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Black Lives Matter!: Systems of Oppression Affecting Black Youth

Special Series: Dismantling Systems of Racism and Oppression during Adolescence

Black Adolescent Boys' Perceived School Mattering: From Marginalization and Selective Love to Radically Affirming Relationships

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Inspired by Black Lives Matter activism, we used racialized lenses on social-psychological "mattering" to investigate how Black high school boys' interactions shaped their perceived mattering. Researchers conducted interviews with 17 self-identified Black boys who were part of a larger school-based partnership called The Black Boy Mattering Project. Participants reported *experiencing and resisting interpersonal marginal mattering* (e.g., evidenced in negative interactions with educators and peers and fueled by racist stereotypes) and described *mattering partially through selective love* (e.g., inferring significance through athletics, yet deemed anti-intellectual). Our study exhibits how schools uphold systemic anti-Black racist notions that shape relationships between Black boys and their peers and educators and diminish adolescents' self-concepts. Implications aim to support educators and researchers in radically affirming Black boys in school contexts.

Key words: mattering – Black – African American – boys – male – teacher-student relationships

Adolescence is marked by rapid, and oftentimes confusing, social and cognitive changes. Formulating a positive, robust, and accurate self-concept can buffer youth from the turbulence they encounter during this period (Elliott, 2009). Developing a positive self-concept requires an adolescent to perceive their worth, value, or simply their "mattering." Feelings of mattering come from meaningful connections to those within their family, schools, and society (Elliott, Cunningham, Colangelo, & Gelles, 2011; Rosenberg & McCullough, 1981). Yet, few encounter more school barriers to developing positive, nuanced self-concepts through mattering than Black adolescent boys (Carey, 2019, 2020). Gendered anti-Black racism, which flourishes through oppressive systems (e.g., disproportional disciplining, school exclusion) and within interpersonal encounters (e.g., racial stereotypes that shape teachers' low expectations), weakens Black boys' school attachment and poses relational strain between significant others like peers and teachers (Smalls, White, Chavous, & Sellers, 2007). When racism shapes their school experiences, it may compel Black youth to question whether or not they matter at all in school, thus diminishing their academic and global self-concepts.

On July 13, 2013, activists transformed "mattering" into a social justice rallying cry. Black activists used #BlackLivesMatter on social media in response to the acquittal of George Zimmerman in the February 2012 murder of unarmed, 17-year-old Travon Martin. Since then, millions globally have organized under the banner of Black Lives Matter to dismantle systemic racism, call attention to race-based extrajudicial killings, and advocate for reimagined social policies, so Black people can infer their mattering across multiple domains (Carey, Polanco, & Blackman, 2021).

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Both social-psychological mattering and the mattering activists call for offer educational and developmental stakeholders a fruitful starting place to create radically affirming schools and programming for Black adolescents (Carey, 2019, 2020; Carey et al., 2021). Stakeholders must grapple with how racist structures (see Blaisdell, 2016), and anti-Black school practices reinforce that which calls scholar activists, protesters, and social actors to demand reforms that prove Black lives actually matter (Bunyasi & Smith, 2019; Carey, 2019; Garza, 2016; Lebron, 2017; Ransby, 2018; Washington & Henfield, 2019). Yet, for educators to undo oppressive systems and affirm Black boy mattering, we need insights into how they perceive their school mattering and the factors that influence this process. In this article, we use two approaches—interpersonal mattering (Elliott, Kao, & Grant, 2004) and mattering theorized through racialized and gendered lenses (Carey, 2019, 2020)—to unpack the voiced experiences of adolescent Black boys and young men[1], who participated in our school and university research partnership called *The Black Boy Mattering Project*. We shed light on how anti-Black racism, which was embedded into the school's fabric and observed in encounters between Black boys, their educators, and their peers, shaped participants' perceived mattering.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Interpersonal Mattering

The construct of mattering supposes that an individual can infer that their existence and actions play a meaningful role in the lives of others and in society (Rosenberg, 1979; Rosenberg & McCullough, 1981). Mattering also accounts for feeling significant; it denotes when one is aware of their worth and has the autonomy to positively impact their world (Prilleltensky, 2014). Conversely, not mattering or "anti-mattering" (Flett, 2018b) spurs feelings of marginalization, subordination, or insignificance within an institution, a community, or in a broader society (Scarpa, Zopluoglu, & Prilleltensky, 2021; Schlossberg, 1989).

While mattering can be felt generally, or globally, specific relationships and frequent interactions are central to its development (Flett, 2018b). Elliott et al. (2004) posited that mattering emerges from relationships when we experience "awareness" (i.e., feeling noticed and acknowledged), "importance" (i.e., feeling others invest in us), or "reliance" (i.e., feeling others look to us for support). Interpersonal mattering is pivotal to social and psychological wellbeing because it bolsters an individual's resilience, increases their engagement, and fosters a positive self-concept (Elliott, 2009; Rosenberg & McCullough, 1981).

Racial Oppression and Black Boys' Interpersonal Mattering at School

To understand how Black boys and young men form their self-concepts via perceived interpersonal mattering, it is key to unpack the ways schools institutionalize oppressive systems. Peers and educators alike become unacknowledged agents of oppression by merely privileging students who reflect traits deemed socially desirable and penalizing those whom the society keeps at the margins (Blaisdell, 2016; Carey, Yee, & DeMatthews, 2018). With this, Black boys' "marginalization" (Schlossberg, 1989) or their perceived "anti-mattering" (Flett, 2018b) comes from not just being victimized by one-off interpersonal racist instances. Their perceived marginalization also comes from being from a racial group that has "historically been mistreated or ignored" (Flett, 2018b, p. 224). Such treatment is fueled by stereotypes of Black boys, which are embedded into the fabric of school norms and operate in interpersonal encounters between students and their teachers and peers (Bristol & Mentor, 2018; Carey, 2019; Hughes, Witherspoon, Rivas-Drake, & West-Bey, 2009; Marsh & Noguera, 2018; Rogers & Way, 2016).

