing purposive sampling, I initiated the participant selection process, ensuring representation across different age groups within the final pool of participants. To proceed, I extended IRB parent consent forms to thirty female students. Ultimately, the first twenty-five students who returned the completed and signed consent forms, thereby authorizing their participation in the research, constituted the final participant group for the study. The following table illustrates the pseudonyms of the participants and provides the emerged themes derived from the focus groups and individual interviews. The section following gives further detail on how the data was collected and analyzed.

Table 1 presents the list of participants along with the accompanying pseudonym for each. The four themes listed represent the encapsulations of cumulative responses from the interview questions. The table presents four interview questions: Under what circumstances do you choose to communicate via SM rather than in person?, Would you say your responses to others have become more or less emotional during and following COVID?, What do you feel is the role of schools in educating students on the connections between SM use and emotions?, and What drives your feelings of anxiety when confronted about how you use SM? Keeping the research questions in the forefront of my mind, I embarked upon setting up how I would go about effectively observing the participants.

In addition to the combined responses to these questions, I analyzed the daily observations of the participants at school during various times throughout the eight week period. As the assistant principal at Xavier, I was able to establish a comfortable level of trust with the participants throughout this process. This trust was essential to establish in the effort to conduct research that is rich and meaningful. Being in close physical proximity to the participants while I conducted the observations facilitated an atmosphere of openness that has proven essential to weaving together this research for publication.

During the first few weeks of observing, I was drawn to several generalizations among the participant pool. A large percentage of the participants were seen multi-tasking, that is, using multiple functions of the cell phone simultaneously. Many were listening to music as they scrolled through SM sites and held fragmented conversations with peers. The multiplicity of simultaneous engagement lent to many miscues in communication when navigating between the virtual and in-person situations.

The daily observations of these students included a concerted focus on facial expressions, body language and commentary that was germane to the solicitation of emotion from the participant. My overall analysis of this repeated observation is that these teens become overwhelmed with the range and pace of intersecting emotional responses during the multitasking process. I would provide the analogy of an overloaded power outlet. When too much electricity tries to pass through a single circuit at a given time, it overloads the circuit causing inadvertent sparks and a blowing of the fuse that activates the circuit. Similarly, I assert, when Black females become overwhelmed with too many emotions at a given point, their emotional system "crashes" often leading to dysregulated or inappropriate responses or behaviors.

Additionally, I ascertained that Black females tend to be more expressive with their nonverbal communication. Audible sighs exaggerated facial contortions and over-dramatized bodily animations are often used to express and publish their emotions. These actions trigger signals to others on the receiving end, leaving the interpretation of these actions to the discretion of the receiver. Many of these non-verbal manifestations appear to be reactionary and habitual. As more time was spent on SM during the isolation period, non-verbal manifestations of emotion became more prominent and pronounced.

The most fundamental analyses of my observations over the eight-week period reflect the participants' sense of becoming emotionally overwhelmed. The inability to emotionally process or manage conflict is, from my perspective, the overriding challenge facing this specific group. There appears to be very little incremental escalation of emotional response, either they are calm or out of control. The agitation of emotion is usually preceded with words or actions perceived to be connotatively negative. There exists a need to be purposefully reactive. This reaction serves as a defense mechanism in the absence of effective conflict management skills. Black females, more than any other sub group, are labeled as being angry and hostile when responding to situations where they feel the need to defend themselves against real or perceived emotional or physical threat.

While it should be noted that many stereotypical and biased assessments of Black females' behavior predates the global pandemic, it cannot be overstated the extent to which SM has influenced how Black females view themselves in comparison to how SM portrays them. The value placed in the messaging, images and response mechanisms

found in SM by Black females, particularly during and following the pandemic, has

created a distorted sense of appropriate emotional regulation.

Table 1

Themes Derived from Common Responses

Participants	Theme 1 Purpose	Theme 2 Situational	Theme 3 Primary	Theme 4 HSC
Student (A)bigail	x	x	x	
Student (B)ianca		x		x
Student (C)andace	x	x	x	x
Student (D)enver	x		x	x
Student (E)rryn	x	x		
Student (F)aye	x		x	x
Student (G)ail		x	x	x
Student (H)ailey	x	x	x	x
Student (I)ngrid	x			x
Student (J)oy	x	x	x	x
Student (K)ennedy				x
Student (L)auren	x	x	x	x
Participants	Theme 1 Purpose	Theme 2 Situational	Theme 3 Primary	Theme 4 HSC
Student (M)ona		x	x	x
Student (N)aomi	x	x	x	x
Student (O)live		x		x
Student (P)ia	x	x	x	x
Student (Q)uinn	x			
Student (R)achel			x	x
Student (S)arah	x	x	x	x
Student (T)ani	x	x	x	x
Student (U)riah	x		x	
Student (V)iv	x			x
Student (W)illow		x	x	x
Student (X)in	x	x	x	x
Student (Y)asmine	x	x	x	x

Ethical and Political Considerations

When dealing with minor subjects, researchers must plan to mitigate ethical

issues arising from the collection, analyzing, interpretation and publication or sharing of

data. Understanding the implications of the findings require specific attention to the potential for participants to "fake the data" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Because the model being used depends on self-reported information, participants engaging in faking the data present real issues for the researcher. Trust and the assurance of confidentiality in the study is addressed by ensuring no on-line data is stored which can be connected to the participants. This is important because interception of such data could be used to infiltrate students' on-line accounts, compromising their anonymity. Further, the ethical principle to "do no harm" prioritized the dignity, safety and well-being of the participants to include their emotional state of being.

Data Collection Methods

The participants engaging in interviews and focus groups informed the data needed to complete this action research. Specifics of how data was collected and analyzed is detailed in the following sections.

Data Collection

To uphold the integrity and confidentiality of the interview process, established protocols were meticulously adhered to (McKinney et al., 2022). The interviews were conducted in my office, specifically during the participants' advisory period, spanning an eight-week timeframe. Each participant engaged in a single interview session, lasting forty-five minutes. Additionally, a fifteen-minute member checking session, as well as pre- and post-focus groups, were scheduled for each interviewee (Politz, 2023). To facilitate these interactions, the ZOOM platform was employed for video recording.

Before the interview commenced, their signed IRB standard consent was presented to each student, clarifying their parents' consent to conduct research, their right

to opt out of the process and highlighting their option to seek support from a social worker in case of emotional distress at any juncture during the interview (Pittman et al., 2023). Proactive arrangements were made to ensure professional staff availability to address potential emotional responses that could arise from the interviews.

Throughout the interviews, students' responses to the research questions were meticulously recorded, incorporating both verbal and non-verbal cues. Memoing was also employed in the process of data collection because it provides the researcher with the opportunity to come back to a concept for further thought or development. By documenting things such as the phases of the process, researchers can seize upon opportunities to turn concepts from raw data to abstractions used to explain phenomena in the research (McGrath, 2021). Additionally, memoing builds a foundation using inductive logic creating a basis for theoretical arguments. Memoing helped to provide the premise that this research is rooted in causation. The responses from the participants are reflected in the cycled behaviors occurring in Black female teens in conjunction with their lack of emotional intelligence and increased anxiety resulting from SM use.

After the interview, a fifteen-minute member checking session was conducted in my office after school hours. During this session, participants were prompted to recollect the interview questions and their own responses, and we engaged in a reflective dialogue to enrich the contextual understanding of the responses.

In addition to the individual interview, I conducted pre and post focus groups and with the selected participants. The pre-focus group was established to gauge interest and initial thoughts on the topic from the potential participants. I began the pre-focus group by asking a general question: "Which SM site do they most engage in and why?" As the

researcher, it was important to remain open-minded and flexible to changes in approach to the process that may have been necessary. Pre-focus groups also help the researcher better understand the perspective of the individual participants. The purpose in conducting the post focus group was to allow the participants to give their perspective on their involvement in the research process.

These established protocols were designed to empower participants with autonomy over the interpretation, application, and presentation of their data. This commitment to participant autonomy, coupled with the option for any participant to withdraw from the study at any phase, played a pivotal role in cultivating trust in the research process and its ultimate objectives.

My observations of the participants extended over a period of eight weeks. As an Assistant principal at Xavier, I was able to be mobile and position myself in many settings to which I was able to document the participants.

Data Analysis

Once the interviews were completed, I began my analysis by identifying common key words and passages to the responses from each of the interview questions. This method of analyzing data is most commonly used to assist in the transcription and interpretation of interviews questions and focus groups. I chose this method as it helped me to better understand the perspective of the participants juxtaposed to my inquiry into the phenomenon with this distinct group (Hess & Biber, 2004).

 I used coding, a qualitative data analysis strategy, to assign a descriptive label to identify related content across my collected data (Coates et al., 2021). Table 1 reflects the recorded answers from each participant for the four main interview

questions. Generally, I used a label, such as "purpose" to group words and phrases used by the participants in response to the same question. For example, twenty-one of the respondents indicated, in various phrases, that they engaged in SM "because there was nothing else to do." I used the word "Boredom" as a label to represent the repeated phrase. This process was repeated for the four main research questions which were most germane to answering the research questions presented. The analysis extended to examine the effects of SM use on anxiety and resulting depression in Black female teens.

When these teens spoke about their purpose for using or needing to engage in SM with frequency, their primary reasoning centered around their ability to access the sites instantaneously. The term anxious was used almost exclusively to describe the dominating emotion surrounding their feelings about the inability to engage in SM. There is an overwhelming feeling of not being "safe" in the absence of the phone which houses SM. SM presents a calming effect for this population to combat idleness, reduce emotional agitation and to distract from in the moment scenarios that they perceive will cause stress or uncertainty. As the term depression was used in the outset of this project as a resulting manifestation of anxiety, the participants did not report the feeling of being depressed. Depression is viewed, to these participants, as being a temporal passing emotion, like "happy" or "sad." They do not understand depression to be a state of mind or being, but more of a word that is synonymous with the phrase "feeling some type of way." Therefore, the findings did not reflect depression specifically as an effect of engaging in SM.

Once the themes were established through the coding process, I completed the

member checking process with each of the twenty-five participants. This process

ensures that the information collected was properly interpreted and in alignment with

the sentiments of the participants. In qualitative research, member checking is a

technique for exploring the credibility of results (Politz, 2023). I felt it was important

for the participants to see how their responses were analyzed and embedded within the

research project as a whole. The participants expressed how proud they were to be a

part of something that included their perspective.

Trustworthiness

To establish trustworthiness, I explain in the following section how the

credibility, transferability and dependability was ascertained during the processes of this

research project. This method was used throughout the interviews and member-

checking to document facial expressions, hand gestures and other reactionary postures

to ensure that the researcher provides the most enriching interpretation of the data.

Theorizing about certain commonalities with the participants leads to how these

commonalities are related to other factors in the research (Hess-Biber, 2004).

Credibility

To ensure the credibility of the study, member checking was a key component

throughout the process to make accurate interpretations of the data collected. Data and

methods feedback loops were used to add credibility to the study. Collaborating with the

participants to include their input on how their data is used, interpreted and presented

was another important step in the process (Hesse-Biber, 2017).

Transferability

As consistent and emerging data evolve around research on this specific topic, the

findings may potentially reveal positive implications for other teens groups. The inclusion of notes based on memoing, journals and copiously descriptive transcribing of the interviews increases the opportunity for the transferability of data (Hess-Biber, 2017). As research supports the heightened rates of anxiety most acutely in Black female teens, logic could extend to using the same process to devise a similar plan of action for other teen groups with the aim of combatting deficiencies in EI.

Dependability

Reporting the processes of the data collected for this project could cause unintended negative consequences for the participants. Therefore, the findings were presented in an anonymized form to the stakeholders. The researcher's willingness to be transparent with inquiring parties regarding the processes included in this project was and remains open.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) explained how the nature of the complex variables in the model reflect in the lived experiences of the participants. It is a collaborative process occurring between the participant and researcher to present an accurate representation of the experiences of the participant. Within the process of interpreting these meanings, the issues of credibility dependability are discussed. In addressing both issues, the researcher relied upon the open and transparent process to include journaling, memoing and data cleansing as a collaborative process between the researcher and the participants. The researcher used an audit trail to justify the reasons behind the use of methods and to ensure that the researcher used consistency in the use of tools for collecting, analyzing and interpreting the data. These processes-built confidence in the dependability and trustworthiness of the findings (Lincoln,

2005, p. 67-69).

CHAPTER TWO

RESULTS OF RESEARCH

The following sections detail the findings of this action research project. The themes and sub themes that emerged from the collection and analyzing of the data outline the processes through which recommendations for change were made. Daily observations of the participant pool over the eight-week period provides empirical data on the unique perspective of the experiences of this demographic. Exploring the emotional and behavioral impact Covid-19 has had on Black females may in part account for the documented increased levels of anxiety and depression during this period.

Findings

These findings reflect the culmination of acquired data to answer the following research questions: How did SM use by Black female teens during and following the Covid-19 social isolation period affect how they experience anxiety and depression; and how was the EI of Black female teens, in their unique adolescent experience, affected by SM use during and following the Covid-19 isolation period? The findings support that SM use during the social isolation period of Covid-19 exacerbated existing feelings of anxiety in this population. Restrictions to human interactions Black female teens face increased challenges in emotional regulation which is exacerbated by a lapse in the natural development of emotional skills caused by the Covid-19 isolation period. From this set of interviews, the following themes emerged: purpose (for social media use), situation (driving the SM use), primary (role of schools in addressing this phenomenon), and hyper-sensitivity to criticism HSC, (feelings further driving levels of

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anxiety).

Purpose

Social media has become a natural part of the everyday lives of teenagers. In their opinion, social media represents an endless stream of content and messaging which, in real time, keeps them abreast of community and peer happenings. Each participant's level of engagement with social media was closely tied to the purpose for which they frequent SM. Candace, Faye and Hailey all engage in social media to distract from present happenings in their mental space. Faye reflected, "SM is a definite distraction from anything that I don't want to consciously think about; like, just for that time, I can forget about what makes me mad or feel anxious, I guess I feel anxious a lot, because I'm constantly on Instagram or Tik Tok." Candace, however, says that SM is like an electronic magazine. "I usually like to post up on Instagram. I just like to see how people are living and what they are doing. This generation posts everything!" Hailey said, "I don't really use SM like my friends do. I mostly like to have my phone for safety reasons. I think me and my mom have separation anxiety! She texts me more since the pandemic started; Yeah, that's when I noticed that we started keeping in more constant contact." Rachel and Mona both shared the view that SM generates connectedness to their circle of friends. Mona shared," I feel like SM lets me express who I am. It's almost like a projection of myself. I just don't like how people perpetrate to be something that they are not." Rachel responded, "I like the whole convenience of not having to be near somebody to communicate with them. I mean, people be annoying." I observed that the participants used the adjective 'annoying' to signify their displeasure with anything that elicits an undesirable emotion

concerning a matter. This response lends credence to my assertion that a lack of EI is prevalent within this population.

Overall, the purpose of SM is connected to the need for the current mood/emotional state to be heightened or changed to reflect the desired feelings or emotions within the user which would otherwise be generated by human interaction. Participants indicated that SM allowed them to vent or make subliminal posts which coincide with a specific incident or series of events to which the user adds their commentary or shares their feelings. Erryn reported in her interview that SM platforms are a "sounding board" or "public diary." "It is a way for me to share my feelings and have others validate them."   Entertainment, social relevance and boredom are three sub themes which emerged from the transcription and analysis of the combined interview process. The resulting conclusion of purpose is heavily dependent upon the circumstances affecting the user at any given moment of the day. The constant stimulation that SM provides quells the feelings of boredom and anxiety and provides a mental escape from situations which are unsettling and, in some way, challenging to respond to in real-life scenarios.