When educators and peers engage with Black boys, they may draw from stereotypes of them as brutish, hypersexual, anti-intellectual, and socially unacceptable—notions that carryover from African enslavement (Carey, 2019; Dumas & Nelson, 2016; Ellis, Rowley, Nellum, & Smith, 2018; Rogers & Way, 2016; Smith & Hope, 2020). These stereotypes inform why stakeholders value Black boys and young men more for their assumed physical

[1]To resist the negative social imagery and stereotypes attached to the term "Black male," for greater precision, and to reclaim the discursive possibility that comes from naming Black childhoods and adulthoods respectively, we deliberately deploy "Black boy" for those under age 18 and "Black young men" for those 18+ in high school (see Carey, 2020; Dumas & Nelson, 2016; Wint et al., 2021). Wielded imprecisely, the term Black male infantilizes Black men by lumping adult men into groupings with boys or young teens. It also 'adultifies' (Ferguson, 2001) Black boys by rendering them older and more calculating than they are. In this study, participants were mostly late adolescent boys (16–17), but some (see Table 2) were legally young men (18 and over).

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or entertainment prowess and less for their intellectual promise (Azzarito & Harrison, 2008; Howard, 2014). When Black boys internalize racist and gendered stereotypical treatment, it may result in devastating consequences such as distress and depressive symptoms (Seaton, Caldwell, Sellers, & Jackson, 2008; Sellers, Caldwell, Schmeelk-Cone, & Zimmerman, 2003), diminished school engagement (Buckley, 2018; Griffin, Metzger, Halliday-Boykins, & Salazar, 2020; Smalls et al., 2007), and a decreased likelihood to persist in school (Bell & Puckett, 2020; Wong, Eccles, & Sameroff, 2003).

Vitally, racial stereotypes are not standalone in their impact; they intersect with gender, class, and sexuality to frame Black adolescent boys' working models of their identities (Carey, Yee, et al., 2018; Way, Hernández, Rogers, & Hughes, 2013). As such, they negotiate presenting identities by weighing the consequences of behaving in ways deemed problematically "Black" and "hypermasculine" (Buckley, 2018; Harris, Kruger, & Scott, 2020; Houston, Pearman, & McGee, 2020; T. Howard, 2013). Black boys also develop racial identities at the nexus of other indicators, including ethnicity or nationality (e.g., African American, West African, Caribbean, etc.) and immigration statuses (Seaton et al., 2008). Yet, formulating positive racial and national identities is a complex process in anti-Black schools. Stereotypes of African Americans as "ghetto" or anti-school and those of African or Caribbean immigrants as primitive or poor heighten tensions among Black boys from various ethnicities, cement boundaries between groups, and diminish their ability to coalition build for shared racial goals (Harushimana & Awokoya, 2011; Watson & Knight-Manuel, 2017).

While Black boys do resist harmful stereotypes (Rogers & Way, 2016; Way et al., 2013), schools may cause Black boys and young men from low-income communities to follow certain "gender scripts" for culturally appropriate masculinities (Howard, 2012), censor themselves, or "present a static identity" (Stevenson, 2004, p. 60) that is predictable to peers and educators. Regulating their self-presentation lowers their potential for being mistreated or suffering further trauma and discrimination. But, when school actors interpret Black boys using fixed, stereotyped portrayals (e.g., athlete, entertainer, criminal), or create conditions that reify these tropes, they diminish Black boys' ability to robustly infer their significance or just imagine mattering to their school and to their world(s) in other ways (Carey, 2019, 2020).

Interpersonal Mattering and the Self-Concepts of Black Boys

The self-concept is multidimensional, consisting of global and domain-specific facets. Global self-concept is an amalgamation; one defines themselves using cognitive evaluations of their interactions with others, their abilities, and competencies in varied domains (Marsh & Shavelson, 1985). Marsh (1989) posited that the domain-specific self-concept consists of academic (i.e., perceptions of self in school), physical (i.e., perceptions of self, given their appearance and abilities), and social domains (i.e., perceptions of self within relationships). Research has shown that mattering to peers, family, and educators drives aspects of adolescents' global and domain-specific self-concepts (Marshall, 2004; Tucker, Dixon, & Griddine, 2010). Like the self-concept, mattering is also domain-specific. One can matter to family, community, and friends in ways that diminish the impact of non-mattering in another domain (Flett, 2018b). Thus, mattering to family (e.g., they rely on me to ensure my little brother's safety after school) can buffer the impact from non-mattering in school (see Elliott, 2009). Yet, the impact of school mattering cannot be overlooked, given how salient this context is for the growth of youth's self-concepts.

Unfortunately, Black boys are often subjected to school practices that both reify their non-mattering and diminish their self-concepts. Educators often penalize Black boys from low-income communities at higher rates than their peers from other groups through disproportional disciplining, academic isolation, and other exclusionary practices (Leath, Mathews, Harrison, & Chavous, 2019; Welsh & Little, 2018). Research has shown that educators punish Black boys more often and more severely, even when they exhibit the same behaviors as their non-Black, same-gendered peers (Bryan, 2020; Ferguson, 2001). Scholars link these outcomes to educators' implicit racially-gendered biases of Black boys as nonchild juveniles, perceived as developmentally more mature and more intentional than they are (Carey, 2020; Ferguson, 2001; Powell & Coles, 2021; Wint, Opara, Gordon, & Brooms, 2021). Other research shows that educators deem Black youth as "subnormal" (Wallace & Joseph-Salisbury, 2021) and therefore punish and hypercriminalize Black boys for resisting unwritten school norms that uphold Whiteness and middle class sensibilities (Brooms, 2019; Howard, 2014; Rios, 2011).

Tucker et al. (2010) studied the factors that contributed to the high academic self-concepts of nine

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high school Black boys. They found the boys' perceived school mattering increased, as did their academic self-concepts, when teachers avoided racial mistreatment, and instead acknowledged them, supported them, and maintained high standards. Conversely, Liang et al. (2020) saw that when Black adolescent boys observed and experienced racially disparate discipline and dismissiveness from educators, these experiences contributed to them feeling disrespected by, and mistrustful of, educators, while influencing their felt school insignificance or invisibility (Liang et al., 2020). Findings here affirm that racialized school experiences are key to Black boys' mattering and, thus, the development of their self-concepts.

Importantly, Black boys do not just accept oppression through stereotyped portrayals and treatment from school actors. In their study of Black adolescent boys, Rogers and Way (2016) encountered three typologies: the "accommodators" endorsed and perpetuated racial and gender stereotypes; the "resisters" saw systemic oppression at play and actively challenged it; and those who viewed themselves as "exceptions" to racial stereotypes, but often endorsed masculinist norms. Black boys may also resist dehumanizing treatment through what Robinson and Ward (1991) noted as "optimal" (e.g., sociopolitical awareness that spurs healthy strategies to resist systemic oppression) and/or "suboptimal" (e.g., immediate, short-term adaptations that do not serve them long-term) tactics (see also Ward & Robinson-Wood, 2006). Findings from these studies and others (see Howard, 2012) demarcate how stereotypes shape Black boys' identities. These studies also challenge monolithic portrayals of Black boys and offer insight into how they forge resistance pathways by reimagining themselves in their worlds.