Situational

The participants indicated that SM provides a mental, emotional, and sometimes physical distraction from a variety of everyday human interactions.   Lauren and Pia best articulated the overarching sentiments from this theme.   Pia reflected, "SM is a means of manipulation that distracts from my anxiety, insecurity, or boredom at any point in time. I don't want to look awkward when I walk into a room or event. I guess I could say that I experience anxiety by the thoughts of how I think people may perceive

me; it just feels weird." In a follow up session with Pia, she elaborated by saying that she along with many of her black female friends "use SM to stop us from overthinking, or to distract from what we don't want to think about, or just because we're bored." Denver, Joy, Lauren and Yasmine all similarly commented that they feel compelled to immediately respond to the audio and visual notifications associated with the sites they frequent. These examples represent the most common responses to this specific inquiry. Positive opinions or likes and loves to content increases confidence in the self and promotes the sense and degree of relevance and emotional safety within the community.

When posting with or about a romantic partner, reported a heightened sense of pride and esteem, as being romantically involved is perceived as possessing the characteristics of beauty, relevance and worth. The perception to others of being desired and/or is what also produces anxiety. The knowledge that social media is the sounding board and electronic billboard that youth use to advertise the best versions of themselves is what drives the motivation to consistently engage in it. When isolated during Covid-19, social media was nearly the only source from which students could be stimulated in that regard. Most participants said that while their uses increased, their personal content did not, while three stated that their posting nearly tripled in volume. When these three respondents were asked why they felt that their content increased to the extent that it did, they said they felt a greater sense of "obligation" to let their community of users know that they remained active. Tik Tok challenge dances increased the most as users were depleted of social events though which to comment or commemorate. Xi explained, "Most girls I know get on Tik Tok out of boredom. I

mean, I think it's because the videos are short and entertaining; it's just something to do so you're not doing nothing but sitting. A lot of girls also like to record themselves doing Tik Tok dancing challenges with friends as a means of entertainment."

Primary

Respondents believed that schools should play the primary role in helping students understand how to regulate emotion and the role social media plays in that experience. Nearly all the participants believe that they would be more prone to adhere to the advice of school officials rather than parents. Gail responded, "We would never discuss reducing social media use if left to our parents…social media occupies our time and keeps us out of their face." Parents, particularly mothers of Black female teens, are frequent Facebook and Instagram users in their own rite and could benefit from the education schools should provide. While all respondents agreed that parents should monitor inappropriate content in which their child engages, they also say that many parents have resigned themselves to being unable to regulate the extent to which their children engage in inappropriate internet activity. Participants further assert that if schools were to offer a course or information on how to regulate personal emotions in a variety of aspects, that they would be more apt to respond appropriately to their teachers, parents and peers in more productive ways. In relation to their experiences with Covid-19, they feel it is of more importance that schools take an accurate assessment of how the isolation period affected the ways in which young people communicate in general. Specific analysis of this phenomenon, they believe, seeks to understand the connection between how the virtual world, in many instances, represents a much greater and more significant acknowledgement and validation of the self.

Social media is limited in that words can be given context by the user, whereas in person interactions forces the respondent to consider vocal tone, facial expressions and body language in the interpretive process of the messaging that is being transmitted. The schools' role should be to first acknowledge the changes in communication and to further offer systems which teach skill sets to offset the negative messaging and energy that is associated with extensive social media use.

Communication in general for black female teens was described in the focus group by the participants as being very animated and sometimes exaggerated in body and facial expressions, or to be "turnt" or "lit." SM users can attach connotative meaning to messages through emojis, acronyms, gifs, memes and reposts. Schools can assist students in understanding how their personal communication online can affect their physical interactions. The population site currently utilizes SEL and PBIS, positive behavior interventions and support with limited exposure to these skills. The challenge is that PBIS addresses these communication issues after a verbal or physical altercation has already occurred. Being proactive in developing a program which addresses the connection between effective emotional management to avoid such conflicts in virtual and in-person communication to ease the specific anxieties related to SM use in Black females is where the gap in resourcing exists.

Hyper-sensitivity to criticism (HSC)

Throughout the course of this study, the theme hyper-sensitivity to criticism (HSC) seemed to accompany opposition to the emotional and physical response to the resistance of being held accountable for things this population is already aware is wrong. This attitude, by observation and repeated in the post focus group, is associated

with being entitled to disregard consideration for verbal and non-verbal responses to being held accountable. Viv explained that being put "On Blast" is the most common colloquialism used within this population to define being made to feel embarrassed, ashamed, confronted or disrespected. Candace added, "the approach from school officials often triggers a negative response. Y'all don't see how sometimes y'all make us feel like we gotta defend ourselves."

This connects to the unique adolescent experience of Black girls. The respondents have been exposed to these targeted hypersexualizing messages through SM. The idea that anyone should try to correct or provide criticism for the messaging they are being exposed to is contradictory to them. These messages include the popularizing of photos and videos which portray young black girls and women of color as video vixens and bad bitches. These terms refer to women who have, in many cases, made enhancements to their physical appearance to include extended eyelashes, hair extensions/wigs/weave, and breast enlargements and Brazilian butt lifts (bbl's). Along with these enhancements, there exists for black women in particular a cause for a certain attitude to accompany the physical characteristics sought in being labeled as a vixen or a bad bitch. Sarah explained that the addition of these physical enhancements adds a sense of value to themselves. She explained, "Noone wants to talk to a plain chick. Far from the attitude, I think grown-ups just take it too far out of context. We see certain people with all the embellishments on tv and how they get a lot of juice on Instagram for how they dress and for their swag. You know, we are just trying to get noticed. For some though, they see their mom and other females in their life dressed a certain way and how they are animated when talking to others, and think that's cute, but

it aint."

Faye, Hailey and Kennedy also shared that their mothers and other female figures have developed certain in-person characteristics associated with reality television. Hair and eyelash extensions, high-priced fashions and body sculpting which often includes exaggerated alterations to the contours of the body to accentuate breasts and buttock areas of females are most common. Haily said, "My favorite show is Love and Hip-Hop. When I was in middle school, me and my friends used to pretend like we were characters." These shows both personally and collectively center around exaggerations of situational drama between the characters. Love and Hip Hop, The Real Housewives, and The Real World are a few examples of a mixture of situational sites like Instagram and TikTok that promote the exaggerated physical self, which in real-life manifests into a more assertive personality to match. Because the participants have been inundated with shows, messages and in some cases reared to believe that this lifestyle is real, criticism of the fantasy to which they have bought into has become fiercely defended. "Turning up" on someone in a situation is the terminology that is attributed to these types of women and their behaviors. By virtue of the fact that these are the behaviors they see exhibited online, on television and in their communal proximity, rebuke of this behavior is considered critical to the lifestyle. Criticism of the lifestyle is an indictment upon the individual and not the behavior. I found this to be the most striking of the responses by the participants as it seems to go to the heart of why schools experience many of the challenges with this particular population.

Schools, as a primary resource to thwart these behaviors, can inject more positivity in the overall school culture, thereby improving communication and creating

a larger propensity for success. Table 2 details the sub-themes that emerged from the initial major themes.

Table 2

Sub-themes

Major Theme	Subtheme 1	Subtheme 2	Subtheme 3
Purpose	Entertainment	Social relevance	Boredom
Situational	Inspirational	Motivational	Anxious
Primary Class	Awareness	PD	Elective
High sensitivity to Criticism	Quick-tempered	Irrational	Poor Decision Making

Entertainment/Social Relevance/Boredom

These subthemes were most prevalent in the interview and focus group process as it relates to the first major theme, purpose. One follow-up session with each participant was used to solidify the meaning behind many of the general responses to the interview questions. I wanted to provide words and definitions to help the participants help me to be most accurate in assessing exactly what they wanted to say and how it should be transcribed into narrative form. Whereas social media has become second nature to this generation of users, its use is entirely expected and is viewed as being a natural progression toward establishing themselves in the virtual community. Technology has taken away "down-time" that was experienced by older generations prior to the full integration of technology. Down time references periods of time where there is no specific task needing to be accomplished; the person is idle. Native users of technology do not view its use as a tool to be used from time to time, but as the most

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preferred vehicle of communication in the modern era. Gone are the days of letter writing and manual solo activities such as solitaire or coloring to pass the time. These pass times have been rendered obsolete and replaced by more efficient, technological advances to enhance user time and experiences.

SM has space for all users to join in and partake of the digital community without interruption. There are no limits with respect to time or content, making all facets of social media available to all users at all times. Because of the limited parameters of social media, native users find that it is necessary to engage in social media proactively to prevent boredom. Participants find stillness in the absence of conversation or activity to be strange. Technology has depleted the nature of idleness. This phenomenon was exacerbated by the forced physical isolation brought about because of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Inspirational/Motivational/Anxious

Participants were matter of fact about how they believe SM affects their mood and the extent to which social media influences their daily behaviors. Nearly all of the participants view SM as inspiring or motivating to them in one way or another. Instagram is the site where the respondents found the most positive inspirational content. Instagram is viewed as a free advertisement outlet to promote the daily activities and commemorate special occasions which could include something as common as a plate of food, to a new outfit, to special events such as a high school homecoming or prom. The negative connotation seems to exist in users' motivation to outdo the next user or the anxiety caused by other users not validating content that is posted. The user will sometimes attribute the lack of engagement on their posted content to others' being a "hater," which

is synonymous with jealousy. Participants said that likes and follows within the platform play a significant role in their efforts to post the most viewed content. Views are documented within the mechanisms of SM to let users know how many views, likes and follows are associated with posted content.

Very few participants mentioned depression in their interview as a result of their SM engagement. However, depression was mentioned to a larger degree when pressed about how this emotion reflects in the connection to the purposes in why they turn to SM as a coping mechanism. Nearly all of the participants stated that when feeling depressed as a result of some family, personal, or school related occurrence, SM provides the distraction needed to divert the negative energy they feel into something more enlightening or uplifting. Again, this need for distraction was increased exponentially during the Covid-19 isolation period. There were a few responses which were indicative of how these sites cause anxiety when used as a sounding board to vent frustration and anger. While only one of the respondents answered affirmatively that they have never been involved in a physical altercation as a result of posts made directly to or subliminally to another user, more than half of the participants responded that they have had more than one in person verbal altercation in response to content made on social media. The anxiety that is generated within the threads of communication between users greatly affects mood and responses to others in real life scenarios.

Awareness/PD/Elective Class

All but seven respondents answered that school should be the primary source of regulation for positively reinforcing awareness of healthy SM interactions. They all said that school requires them to have a centralized focus during school hours, although the

study site has no specific school-wide policy referencing cell phone use. Students feel entitled to engage in SM "check-ins" if not immediately engaged in classwork. To the contrary, many feel the need to "check" notifications on SM at any time, but particularly when they are not focused on a specific task. Schools, as the participants explained, should actively regulate student engagement in SM as they admit it is the most distracting aspect in the learning environment, second only to the physical proximity to and camaraderie among friends during school hours. Students said that the right kinds of reminders and encouragement to interact in the physical realm coming from schools would diminish their propensity to feel the need to conduct "check-ins" with the same frequency that they would have without these reminders. The right kinds of reminders include a more hands-on approach to the learning and more interesting approaches to connections between the curriculum and how the knowledge will be used to benefit them in practical situations. Simply complaining about boundaries, they assert, makes them more resistant to redirection regarding their phone. These interruptions to teaching and learning to include cell phone use are noted in the referral data and have become one of the leading causes for escalation of incidents of verbal escalation and violence.

In order for schools to maximize their influence on student awareness of SM use, they need training. Participants were asked to detail the kinds of training they believed were needed to enlighten schools on how to most effectively service students who struggle with regulating positivity while engaging in SM. The two most mentioned concepts that teachers need to understand is why students find SM necessary as a coping mechanism and how to manage focus and general physical idleness. They want school officials to understand that physical idleness is uncomfortable and therefore an

unnecessary concept. They reported being confused as to why "older" people in general are concerned at all about their engagement. To these teens, SM is most used to avoid being idle. To meet this fundamental challenge, the participants offered recommendations in teaching delivery.

Schools need to have more transitions in lesson delivery. Students have not developed a patience for prolonged or sustained focus on a single task they find unengaging. They are not native to idleness or purposeful stillness. Students asserted that a class which teaches the skills of patience and coping with challenging and physical uncomfortableness in general would be most helpful. Teaching the need for these skills and their effectiveness in decision making processes would also serve to be the most useful in a class combined with social emotional learning.

Quick-Tempered/Irrational/Poor Decision-Making

This theme most closely aligned with the portion of the proposal that speaks to the unique adolescent experience of Black female teens. Their environment plays a tremendous role in how they see themselves as women of color. As mentioned in chapter one, Black female teens are characterized as being more sexually aggressive, more emotionally expressive and more prone to verbal and physical escalation than other teens of different races. Participant T remarked, "I Know I can Turn up real quick, so I try not to engage with people that I know can make me mad!" Respondent B said, "My mom calls me the certified drama queen! A title I wear proudly as I feel I can go word for word with the best of them!" As a result of these distinctions, Black female teens generate responses from others that are characterized as being "extra" or dramatic in nature. This expectation is exacerbated by the ways in which Black women are portrayed

in reality television particularly. There is a sensitivity to criticism of these behaviors as the interviews bare out. Student W said, "You have to make it be known that you are not soft or to be played with as others see this as a weakness in you and will 'try' you.*"* This impulsive, quick-temperedness often leads directly to the other two sub themes. Respondents admit that their reaction to SM is often irrational when deemed to be negative. These irrational responses lead to negative responses and feelings which beget poor decision-making. Some of these decisions that affect the school day are: lack of focus, lack of motivation for constructive tasks, tardiness to class and skipping class altogether as reported by the respondents. The rapid responses given to SM mirrors the rapid responses to people, oftentimes without the rational thought process. It is in this context that the Causal Chain Theory is created in relation to this phenomenological study.

Summary of Findings

The results from 25 interviews in combination with the focus groups and daily observations of the respondents yielded some interesting results. Analysis of the findings shows that SM use by Black female teens does not bring about depression. However, not having access to SM and to those who make them feel safe produces extreme anxiety. The findings do not support the assertion that anxiety leads to depression. Being separated from the source of access, the cell phone, causes this population to feel isolated and without a means of protection or escape from unpleasant thoughts, people and situations they perceive to be untenable. The need to be connected increased significantly during the pandemic because of the extended absence from school. The absence from school and other communal activity during this period placed a greater reliance upon and

focus in the development of their on-line personas. Lost within this focus is the ability to emotionally cope with stressful or challenging situations. The lack of human interaction during the adolescent period caused a lapse in emotional processing through which EI is garnered. This lapse in the development of EI has yielded behaviors that have the tendency to be driven by an underdeveloped emotional processing. Therefore, schools need to incorporate social emotional learning into their curriculum to service the underdeveloped EI of black female teens created by the isolation period during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Introduction to Action Plan

The following action plan was developed in response to the findings in this study for the participants at Xavier High School. The findings support a need for schools to invest in changes to the curriculum that incorporate social skills that are rooted in overall self awareness. For teens undergoing adolescence during the isolation period, skill sets learned in the course of human interaction, fostering emotional maturation, were severely impeded. Social isolation changed how Black girls learn to communicate and respond in a host of interpersonal situations.

Table 3: *Framework for Action Plan*

Illustrates The Development of The Action Plan.