Asset-based, culturally responsive educators augment Black boys' self-concepts when they refuse or at least resist the stereotyped presuppositions that keep this group marginalized (Howard, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 2011; Nasir, Givens, & Chatmon, 2019). While not explicitly studying Black boys, Flett's (2018b) synthesis of school mattering literature revealed that when students' unique cultures are ignored in social and emotional interventions, academic support programs, or in the curriculum, students may be prone to feel they do not matter. However, aside from this cultural assertion, Black boys' racialized mattering has been woefully understudied. Save for Tucker et al.'s (2010) work in a high school, most school-based mattering studies on this group were done with young Black men in higher educational contexts. In these studies, perceptions of mattering to others were linked to college retention, feelings of campus belonging, and academic motivation (Cole, Newman, & Hypolite, 2020; Gloria, Robinson Kurpius, Hamilton, & Willson, 1999; Gossett, Cuyjex, & Cockriel, 1996; Palmer & Maramba, 2012). In a similar vein, the concept of interpersonal mattering holds ample promise for being a bridge between Black adolescents' self-concept and students' optimal educational outcomes in PreK-12 school settings.

BLACK BOY MATTERING CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Drawing on the construct of mattering (Elliott et al., 2004; Rosenberg & McCullough, 1981), the energy and images brought to the fore by the Black Lives Matter movement (see Garza, 2016; Lebron, 2017; Washington & Henfield, 2019), and historical and contemporary notions of Black masculinities, Carey (2019, 2020) theorized a framework to understand the ways that society and school actors prove how Black boys matter. Carey (2019) defined Black boy mattering as "the value and significance of Black boys and young men indicated by the regard with which they are held, how they are treated, and the relational interest taken in them by individuals in society and in their schools" (p. 375). Carey's (2019) framework consists of three subconcepts—*marginal*, *partial*, and *comprehensive* mattering—that are indicative of the extent to which Black boys and young men matter to others in schools and within broader society.

The *marginal mattering* of Black boys and young men is "the type of baseline, minimal recognition that implies their insignificance, as signaled by individuals (e.g., peers, educators, the general public) and institutions (e.g., schools) around them" (Carey, 2019, p. 376). Marginal mattering is oxymoronic. "Marginalization" and "mattering" are seemingly at opposite ends of the spectrum; they are "polar themes" (Schlossberg, 1989). Marginal mattering draws on notions of "marginalization" (Huerta & Fishman, 2014; Schlossberg, 1989) or "anti-mattering" (Flett, 2018b), which reflects when one feels insignificant or unworthy of attention. Through a racialized lens informed by Afropessimism (see Carey, 2020), marginal mattering posits that the reason Black boys and young men are rendered disdainful and pushed to the peripheries is due to social requirements to keep Black life at the margins to justify the privileges afforded those—most often

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White life—at the center. In this way, perceiving one's marginal mattering is less about feeling invisible or ignored, as suggested by Flett's (2018b) notion of anti-mattering. Rather marginal mattering is about feeling paid attention to, but via a fearful surveillance that is disdainful of Blackness, which is always perceived dubious and socially unacceptable.

When stakeholders treat Black boys as if they marginally matter, they engage practices that criminalize, dismiss, and thrust Black boys into school failure and social disarray (i.e., disproportional disciplining and other fear-driven punitive practices that reinforce Black boys as threats). It evokes the same distress and psychological pain as anti-mattering (Flett, 2018b), but it is ostensibly immovable and incurable; it lingers perpetually as a constant menace to Black boys in a world that upholds anti-Blackness through racist systems. Marginal mattering shuns race-neutral analyses for their inability to attend to structures that govern social requirements to keep Black boys and Black life generally, marginalized. This systemic marginalization—and the racial violence and extrajudicial killings of Black people that accompany it—is what drew activists to the streets to exclaim Black Lives Matter in the first place.

Partial mattering reflects "the significance Black boys and young men can infer about themselves based on how others (e.g., educators and the general public) selectively value certain talents and attributes they embody in ways that leave racist systems unchallenged" (Carey, 2019, p. 378). Feeling positive about ourselves derives from, among other sources, perceiving that we matter for being useful to someone or something else. Feeling valued (i.e., appreciated and recognized) for adding value is key for an individual's self-esteem and functioning (Scarpa et al., 2021). Yet, individuals may fall victim to what humanistic psychologist Carl Rogers described as "conditions of worth." Rogers (1959) defined this phenomenon as such:

> A condition of worth arises when the positive regard of a significant other is conditional, when the individual feels that in some respects he is prized and in others not. Gradually this same attitude is assimilated into his own self-regard complex, and he values an experience positively or negatively solely because of these conditions of worth which he has taken over from others, not because the experience enhances or fails to enhance his organism. (p. 209)

When one's self-regard is too dependent on the "quality and consistency of the positive regard shown to us by others" (Thorne & Sanders, 2012, p. 31), an individual risks not actualizing the whole self at the sake of appealing to the whims of significant others. In the case of Black boys and young men, school actors and the public encourage, expect, or allow this group to fulfill certain roles that uphold status quo racial and economic subjugation. In return, educators, peers, and the general public conditionalize their worth or selectively love Black boys and young men in ways that reinforce this group's partial mattering.

Partial mattering harkens historicized notions from the time of African enslavement in the United States and elsewhere, of the presumed imperviousness to physical and psychic pain, the tenacity and brutishness, and the entertainment prowess of Black boys and men (Howard, 2014; Slatton & Spates, 2014). When Black boys perceive their partial mattering, it is because only some of their attributes—typically stereotypical traits and talents—are deemed significant (i.e., being valued, and often exploited, because of their capabilities as an athlete or entertainer; Carey, 2019). Partial mattering thrives in schools, colleges, and professional athletic domains, where Black boys and men garner value for their physicality, heroism, feats, or what they do for the school or organization and less for who they are or are attempting to fully be. While the individual reaps some regard or resources from their engagement (e.g., adulation, college scholarships, high salaries), the institution or organization also acquires ample benefits (see Donnor, 2005). Thus, partial mattering leaves the individual fragmented, conditionally valuable for not just their own benefit, but for being "a means to some other, and someone else's end" (Carey, 2019, p. 381).