Objectives and Outcomes (What)	Tasks (How)	Person(s) (Who)	Time (When)	Location (Where)	Resources	Funds

Objective 1: Identify specific emotional needs of Black female teens Outcome 1: Alignment of SEL resources to meet the unique needs of Black female teens	Meet with BLT, SEL coordinators develop implement- to align with current SEL resources to develop a curriculum addressing the needs of the target population	Teachers, Principals, Students, Parents, School District Community	1st meeting September 2023	Population Site	SEL curriculum Study Findings Samaritan Behavior Staffing Teachers	None initially
Objective 2: Create an elective class	Development of an elective class		Fostering Effective Communication Effective Emotional Management Improved personal, family, school and community relationships			
Methodology		Interviewing and observing Black female teens at Trotwood		Creating a plan which aligns current SEL practices with specific resourcing addressing anxiety and emotional	Communicating results to stakeholders	Continued study on the implications of deficiencies in black youth

				wellness in black female teens		
Analysis Procedures	Charting emerged themes Manual transcription of interviews and notes from observations					
Findings	Need for Specific programming to address emotional needs of black female teens in conjunction with current implementation of SEL practices					
Implications	Healing emotional trauma Improving personal, family school and community relationships Improved behaviors in school	An action plan is being created to address the lack of specific resourcing to black female teens focusing on their emotional development	Provide students with a healthy platform for self expression Provide teachers with tools to improve communi		Action plan designed to align SEL resources to address specific emotional needs of black female	

			cation with students and build meaningful relationships			
	Increased teaching and learning					

Action Plan Objective, Outcomes and Rationale

The findings from the interviews and focus groups during the data collection phase of this process results in the need for the following action plan: creating an elective class which includes targeted strategies and behavioral support coupled with social emotional learning which speaks to Black female teens who experience anxiety due to a lack of EI created by the Covid-19 pandemic. When exploring how deficiencies in EI intersect with increases in anxiety and depression in black female teens, understanding and identifying the role of stakeholders in achieving the objective becomes the primary focus. To this end, valuing the significance of and developing effective processes for identifying external, internal, primary, secondary as key stakeholders to engage in an action plan requires specific knowledge of the community (Dumlao, 2018). These stakeholders present the rationale to the external stakeholders: the school board, Superintendent and community leaders, who are responsible for the adoption and ratification of the inclusion of these resources. The benefit from students' effective acquisition of improved coping skills and emotional regulation affects all stakeholders at many levels. School leaders and district officials seek to incorporate support systems that move toward continuous improvement of teaching and learning, as well as school and community culture.

Action Plan Objective

The stakeholders included in the graph will be engaged individually, with the goal of all groups working collaboratively to develop the implementation of the action plan. The objective is to explore how the adolescent experiences of Black teen girl's and their SM use influences the connections in elevated levels of anxiety. Assessing how the current SEL practices can be aligned to specific programming for Black teen girls is the primary outcome for the initial engagement. A few questions for consideration: Do current SEL practices at the population site address student anxiety in relation to SM? How does the data reflect the connection between increased SM use during the pandemic and anxiety in the unique adolescent experience of Black female teens? What specific skill sets will assist Black females in improving anxiety associated with SM use?

Engaging this community to include all stakeholders with a clear focus and plan of action. It is in this principle of engagement that researchers must invest the time and energy to assess the need in relation to the organization's ability to respond to those needs (Parker, 2020). Spending the needed time with this community to establish and build trust and interest for the study is paramount in conducting a plan that will extend beyond the exploration of this project. Jennifer Brandel's article, "Don't be an Askhole" explains that the "ethics of engagement are important where norms and practices are changing fast." Ensuring clarity about the goals and objectives of the plan will help to guide the approach and constructively reflect upon the extent of involvement of each of the stakeholders throughout the process. Responses from an initial focus group with the primary stakeholders, black female teens, lays the foundation for the direction of my engagement plan. These primary stakeholders guide "next steps" as they are the group of

focus.

Parents of the participants are considered to be key stakeholders in the action process. Further description of these stakeholders in relation to the students varies in ideology and scope. Additionally, the overwhelming number of parents in the community who would be engaged are single mothers whose time with their children is often limited. Many of these households are beleaguered with internal and external factors, including SM, which limits the interpersonal connections proven to be vital in a child's healthy emotional and psychological development. Social media and messaging sites are viewed as essential forms of communication between parents and their children throughout the course of the day. These stakeholders are primarily Millennials who also use SM for a variety of personal and entertaining purposes. Parents' excessive use of SM, in some cases, is mimicked by their teen. Parents can provide insight into behaviors in participants which may be consistent with potential interest in the study and to provide further context. As all of the participants in this study were minors, written consent was obtained before interviews were conducted.

Parents gave consent for the information provided on their teens to be included in the study. By extending the permission for the study to be conducted with their daughters, they inadvertently gave consent for their own involvement as well. It is hoped that this engagement will identify root causes of anxiety as it relates to the need to be connected. The project seeks to foster sustainable collaboration among parents, students and school officials to provide the safe emotional spaces that Black girls need to feel secure. Parents are key in that they have the ability to influence social media use not only outside of school, but to create fostering experiences which involve strengthening relationships. In

this way, relations between the parents and the school have the potential to greatly improve.

The school district is located in southwest Ohio. It is considered a suburban school district as it is located outside of a major metropolitan city. There are 850 students attending the high school of focus. Black female teens make-up nearly 490 of that number. Ninety-five percent of the students attending this school are identified as qualifying for free and reduced lunch. The school has the underlying mission to equip students with the skills to become college and career ready. The organization connects to the action plan as the desired all-around outcome of providing resourcing to support specialized skills for Black females in the population. This engagement helps the organization build its capacity with the other stakeholders, thereby improving the culture and appeal of the organization.

Finally, the organization is the Nexis in the community engagement plan. Overall, the organizational connection to the plan involves resourcing and solidifying processes in the action plan. At the school level, promoting specific programming geared toward helping Black girls with the existing SEL curriculum seeks to improve the culture of the school community. At the district level, the organization can provide data over time which lends support for such programming to be instituted for all students. Using the data from the findings, schools can see trends in behaviors that can guide effective measures to continue conversations with parents and students to maintain positivity in self and social media use.

I believe that the outcome of the engagement with the community will yield a transformative plan which is aimed at anxiety in the Black female population. It is hoped

that the feeling of empowerment anticipated by the teens will create a sustainable

conversation geared to improve interactions within the group as a whole. Setting the goal

of sustainable resourcing requires a collaborative effort within the school to filter

outward. SEL resources with effective communication skills and seeks to promote a

positive change within the culture of the school in general.

CHAPTER THREE

DESCRIPTION OF THE ACTION PLAN

The action plan outlined in chapter two illustrates how collaborative efforts between internal and external stakeholders at the population site will culminate in the creation of an SEL/EI elective class that aligns existing SEL resources and curriculum addressing the underdeveloped EI of Black female teens. This plan was conceived from the transcription of interviews as well as notes from pre and post focus groups, disciplinary referrals and daily observations of the participants.

The formation of this phenomenological study is rooted in understanding the causal chain formed through the analysis of interviews and observations over an eight-week period. The goal of the plan is to use the themes that emerged from the interview questions to develop an elective class for Black female teens by aligning current SEL practices and curricula enhancing EI. The outcomes for the action plan are based on the emergent themes to include the need for schools to incorporate specialized programming to align with current SEL practices. The fusion of SEL with resources within the enhancement of EI to include skill sets improving communication and behaviors culminates in the alleviation of emotional anxiety for Black females. This final chapter contains the details of the plan, analysis and rationale for organizational adjustments to accommodate the emotional needs of the Black female population.

Description of Action Plan

The action plan is designed to develop specific programming to resource Black females who experience undeveloped EI, thereby improving the emotional functionality of this population at the study site. The process of enacting this action plan first

involves connecting with the social emotional learning (SEL) support services already established at the population site. During the initial three months, I will collaborate with all internal stakeholders to gather data about the way Black females are currently resourced and how we can combine our efforts using the data from this study to inform our approach/practices. Further, the information garnered from meeting with the internal stakeholders will be shared with the external stakeholders to discuss actionable measures and strategies for the addition of an elective class into the curriculum at the population site.

Once a draft of actual implementation has been solidified with the external stakeholders, I will proceed in collaborating with the internal stakeholders to begin the process of developing the SEL/EI curriculum. This will include meetings that combine the findings of this study with the intersection between SEL and EI curriculum. Using predetermined measurements from the internal stakeholders to include recommendations from myself, the SEL coordinator and the Building Leadership Team (BLT), we will engage in monthly iterative cycles of building data to determine the viability of the action plan. Adjustments to the implementation of the action plan as determined by the measurements laid out and agreed upon by all stakeholders, will guide the iterative process toward completing the curriculum for the elective class.

Months One through Three

The first step in ensuring the success of this action plan is to provide a presentation to internal stakeholders providing the rationale for this work. I will use the data from the findings in the study to explain the implications and significance of resourcing the target population by addressing the link between under-developed EI and

SM use. I hope to garner internal buy-in to incorporate SEL support and professional development of staff to create an elective class which focuses on improving the emotional responses of the target population. This initial meeting is crucial as the BLT, SEL coordinator, social workers and students represent the collaboration needed to create buy-in to this initiative. These are the street level bureaucrats that will work directly with the combining of SEL/EI resources to create the class. This project will be presented under the umbrella of culture and climate, consistent with the districts' already established commitment toward best practices. This support is guided by SEL/EI practices which specifically respond to the data found in the studies through the emerged themes. In this way, value is given to the perspective of the target population in our response to the specificity of their needs.

Focus groups including all internal stakeholders will center around understanding how the uniqueness of the Black female adolescent experience, coupled with increases in SM use during COVID, affected levels of EI in this population. The objective is to create a response system that is geared toward resourcing staff and the target population with policy, procedures and best practices in response to effective emotional regulation at the population site. While each female's adolescent experience is different, the data show patterns of consistency in Black female's responses in a variety of emotionally charged situations. Helping Black female teens navigate through challenging and often traumatic experiences to develop more effective emotional responses is the overall goal in the success of the program. Having a unified approach and plan of action to enhance EI in challenging situations lends to improved relations between students and teachers thereby improving school culture and climate.

Months Three through Six

Data from the focus group's internal stakeholders will be shared with external stakeholders, which include the Superintendent, School Board and Parent group. I will gather and analyze the feedback from the external stakeholders to provide recommendations for changes in policy, procedures, and curriculum. Feedback and support from these groups hopes to solidify the sustainability of the action plan by developing strategies to assist parents and community leaders in continuing steps made within the school to transferable approaches and behavioral interactions in the home. Employing the strategies to be included in the SEL/EI curriculum will improve the culture and climate of the school and guide future implications in developing appropriate strategies for other student groups who may have similar emotional challenges. This group has the power to create adjustments in the school curriculum to accommodate the sustainable changes seeking to be made by enacting this action plan.

Six Months through Twelve and Beyond

An analysis of the feedback from the external stakeholders with the data presented from the internal stakeholders is the next step in the action plan. Presenting the analysis of the feedback to the internal stakeholders allows for recommendations enacting the necessary changes to school curricula reflecting a uniformed response to the socio-emotional needs of the target population. The iterative process of collecting and sharing data from the internal stakeholders to the external stakeholders will constitute patterns of data that provide rationale for the changes to be made in school policy, procedures and best practices. Utilizing the Markiewicz and Patick (2016) framework of continuous evaluation, internal stakeholders can determine the standards

and methods by which the changes to school policy and procedure is validated. The use of internal data within this framework creates the guide toward continuous improvement as evidenced by the establishment of policy and procedures from input by all stakeholders.

As the internal stakeholders continue to meet on a monthly basis over the next six months and beyond, adjustments to the development of the SEL/EI curriculum will continue to be implemented. The apex of success of the action plan is to provide staff and students with consistent and sustainable resourcing toward enhancing effective emotional regulation. Continuous data analysis will also reveal broader root causes within a specific chain of events outside of the connections with SM, recovering from the isolation of COVID and undeveloped EI for Black females. Additionally, the use of the data is transferable to other teen groups within the population site. As technology advances to include artificial intelligence, continuous dialogue is needed to analyze and assess how schools move forward with students who spend most of their time interacting with technology. The need to look into the future of human interaction is a concept which I would have never contemplated as a teenager. However, our duty as vested stakeholders in the development of mentally, physically, and emotionally sound human beings remains our task; a duty from which there is no opt-out and to which is vital for the continuation of the human experience.

Long-Term Outcomes

Long term outcomes for this action plan include decreases in behavior referrals associated with incidents of emotional dysfunction by Black female students. Data points within the structure of the Public Works discipline system can be used to track

the specific data to assess long term success of the action plan. Other long-term outcomes should include continued focus groups and mediation strategies for students and teachers. Effective practice of policies and procedures by staff and students as evidenced by improved culture and climate at the population site. Iterative cycles of evaluations to include the BLT are required to maintain the validity and sustainability of the plan. The diagram below outlines the course of evaluation of the action plan.

Figure 1:

Act, Plan, Study, Do
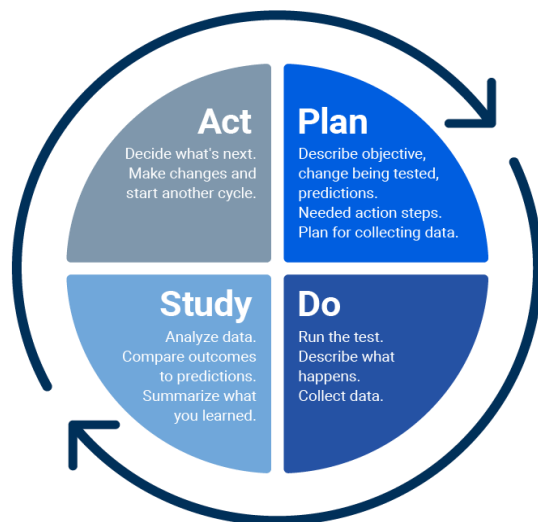
The initial PLAN objective would be to identify the two most common manifestations of a lack of EI in Black female teens. Then, identify specific changes in school/teaching strategies found within the frameworks of SEL/EI curricula to address these challenges and identify what we predict changes in the data we expect to occur. The DO portion of the cycle includes collecting behavior data through daily observations and Public School Works for a period of three weeks. The STUDY

portion includes analyzing any changes in the frequency and severity of the two identified manifestations of behaviors reflecting the lack of EI in the target population comparing our predicted outcomes to the actual outcomes. Finally, we ACT upon the results of our analysis of the data by making the determination to either adapt or reject the agreed upon strategies identified to address the PLAN section of the cycle into the curriculum or to modify them in some way. We begin the next cycle by evaluating what we will adapt for inclusion into the curriculum and what we need to change to strive for best practices. This cycle can be repeated as needed to accommodate the fullness of identification of behavioral objective, data collection, analysis and adjustments until the saturation of this cycle is achieved.

Analysis of Future Implementation

The analysis of implementation in the following section of this document is hypothetical because the action plan has not been enacted. The analysis and anticipated outcomes are grounded in relevant literature related to organizational theory, and potential stakeholder responses and unintended outcomes are identified. The section concludes with an alternative course of action that should be followed if the prescribed plan fails to be realized for any variety of reasons.

Change Process

The change process in this study and action plan is phenomenological in nature. Phenomenological studies seek to enact change through finding the connections in why people may act as they do (Delve et. al, 2022). Schools should be structured toward the premise of continuous improvement. To this end, school leaders are tasked with developing, enacting and assessing the fidelity of curricula, resourcing and programs to

best support students. Many changes made coincide with other issues surrounding changes in funding, personnel and leadership. Considering these changes in conjunction to grappling with operations during and following the global pandemic has elevated the crisis in schools surrounding the achievement gap and schools' approach toward this phenomenon. Therefore, the change process must be conceptualized and mitigated as an iterative process. Both internal and external stakeholders play pivotal roles in aligning their influence toward sound policies and programming to best support students' emotional health.

Using the Causal Chain theory framework for this exploratory study helps to lend credibility to my assertion that Black females at the population site need school-based programs to support the enhancement of their EI. The convergence of increased SM use due to the isolation period caused by Covid-19 has left a gap in the development of EI in this population marred by increased anxiety. This chain of events, I assert, creates emotional overwhelming circumstances for Black females in a more pervasive sense because of the uniqueness of their adolescent experiences. The change process must therefore not only provide programming which speaks to these unique circumstances, but also work to foster a more positive school climate where the stigma against this population is reduced. As the plan continues to be developed and implemented over time, the objective is to practice more productive overall approaches to the entire student population with the goal of decreasing incidences of inappropriate emotional responses.