Comprehensive mattering calls for a "radically imagined relational approach to understanding, interacting with, and conceiving of the fullness of mattering of Black boys and young men" (Carey, 2019, p. 383). It focuses on the multiple, not singular, ways they are significant in society and schools (Carey, 2019). This aspirational and speculative type of mattering urges that Black boys and young men be liberated from the negativity society layers on them to be robustly understood and validated across all life domains. As Carey (2020) noted,

> . . .when Black boys and young men matter comprehensively, they will be fully seen as human, sentient beings, whose value will reside in their mere existence, and their

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> humanistic flourishing within that existence, instead of through ways that cultural and social forces orient them to matter in certain, fragmented and predictable ways. (p. 736)

When this occurs, Black boys would perceive their significance from their existence and be celebrated for having multiple characteristics without regard to how others can conditionalize their worth by commodifying their present or future engagements. As educators and even peers bound Black boys and young men to "static identities" (Stevenson, 2004) shaped by their *marginal* or *partial* mattering, Carey (2019, 2020) pushes stakeholders to envision what their robust, *comprehensive mattering* would look and feel like and determine how school actors might support students in building the radically affirming self-concepts that would emerge as a result.

THE PRESENT STUDY

Prior research on school mattering has shown it as a constituent of academic motivation, school connectedness, and as protective against drop-out and stress (Flett, 2018a; Gloria et al., 1999; Lemon & Watson, 2011). Yet, as Flett (2018b) asserted in his review, researchers not only overlook mattering, but they also problematically conflate it with proximal concepts like belongingness, social support, and relatedness (see also Elliott, 2009). To bring this point to bear, Flett (2018b) asserted, "A person can be a welcome member of a group but still feel relatively insignificant as if they are lost within the group" (p. 61). Scarpa et al. (2021) showed that adding value to a community or institution did not equate to feeling valued by the group. Similarly, Black boys can feel like they belong at school, feel supported by teachers, and even sense deep peer relations but still feel devalued, insignificant, or invisibilized for facets of their identities or contributions. Thus, mattering has unique elements not captured by related belonging constructs.

The present study on interpersonal school mattering uplifts the voices of Black high school boys, who have been understudied using mattering, a concept that is often overlooked and misconstrued. We use a qualitative approach to address the following research questions: (1) What types of school experiences with interpersonal anti-Black racism compel Black boys to perceive their marginal mattering to their educators and peers? (2) What types of school experiences compel Black boys to believe they partially matter?

METHODS

The Black Boy Mattering Project

Carey established The Black Boy Mattering Project (BBMP) in 2019 as a unique research partnership between a university and a local high school. Rooted in Carey's (2019, 2020) and Elliott et al.'s (2004) conceptualization of mattering, we set out to explore how boys (under the age of 18) and young men (those who are 18, but in high school), who self-identified as Black or African American, characterize how they matter within school and society. For the overall study, BBMP research activities consisted of semi-structured interviews, focus group interviews, and a field trip to a local art museum, where they toured an African American art exhibit and created artistic renderings that depicted how Black people matter in society. Given the research questions guiding the present study, we draw solely from data from semi-structured interviews conducted between October 2019 and March 2020.

Procedures and Study Recruitment

Our research team partnered with County High School, a Title I, racially and ethnically diverse (38% African American; 32% White; 22% Latinx; 4% Asian American; 3% more than one race; 1% Other) high school located in the mid-Atlantic United States that enrolled 1,059 students (51% female;

TABLE 1
County High School Demographics and Academic Outcomes

County High School characteristics	*Students*	*Teachers*
Membership		
Count	1,059	64 (FTE*)
Racial composition		
Black	37.96%	12.90%
White	32.49%	80.65%
Hispanic	21.62%	4.84%
Asian	4.34%	0.00%
Two or more races	3.21%	1.61%
American Indian/Alaska Native	0.38%	0.00%
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	0.00%	0.00%
Gender composition		
Female	51.09%	41.94%
Male	48.91%	58.06%

Academic outcomes	*County H.S.*	*State*
Four-year graduation rate	73.52%	87.70%
College and career ready	37.50%	58.59%

FTE = full-time equivalent.

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see Table 1). County High School, which used to be predominantly White faced substantial demographic shifts in recent years. The opening of a nearby charter school drew many middle and upper middle class White families away, while bussing mandates increased Black and Latinx student enrollment from the local city. At present, though county is a suburban school, it was "urban characteristic" (Milner, 2012). It contends with many of the unique challenges and opportunities of schools in more racially and economically isolated urban communities. We chose it because it is a traditional comprehensive high school with a racially and ethnically diverse population. We also chose County High to support educators in meeting the needs of its increasingly Black student population through the BBMP. During the 2019–2020 school year, 74% of students graduated within four years with 38% of students deemed "college or career ready," according to the state's assessment markers. The funders for this research were eager to have partnership projects nestled in schools like County High to learn about students' experiences and support educators in building interventions for boys like those from our project.

Prior to data collection, which began in the Fall of 2019, Carey connected with district officials and met with County's principal and assistant principal to solicit interest and permission to begin the study. We then worked with school administrators to appoint a teacher leader, to whom we paid an honorarium, who helped with recruitment and logistics (e.g., finding meeting rooms, posting recruitment flyers, locating participants, and communicating school news). County's assistant principal recommended an experienced teacher who was effective in the classroom as the AVID teacher (Advancement Via Individual Determination) and had a stellar reputation. Our teacher leader, who identified as a middle-aged White woman, took on many teaching and mentoring roles at County for over a decade. Her popularity among students and staff was evidenced in her selection as "Teacher of the Year" in 2019. Participants often cited her as their favorite teacher for her willingness to sustain meaningful student relationships. Her success with students fostered connectional pathways between our university research team, the County High community, and the Black boys and young men with whom we engaged.

Criteria for participation in the BBMP included students who self-identified as either a boy or young man, and Black or African American. The teacher leader distributed and posted recruitment flyers and purposively sought out students who met study criteria. Approximately 75% of our participants were recruited in this way. The remaining 25% were recruited via snowball sampling (Creswell & Poth, 2016); some current participants brought their friends to interviews to meet the research team and join the project. All participants returned a signed student assent form and a parental consent form to the teacher leader prior to being interviewed.