Measuring Future Outcomes

The measurement of the desired outcomes will be determined by the data

created through the cycles of engagement by the stakeholders. In addition, improved culture and climate as a result of the action plan is an observable measure which evidences itself through daily interactions between students and among students and staff. The plan, do, study, act (PDSA) method of measurement is a common iterative practice which guides BLT and PLC's nationwide (Taylor, et.al;, 2014). Using this tool gives stakeholders the ability to show, analyze and make improvements to resourcing and programs that are specific to the target population.

Overall, I anticipate that Black female teens will learn the value of and significance in mastering their emotional responses in a variety of situations in the elective class. Further, staff will place greater value in their approach to student behaviors and discipline, thereby improving school culture and climate. Finally, schools will promote incorporating a healthier consumption of on-line activity within the programming and resources made available to students. School will become a place of emotional safety where Black females are celebrated for their uniqueness and encouraged toward positive emotional expression. Equipping young women with a sense of empowerment of self will assist them in their approach to other challenges that can become negatively exacerbated by the lack of EI.

Anticipated Outcomes

The projected outcomes center around teaching students to approach situations being emotionally balanced, coherent in thought, and appropriate in response. Solidifying these core tenants as a foundation for emotional wellness helps to enhance critical thinking and promotes effective socialization.

Projected Stakeholder Responses

The projected stakeholder response to this action plan is one of welcomed optimism. My interview with the Superintendent detailed the ways in which all stakeholders benefit from this process. Creating buy-in to manifest viable consistent effort sustaining the fidelity of the efforts to include an elective class. As the process is iterative and transferable to other demographics within the study site, strategies incorporated within this action plan can be models for other buildings to be adapted appropriately to accommodate all age groups.

Potential Unintended Consequences and Alternative Course of Action

No effort toward change, no matter how well intended, comes without some level of risk. Unintended consequences have the potential to occur in this action plan. This plan has the potential to raise questions about equity and inclusion. It could be argued by students, teachers, and parents that an elective class that is specifically germane to Black females is discriminatory in nature. Many students of all subgroups face emotional challenges that can be found to be more prevalent with that particular sub group. Adding a class to which presumably only Black females would/could enroll, could create the unintended consequence of political scrutiny with the greater community housing the population site.

The alternative course of action for the school would be to offer the class to all students. It would be necessary to make adjustments to the curriculum to accommodate different subsets of students needing support in specific areas of emotional support. The curriculum can be adjusted to accommodate the generalizing of the content.

Analysis of Organizational Change & Leadership Practices

The intent of this exploratory study was to discover how the EI of Black female teens has been affected by SM use during and post the Covid-19. This inquiry seeks to aid in providing sufficient emotional resources to Black females as they transition through their unique adolescent experiences. The changes within the organization needed to accomplish this reflect heavily the culture that is set within the population site. The site welcomes a new/returning lead principal this year. His leadership style is committed to modeling and setting behavioral norms that foster a positive culture and climate. As he is a returning lead principal, he has specific insight into the staff and operations of the building. He has previously demonstrated success by connecting how the importance of having a caring and welcoming environment contributes greatly to the culture of the school. "You Matter" has been reinstituted as the motto for our students. All staff and students matter. As such, leaders set the tone, expectations and monitoring of daily practices to ensure that these changes occur. Speaking and responding positively in vocal tones and body language to all persons are primary examples of how leadership aspires to begin this change process. Having activities and motivational events that inspire the want to factor in staff and students changes the energy associated with being in the work environment. Changing the culture of an organization begins with showing care for the people in the organization. This care is modeled through all stakeholders' commitment to meeting the needs of the whole child.

Theoretical Connections to the Implication Process

Since beginning this exploratory study, there have been numerous studies examining the effects of SM on the emotional wellness of teens (AS; & Goodlet, 2022,

Banks, 2021, Chen, 2022, Cuncic, 2022). Schools are experiencing more frequent episodes of extreme anxiety and feelings of being overwhelmed in stressful situations by Black females (Hicks, 2022, Horsford, 2021, Ja, 2021). Schools have made efforts to respond to the effects and implications of these behaviors. Exploring this phenomenon through the chain of events that precede behaviors includes the focus of identifying root causes. To fully understand the theoretical connections to the implication process, acknowledgment of how the paths of influence from a cause of action to the resulting symptoms of behavior are needed (Banks, 2021, Burnett et al., 2022,). The Causal Chain theory states that there is a chain of cycling events which feed into one another resulting in certain patterns of behavior (Itani et al., 2022). In this study, the data supports that participants reflect various starting stimuli or root causes in how they experience anxiety.

The role of schools in servicing the emotional needs of students lies within its commitment to identifying and addressing root causes for behaviors. Further, policy and practice should reflect strategies to reduce and alleviate anxieties which result from the lack of skills to prevent dysregulated emotional responses. It is the professional responsibility of schools to provide support for the needs of the whole child. In doing so, we equip students with the skills needed to become emotionally balanced people who can effectively adapt to the ever-changing society and world.

I anticipate that all stakeholders will welcome this process with the hope of expanding the scope to include all teenage groups housed at the population site. Sustaining consistent motivation to complete the process for a comprehensive curriculum addressing this phenomenon is the primary challenge. Internal stakeholders

will provide the sense of urgency that is needed to inspire real change at the district level. Regulated, informative cycles of real data being analyzed by proven, measurable instruments will, I anticipate, provide all stakeholders with the rationale to continue moving forward in discovering a variety of strategies which uncover paths to improved teaching and learning.

Conclusion

The undertakings in this study were driven by the need to identify the collective chain of events which culminate in documented increases in anxiety and depression among Black girls during and following the COVID-19 pandemic. Citing remote learning during the isolation period as the catalytic source of underdeveloped EI, the project sought to align the current SEL curriculum with programming that enhances EI. The measures taken throughout the process were carefully selected to ensure a thorough and in-depth analysis of the unique experiences of Black girls during adolescence. SM exacerbates existing levels of anxiety in Black female teens. While this study did not directly include connecting anxiety to depression, it can be stated that participants in this study do not feel depression as a result of using SM. Whereas the specific event that begins the chain of perturbations leading to anxiety differ from participant to participant, the root of the challenge that leads to dysregulated behavior stems from the lack of self-awareness as a primary function associated with EI. Further, undeveloped communication and social skills became more apparent when schools switched to remote learning. The convergence of these factors occurring during adolescence for Black females explains the acute levels of rising anxiety rates in this population.

The research process included a phenomenological approach to the exploration

of my research questions: How did increases in SM use by Black female teens during the Covid-19 social isolation period affect how they experience anxiety and depression; and, how was the EI of Black female teens affected by increases in SM use during and following the Covid-19 isolation period? Using semi-structured interviews, observations and focus groups, I analyzed the responses into thematic codes. These themes represented the totality of the collective responses of the participants. I detailed the concepts presented with accompanying quotes and observation notes throughout to give voice to the perspective of the participants as it related to the topic of research.

My recommendation for continued research includes exploration of how this phenomenon has affected other teenage groups experiencing adolescence during this time period. While I assert that the unique adolescent experience of Black females made them more acutely vulnerable to becoming emotionally dysregulated as their SM us increased, other teen groups also reported significant increases in depression and suicide rates as a result of being thrust into physical isolation. I believe it is incumbent upon schools to add elements to existing curriculum which addresses missing social emotional elements that have created a more intense value in the virtual identity as a result of increased SM presence.

New knowledge attributed to this project includes making a specific connection to how SM has affected the emotional regulation of Black girls. Certain cultural attributions of Black girls in combination with elements of their adolescent experience were brought together in this project to illustrate the correlation between these elements. Physical and emotional manifestations of Black girls are historically rooted in the adultification and over-sexualization of this population. Understanding how Black girls

process emotional stimuli differently than other teenage groups of comparative age, in light of the biases and discrimination shown toward them, adds a new perspective to existing literature about the mental health of teens as technology forces us to examine the unforeseen implications of its use in the lives of teenagers.