Participants

Seventeen boys participated in the BBMP during the 2019–2020 school year. All participants identified as being a boy or young man and as Black or African American. Three were second generation immigrants from West Africa, while one was biracial. Table 2 shows demographic characteristics (e.g., age, race, and ethnicity) and the boys' self-described qualities. These descriptions offer glimpses into their self-concepts. Table 3 shows their academic interests and affiliations. Lastly, we asked the boys to choose pseudonyms. Some chose names that honored family members or celebrities while others picked variations on their own nicknames. Affording participants' naming rights offered them greater ownership of their narratives.

Data Sources

We developed two semi-structured interview protocols based on the theoretical construct of mattering (Carey, 2019, 2020; Elliott et al., 2004). Using semi-structured interviews afforded us the ability to co-construct knowledge based on the unique perspectives of individual boys. We did this with tailored supplemental questions about phenomena specific to their lived experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Each of the four researchers were assigned to interview the same boy twice; 15 of the 17 boys participated in both rounds of interviews. One participant transferred to another school, while the other was scheduled to interview the day we ceased in-person school engagement due to the COVID-19 outbreak. Having the same researcher interview the same student twice helped us to foster relationships with the boys and modify follow-up questions based on prior responses. Each interview lasted 45 min and occurred during a designated free period in the morning. At the start of the first interview, the boys completed a questionnaire to self-report, among other things, their race and ethnicity, age, grade, and GPA. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed using a secure transcription service (Verbal Ink). After the

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TABLE 2
Participant's Personal Characteristics

Participants	*Age*	*Race*	*Ethnicity*	*Self-described personal qualities*
Abraham	17	Black	African American	Smart, nice, funny, talkative, and talented
Charles	18	Black	African American	Laidback and funny
Darien	16	Black	Second generation, Ghanaian	Quiet, positive, funny, outgoing, and kind
De'Andre	17	Black	African American	Funny and calm
Dee	18	Black	African American	Calm, smart, outgoing, kind, fun, and caring
Denzel	17	Black	African American	Funny, smart, hardworking, and happy
Deuce	17	Black	African American	Calm and independent
Henny	15	Black	Second generation, Liberian and Ghanaian	Funny, positive, athletic, loud, and energetic
John	16	Black	African American	Friendly, gentle, caring, and athletic
Josh	18	Black	African American	Calm and funny
Lewis	17	Black	African American	Funny and talkative
Mac	18	Black	African American	Quiet, funny, and nice
Michael	15	Black	Second generation, Nigerian	Talkative, hardworking, and smart
Sa(man)tha	17	Black	African American	Compassionate and generous
Sean	17	Black	African American	Happy, enthusiastic, funny, athletic, and smart
Steven	15	Black (Biracial)	African American and White	Smart, shy, funny, caring, and calm
Tei	17	Black	African American	Funny, smart, athletic, and unique

TABLE 3
Participants' Academics and Affiliations

Participants	*GPA*	*Class/year*	*Favorite teachers*	*Academic affiliations (e.g., clubs and teams)*
Abraham	3.4	Senior	Math teacher and English teacher	Basketball and track
Charles	N/A	Senior	Math teacher	Basketball and Sports club
Darien	3	Junior	African American studies teacher and Gym teacher	Soccer
De'Andre	2.8	Junior	African American Studies teacher and Economics teacher	Basketball
Dee	2.4	Senior	African American studies teacher and Math teacher	Football, basketball, and baseball
Denzel	N/A	Junior	African American studies teacher	Football
Deuce	3	Senior	English teacher and AVID teacher	Basketball and football
Henny	3.6	Sophomore	Gym teacher, Art teacher, and Biology teacher	Basketball
John	3	Junior	Chemistry teacher, Spanish teacher, Math teacher, and AVID teacher	Football, wrestling, and volunteer for school events (e.g., pep rallies and prom)
Josh	1.8	Senior	AVID teacher	Football
Lewis	2.6	Junior	AVID teacher and Telecommunications teacher	Football and basketball
Mac	1.8	Senior	Linemen coach and Math teacher	Football
Michael	3.8	Sophomore	Math teacher	Track
Sa(man)tha	2.4	Junior	English teacher	Track, Academy of Creative Expression (ACE) program, and Wise Guys program
Sean	3.1	Junior	Chemistry teacher and Math teacher	Basketball
Steven	3.7	Sophomore	English teacher	None
Tei	2.2	Junior	English teacher	Basketball

Note.. Fall GPAs were self-reported, and an "N/A" reflects either students who either did not know their GPA or did not wish to share it with the interviewer.

completion of both interviews, participants were compensated with a $10 Visa gift card.

Data Analysis and Positionality

We used Dedoose to code interview transcripts using deductive and inductive processes (Creswell & Poth, 2016). The first author created a priori codes drawn from facets of Carey's (2019, 2020) and Elliott et al.'s (2004) mattering definitions. The first author began to code a sampling of transcripts, and as he did, inductive codes emerged. After Carey built a code manual with both deductively and inductively derived codes, the research team met to discuss and negotiate these codes. Next, he crafted a series of coding tests through

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Dedoose, a web application for managing and analyzing qualitative data, to establish interrater reliability. We calculated interrater agreements using a robust estimate of reliability, Krippendorff's alpha (K_{alpha}), which supports any number of raters and modes of data (e.g., ordinal, interval, ratio, nominal, etc.). K_{alpha} coefficients range from 0 to 1, with 1 indicating perfect agreement among raters (Hayes & Krippendorff, 2007). We calculated a K_{alpha} coefficient with 1,000 bootstrap samples using the KALPHA macro plug-in within SPSS 24.0 (Hayes & Krippendorff, 2007). Interrater agreement among four coders yielded a coefficient of $\alpha = .81$, 95% CI = 0.74, 0.87, indicating good reliability.

While statistical reliability was established, the team continued to meet weekly to discuss the robustness and preciseness of the codes. After all interviews were coded, the team met to note overlaps between certain coded-excerpts. For instance, when a data excerpt was coded with "partial mattering" and "perspectives on teacher," we grouped these and other overlapping codes into "families" of coded excerpts. We analyzed the families through the lens of the theoretical frameworks and distilled these into themes that responded to the research inquiries.

As researchers who seek to engage in asset-based, decolonized inquiry, we acknowledge our positionality to not only the topic, but also the racially, ethnically, and economically marginalized participants with whom we worked (Milner, 2007; Patel, 2015). Our research team was made up of three Black men (two African Americans and one second-generation Caribbean American) and one Afro-Latinx woman of Dominican origin. We shared experiences perceiving our own non-mattering due to oppressive systems meant to keep us, and our communities, at the margins. As a group of Black researchers, we acknowledged that although we shared ethnic and racial affinity with the boys with whom we partnered in the Black Boy Mattering Project, we shared vastly different life experiences afforded us by our educational and economic standing. We did not assume we understood their experiences simply because we were similarly raced. We carefully mined the boys' experiences through their perspectives, instead of through our own lenses. We also represented a large university and risked reproducing colonial tropes of taking knowledge from racially marginalized youth. Instead, this was an intentional partnership project; we worked with the boys to determine avenues for certain inquiries and advocated for them to teachers and administrators based on initial results from this study. We nurtured bonds with our boys using positive interactions, took them on a field trip at their request (two others were planned but canceled due to COVID-19), and checked on them when we were apart due to COVID-19 restrictions. Our team fostered meaningful and creative inquiry experiences through affirming, asset-based engagements to ensure our boys knew how much they mattered to us.

FINDINGS

In this section, we present findings drawn from the boys' voiced perspectives. Through representative quotes, we show how Black boys perceived their mattering within the school and the complex ways they interpreted and navigated teacher and peer relations as a result. Our findings are presented with initial discussions and highlighted by a close attention to how systemic racism fueled participants' experiences. Two main themes emerged: *experiencing and resisting interpersonal marginal mattering*, and *mattering partially through selective love*.

Experiencing and Resisting Interpersonal Marginal Mattering

We explore this theme with two subthemes that consider participants' perspectives on their educators and on their peers. To begin, systemic anti-Black racism, which is embedded in the fabric of U.S. society, was upheld through school norms and evidenced in interpersonal encounters between students and their teachers and administrators. Participants resolved that on average, their teachers and deans attempted to, as Abraham put it, "do what's right for their students." However, participants all recounted encounters with teachers and administrators that were rooted in stereotypes, racial bias, and reified Black boys' perceived marginal mattering.

Experiencing marginal mattering with teachers and administrators. Participants often shared encounters where teachers used biased language that kept Black boys at the margins and justified their devaluation. For instance, De'Andre recounted an experience that amounted to him requesting a new course teacher. He noted,

> Well, last year, that's why I got switched outta that class 'cause me and that teacher

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> didn't get along last year. But I had a friend in there and [the teacher] pretty much didn't like us 'cause we used to laugh and all that. You could tell he was racist by what he was doing, and I forgot what was going on. It was something going on, and I remember him saying, "Me and the principal gonna start cracking down." And one of my friends said, "On what, Black people?" And he said, "Yeah!" And that just made us think that's racist.

Upon laughing in class, De'Andre's teacher threatened him and his friend with severe discipline, a feat backed by the school's chief administrator, the principal. De'Andre believed this teacher targeted him and his other Black friends for more acute disciplining not because of the severity of their action, but rather because they were Black, a notion the teacher surprisingly confirmed. Anti-Black commitments underscored how teachers and administrators justified the marginal mattering of Black boys through regulating, enforcing, and hyperpolicing. The teacher double-downed his disciplinary threat with "cracking down," which is visceral, historically charged language that summons images of the White enslavers whip, used to control Black bodies.

Another participant, Denzel, narrated a time when a teacher used demeaning, criminalizing language to redirect his friend's actions. Denzel noted,

> One of my friends, he was in school; I forgot what happened…But a teacher said, "…it's statistics, you're gonna be dead by the age of 21!" That's very disrespectful! He went to the Dean to tell them; you know what they did? They laughed in his face! They've been doing that, so it's really dumb what happens here if you get racially profiled. That right there is not a joke, and the person he said it to, he didn't take it as a joke, either. That's not funny to me. That's very disrespectful, especially 'cause he was Black and he lived in the city. That's very disrespectful.

Due to this teacher's racially assaultive language and the Dean's dismissive response when he reported it, Denzel's account reveals both how Black boys were victimized and what happened when they sought justice from administrators for being "racially profiled." By voicing damning, racially codified, base-less statistics to redirect this student's actions, he reminded the student and all within earshot of the looming death facing Black boys from low-income communities. In doing so, this teacher demeaned the student and affirmed his insignificance to the entire class. His insignificant, *marginal* status was fortified through the Dean's dismissive response. Moreover, his friend was from the city and was bussed a long distance into County High School. He, like other Black students from the city, came from low-income communities. They were perceived as more threatening, more devious, and more likely to start fights than their middle class peers from the county. In spite of being especially vulnerable due to growing up in economically stratified communities, Black boys from the city were often stigmatized by students and other teachers.

Experiencing marginal mattering with peers in interracial encounters. In addition to exchanges with teachers and administrators that convinced them of the ways they marginally mattered, participants also reported experiencing racial microaggressions with fellow students. Abraham described racial divisions between County's students as such,

> The people from [this area], they're mostly White people. And they have a lot of school spirit, but they don't try to connect with Black people. It could be a group with me and my friends and we would walk past a group of White girls or something; they just look scared. Like "I'm just trying to hold the door for you. I'm not gonna rob you in school or nothing like that." I feel like the White people-they don't try to interact with the Black people. If you saying something to 'em, they'll just say like "hi." It's kinda weird.

Here, Abraham illuminates interracial relational tensions by describing how Black boys are rendered threatening to White students. Even when he attempts kind gestures like holding the door for fellow students, his kindness is met with the same type of fear-driven dismissal many Black boys from low-income communities encounter and often expect in society.

Experiencing marginal mattering with peers in intraracial encounters. Many of the Black students from the city commonly called "in town" came from racially isolated and economically stratified poor neighborhoods. Due to historic disinvestment from stakeholders, city residents grappled with the realities of drug economies and violent

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crime. As such, Black boys from in town brought into school the trauma that came from growing up in such conditions. They sometimes behaved in ways that further reinforced stereotypes of Black boy aggression and irrationality already existing in the consciousness of County's predominantly White teaching force. In addition, intraracial tensions existed between Black students from the county and those from the city or "in town." Abraham noted,

> And you know Black people, it's just weird. You know how it is in town. It's a war, I guess you could say, a battle. It's like you really can't connect with your own kind and you can't connect with [the White students]. So at the end of the day you've got yourself. I mean, I guess you could say it's kind of weird growing up [here]. But I don't know.