Black female teens experience a myriad of challenges in their home, school and social environments. Images and messaging on SM are often the catalyst to how they see themselves and how they respond accordingly. Schools must become a place that guides students to foster a healthy sense of self amid the distractions that technology brings about through direct and subliminal messaging. Helping Black girls make sense of the world around them begins with guidance in how to interact with technology and placing appropriate levels of value in the virtual identity. Motivating teens to re engage in interpersonal interactions will help to alleviate the pressure associated with virtual competitiveness. The implications of technology on the mental health of teens is an on-going process. Schools must view themselves as evolving catalysts of change to maintain their effectiveness in reaching Generations Z and Alpha by preparing them to bridge the cyber gap between the virtual world and humanity.

Leadership Reflection

Conclusionary thoughts on this process cause me to reflect on my leadership approach. The intent is to create a situation that benefits all stakeholders, primarily the students we serve. Transformational leadership operates under the premise of inspired motivation to generate equitable and sustainable results for all within the organization. The design of the action plan involves the direct participation of the students it is intended to serve. This element is important because it provides specific insight into the

target population by guiding the thought process to assist Black girls in their personal transformation of human development. Learning to effectively navigate in an ever-changing world requires the ability to be flexible and astute in critical thinking and action.

The uniqueness of the adolescent experience for Black girls is marked by stigmas and stereotypes associated with perceptions of behavior that is experienced differently by their white counterparts. The idea that Black girls are naturally more resilient in processing emotional traumas and are more adult in appearance and personality at younger ages, suggests that this population should not be granted the same innate consideration of response to these challenges that are naturally extended to White girls. This disparity is cultural and historic in nature. This work seeks to change the narrative about common negative experiences with Black girls. Therefore, transforming attitudes and behaviors becomes the overarching theme of this work. Being a transformative leader requires a level of commitment to the objectives set by the stakeholders. The principal is the gatekeeper of the promises to students. It is his/her responsibility to allocate the resources available to provide the needed changes to the learning environment. Consistent effort coupled with a collaborative approach to include all stakeholders, leaders can transform learning spaces into respites of emotional safety for our communities most valuable assets.

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June 17, 2022

To Whom It May Concern,

University *of* Dayton
Department of
Educational
Administration

I have reviewed Tasha Millerton's IRB application and I approve of the research as proposed. If I can be of additional assistance, please don't hesitate to contact me via email (cbrion1@udayton.edu) or phone (541-531-3770).
Sincerely,

Corinne Brion, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor
University of Dayton
665W Fitz Hall
Dayton, OH

APPENDIX B: *Trotwood-Madison City School District IRB Approval*

To Whom It May Concern:

Please accept this letter as approval for Tasha Millerton to conduct her Research Study at Trotwood- Madison City **School District**. **We are excited to work with her in this endeavor. If you have any** questions, **feel free to contact me.**

Sincerely,

Reva C. Cosby

Reva C. Cosby, Ph.D.
Superintendent of
Schools

(**937) 854-3050 ext**. 1100
revacosby@trotwood.k12.oh.us

Trotwood-Madison City School District

3594 N. Snyder Rd.
Trotwood, OH 45426

APPENDIX C: *Parental Consent*

UNIVERSITY OF DAYTON

Parental Consent for Minor/Child to Participate in a Research Project

Project Title: Social Media: Portals to Anxiety and Depression in Black Female Teens

Investigator(s): Tasha Y. Millerton

Description of
Study: This project seeks to explore the increases in anxiety and depression rates among black female teens post COVID-19 isolation. Focusing on the unique adolescent experiences of black female teens, the study seeks to provide insight and recommendations on how schools can work collaboratively with parents and students to mitigate the potential negative effects of unhealthy social media use in this population.

Adverse Effects
and Risks: Participants may experience adverse emotional effects from their participation in this study to include: spikes in anxiety and depression. Support services to include specific social and emotional resources to address these potential effects are in place and available throughout this process.

Duration of
Study: The study should take at least six-weeks to complete.

Confidentiality
of Data: All data will be kept in a locked file cabinet at the home of the researcher. Pseudonyms will be used in lieu of students' actual names. Responses will also be categorized by themes. Participants will be videotaped (included on consent form). Identifiable data will be destroyed upon completion of the dissertation in practice.

Contact Person: Parents or guardians of participants may contact:

[Tasha Y. Millerton, millertont1@udayton.edu, 937-241-3157]

[Dr. Corinne Brion, Brionc1@udayton.edu, 541-531-3770]

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant you may also contact the University of Dayton's Institutional Review Board at (937) 229-3515 or IRB@udayton.edu.

APPENDIX D: *Interview Questions*

Interview Questions

1. How old are you?

2. How many social media platforms do you use?

3. Which site do you most frequently use?

4. How much time do you spend on your most used social media site per day?

5. After using the site, what is the best word to describe your mood once leaving this site?

6. How often do you engage in social media in class?

7. Have you ever been involved in a physical altercation as a result of social media

engagement?

8. Have you ever been involved in a verbal altercation as a result of social media

engagement?

9. How often do you Choose to communicate via social media than in person (IRL).

10. Have you ever used an assumed name on social media?

11. Have you ever falsified your age on social media?

12. Have you ever met a stranger on social media which led to an IRL meeting?

13. Have you ever been punished for engaging inappropriately on social media?

14. How old were you when you first began engaging in social media?

15. On a scale of 1-10 (10 being greatest), how much of an influence do your parents have

on your social media engagement?

16. Scale (1-10), how rapid is your response in a casual "thread?"

17. Scale (1-10), how often do you feel motivated after engaging in social media?

18. Scale of (1-10), how often do you feel depressed after engaging in social media?

19. Scale of (1-10), how often do you feel anxious after engaging in social media?

20. Scale of (1-10), how often do you feel inspired after engaging in social media?

21. Have you ever been embarrassed as a result of using social media?

22. Do you feel "left out" when you do not engage in social media?

23. Have you ever been bullied on social media?

24. Do you feel your popularity increases as a result of social media use?

25. How many hours do you spend per day on social media?

26. Do you most engage in social media in school or out of school?

Activity Triangle/Retrieved from www.elmsa.org

TEMPLATE FOR TAKING FIELD NOTES
Date:
Site:
Activity:
Participants:
Length of Observation:
Summary Write a one paragraph summary or abstract of the day's events. Include analytic description, such as today was a good example of code-switching.
Narrative Write a detailed narrative of what you observed. Use (OC: _____) for observer comments.

Framework for Action Plan

Objectives and Outcomes (What)	Tasks (How)	Person(s) (Who)	Time (When)	Location (Where)	Resources	Funds
Objective 1: Identify specific emotional needs of Black female teens Outcome 1: Alignment of SEL resources to meet the unique needs of Black female teens	Meet with BLT, SEL coordinators develop implement- to align with current SEL resources to develop a curriculum addressing the needs of the target population	Teachers, Principals, Students, Parents, School District Community	1st meeting September 2023	Population Site	SEL curriculum Study Findings Samaritan Behavior Staffing Teachers	None initially
Objective 2: Create an elective class	Development of an elective class		Fostering Effective Communication Effective Emotional Management Improved personal, family, school and community relationships			
Methodology		Interviewing and observing Black		Creating a plan which aligns	Communicating results to stakeholders	Continued study on the implications of

		female teens at Trotwood		current SEL practices with specific resourcing addressing anxiety and emotional wellness in black female teens		deficiencies in black youth
Analysis Procedures	Charting emerged themes Manual transcription of interviews and notes from observations					
Findings	Need for Specific programming to address emotional needs of black female teens in conjunction with current implementation of SEL practices					

| Implications | Healing emotional trauma

Improving personal, family school and community relationships

Improved behaviors in school

Increased teaching and learning | An action plan is being created to address the lack of specific resourcing to black female teens focusing on their emotional development | Provide students with a healthy platform for self expression

Provide teachers with tools to improve communication with students and build meaningful relationships | | Action plan designed to align SEL resources to address specific emotional needs of black female | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|