Conflicts existed among the Black student community, based partly on where one was from, leaving the Black students not only mistrustful of White students but also of certain same race peers.

Resisting marginal mattering. Black students who sought to resist their marginal mattering had to distance themselves not only from their peers, but also from the behaviors associated with their Black counterparts from the city. Evidence for this emerged especially among participants from African immigrant families. For instance, Henny, whose mother was from Liberia and father from Ghana explained that his Black peers often got in trouble because of the following:

> . . .they represent themselves. Like if they try to be all like ghetto and all that, they represent themselves like as a bad person. And that's what most people think about us, but if they think, like if they stay in class and all that, then they'd see the good in us.

Many of the boys shared that they had to monitor the ways they were being perceived in classes to challenge and resist the pre-existing marginalizing beliefs about Black boys and men.

Systemic anti-Black racism, which thrived unacknowledged, underscored why Black boys perceived their marginal mattering at school. Racial bias and stereotypes fueled interactions between Black boys and the majority of White teaching staff and administration. Biases and fear-driven stereotypes informed how Black boys mattered, but only at the margins to their White peers. Perhaps more alarming, due to internalized racism, Black boys, in some ways, mattered marginally to others within their own racial group and were left to monitor their behavior and contort themselves to resist reproducing racist gender scripts already written about them.

Mattering Partially Through Selective Love

Participants also indicated that Black boys mattered partially, or garnered "selective love" from the County High School community. Systemic oppression appeared as stereotyped sentiments and limiting portrayals of the anti-intellectual Black boy athlete, who was valuable to County for his athletic contributions and little else.

Black boy athletes and perceived anti-intellectualism. Participants, many of whom were football and/or basketball players or ran track, internalized feeling as if educators and peers valued Black boys mainly for their athletic contributions and less for their academic or scholarly prowess. Such a reality reflected their selective love and was evidenced in this exchange between a research team member and Denzel.

> CP: So in your opinion, how do Black boys and young men matter in this school?

> Denzel: To me, I don't know. I really don't know. That's a good question now. I feel like to the staff, I feel like we only matter in sports. I don't know. 'Cause I know my grades aren't the best, and I want to say a lot of Black—but we probably don't got the best grades. I don't know. I really can't think of how all of us matter except for in sports.

> CP: So what does that mean to you, only mattering in sports?

> Denzel: I feel like we need to do better and show them that we're more than just sports. 'Cause as of now, to everybody, we're just sports, rap, and entertainment. We're basically just entertainment. I feel like we could do better education-wise.

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Denzel's account shows how Black boys like him mattered, but only partially, for their sports involvement. Denzel expanded this belief by indicating that the general public, not exclusively school actors, values Black boys and men as "just entertainment" for sports and music. His use of "just" signals how limiting he believes this demand is on the conditionalized worth of Black boys and men. This societal valuation informs stereotypes of Black boys as useful for their entertainment worth, not their intellectual contributions. Problematically, Denzel fails to address the oppressive forces that keep Black boys and men as "just entertainment." By noting that "we"—meaning Black boys—"could do better" by earning higher grades and prioritizing education, he internalizes this societal perception into his self-concept. In doing so, he overlooks the systemic racism that forecloses more expansive opportunities for Black boys and misses the role the school could play in supporting him and his peers in mattering in other ways.

County faculty and students alike embraced stereotypes of Black boys as athletes and little else. Many assumed Black boys to be athletes, regardless of whether or not they played a sport. As Abraham indicated, "I feel like that's what it just is at this school: if you Black, you automatically gotta play football or basketball. You gotta play something." Other Black boys, who were not athletes, noted that their non-Black peers perceived them to be athletes based on their bodies. Darien recounted an encounter with a peer, "I was talking about, you know, trying out for the team; he was, like, 'Yeah, you're a Black guy, you know, you're tall, you're fast' – … like, everybody wants you to be an athlete." Racist stereotypes shaped such encounters. Since his body was Black and tall, and he was fast, he would naturally want to try out for a sports team without hesitation. However, it was deemed almost unimaginable that a Black boy at County could be a high-caliber athlete and simultaneously, a high-achieving student. Deuce, who was a top basketball player and the football team's starting quarterback, noted,

> When they see athlete, they think, "Oh, he's not gonna do his work." "Oh, he's on the football team or the basketball team." "Oh, he's just here to play sports." But other than that, I do my work just like any other kid does.

Boys like Deuce had to expend significant energy to resist stereotypes that Black boys were only in school for sports and did not complete assignments. Those like Deuce did their "work" on and off the field; yet, he suffered from the gazes of peers and teachers who assumed he did not.

Selective love and selective supports: partial mattering to teachers. Participants indicated that positive regard did accompany their athletic status. Mattering, though partially, for athletics elevated their status and perceived importance to their school community. Participants like Lewis, who played football, indicated,

> A lot of teachers, even ones that kinda don't like me, they see me with that jersey on, they always ask me, "Oh, who are you guys playing?" or, "Did you guys have a good game?" or, "Good luck!" Some of the teachers try to come out and support, and say "Oh, I saw you. You did this and that." So a lot of [athletes] are bringing that joy of having the school how we used to be, and we're trying to get that winning spirit back up…

Interactions like these boosted the boys' perceived school mattering and their self-concepts. County's reputation as a sports powerhouse mattered significantly to the school community. Though their success waned in recent years, educators and students relied on its football and basketball team to spark school spirit. As Deuce said, "the sports teams is what keeps the school together," and participants all noted that while they had their own athletic ambitions, they felt relied upon by peers and teachers to bolster the school's regard by winning games.

Participants reported that teachers supported them in the classroom in an effort to ensure they could remain academically eligible, especially for football. Denzel noted the following:

> I feel like during football season, I had better grades because my teachers were on me more so I wouldn't fail off. But after that, I feel like they just stopped being on me, most of the time. So I feel like instead of just being on you for just one marking period, you should be on me for the rest of the year to keep me focused.

Denzel garnered additional academic supports from his teacher only during the football season. Yet, he could have benefited from these supports to focus and maintain good grades throughout the

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remainder of the year. When reflecting on his own mattering, Dee recounted,

> I don't think—honestly, I don't feel like I mattered during this basketball season, 'cause I didn't play. Like, no teacher cared about my grades, no teacher cared about helping me. But when I played football, they like 'make sure that he can play football.'

Dee mattered so much to the football team's success that teachers offered him extra classroom supports to ensure he could play. When the football season stopped, so did these extra supports. Perhaps teachers only saw Dee's athletic promise or his interests in using sports as a conduit for educational advancement. In turn, they offered him enough help to meet minimum academic eligibility requirements instead of sparking his intellectual curiosity that would deepen his school connectedness, fuel his love of learning, and expand his academic self-concept. Regardless of the rationale, such diverging treatment revealed Dee's perceived partial mattering to his teachers.

In sum, participants perceived that Black boys mattered at County, but only partially, and mainly for their athletic prowess. Although participants benefited from athletic participation and garnered positive regard from teachers, teacher supports were transactional. Teachers helped athletes during their respective athletic season but lessened supports during the remainder of the year. Participants questioned whether or not teachers cared or believed Black boys mattered enough to extend the effort required to support them in inferring their significance or their comprehensive mattering in other domains.

DISCUSSION

This qualitative study sought to determine how a group of Black boys at one school perceived their mattering. Particularly, we set out to explore how anti-Black racism influenced interpersonal encounters and thus compelled Black boys to infer their marginal mattering (e.g., being perceived as a threat, worthy of hypercontrol) and partial mattering (e.g., counting for their athletic prowess and little else). Participants' interactions with some teachers and non-Black and Black peers suggest how County High School upheld systems of oppression, particularly anti-Black racism, through relational practices. Anti-Black logics, which appeared in school encounters diminished the boys' perceived mattering and self-concepts. Participants' marginal mattering emerged via teachers' discriminatory speech, peer microaggressions, and intraracial tensions. In terms of their partial mattering, the boys involved in sports integrated discourses held with teachers and peers into perceptions of what being a Black student athlete meant. Accordingly, these interactions elucidated their inferred mattering for their athletic skills and contributions and not for their academic prowess. As such, participants maneuvered racial and gendered stereotypes of anti-intellectual athletes when formulating their self-concepts.

Findings align with prior work that shows how schools that uphold systemic oppression reproduce disparate treatment for Black boys and men by rendering the nexus of Blackness and "boyness" problematic (Brooms, 2019; Bryan, 2020; Dumas & Nelson, 2016; Ellis et al., 2018; Howard, 2014; Rios, 2011). Findings here extend such notions by revealing that when racist encounters occur and go unacknowledged by teachers or administrators, Black boys infer their insignificance or their non-mattering (seen here as marginal mattering) within schools, a feat which diminishes their self-concepts.

When participants mattered in ways deemed positive, it was for feats associated with racialized "gender scripts" (see Howard, 2012) and cultural expectations of Black masculinity, seen here as athletics. Findings here align with earlier assertions about the ways school-based Black masculinity is bound to athletic outputs that supersede their academic and other talents (Shifrer, Pearson, Muller, & Wilkinson, 2015). With sports, coaches could control Black boys' supposed hypermasculine, aggressive behavior on the field. Off the field, teachers strategically deployed academic supports to keep Black boys playing and keep their physicality contained through "productive" means. A crucial problem was that participants were not supported to matter to themselves, to their peers, or to their school broadly, in ways other than as "athletes" or "just entertainment" as Denzel noted.

Institutional priorities were also key in sustaining arrangements that conditionalized the worth of Black athletic boys who partially mattered. When the athletic teams won, it was due to the outputs of mainly Black boys. Athletic victories also improved County's spirit, its brand, and its image. This finding harkens Donnor's (2005) work on institutional interest convergence that govern the experiences of Black student athletes on intercollegiate football programs.

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Importantly, the present study was of Black boys' school-based mattering, mindful of social moderating factors at the nexus of race, gender, nationality, and economic marginalization. As noted, mattering is domain-specific, and as such participants' mattering to family or to neighborhood peers likely mediated the boys' desires to exert effort to behave in ways that would augment their school mattering (e.g., my family relies on me to take care of siblings, or even athletically excel). Lacking the opportunity to matter in other ways at school, the external or even internal pressure Black boys feel to play sports comes into sharper relief; the boys sought to fulfill a need to matter in school through whatever avenues offered (see Walseth, 2006). Yet, they missed opportunities to comprehensively matter (Carey, 2019), a notion that focuses on the "multiple, not singular, ways they matter, are significant, and are essential in society and their schools" (p. 383). Such "predictable, nonrobust, limited, and limiting" (Carey, 2019, p. 389) portrayals, and such "static identities" (Stevenson, 2004) bounded Black boys' self-concepts to what they can do with their bodies instead of all else they could do, or just be.

Findings extend adolescent mattering research (see Marshall, 2004; Tucker et al., 2010) by including a close attention to how systemic oppression appeared through racial and gender biases and stereotypes. Black boys had to form self-concepts, based on their mattering, through layers of historically-rooted, systemic oppression in ways that their non-Black peers did not. In sum, findings show the remarkable burden systemic racism places on adolescent Black boys; they are developmentally tasked to form positive self-concepts within schools that conditionalize their worth (see Rogers, 1959), reify their social unacceptability, and keep them at the margins.

Like the Black boys Rogers and Way (2016) called "resisters," participants in the current study defied racial stereotypes while observing racial discriminatory patterns at school. Findings also show how participants observed their friends from economically and racially subjugated sections of the city "accommodate" and perpetuate racial stereotypes (Rogers & Way, 2016). They could have done so to rebel against microaggressions from teachers and peers who stigmatized them, made them feel insignificant, and thus reified their marginal mattering.

Other participants perceived themselves as "exceptions" (Rogers & Way, 2016) to racial stereotypes, a feature seen in boys from the county and those from West African immigrant families. However, all boys, with the exception of Sa(man)tha, who revealed evidence of gender nonconformity, endorsed masculinist norms or "scripts" (see Howard, 2012). This finding shows the various ways Black boys refuse systemic oppression that appears via stereotypical racial expectations. Yet, without considering how racial *and* gender stereotypes intersect in shaping their mischaracterizations, the boys may have struggled to formulate authentic self-concepts as boys and racialized beings, unfettered by requirements to matter in ways school actors deemed appropriate. Thus, even the boys who resisted stereotypes may have overlooked the manifold forces that prevented their comprehensive mattering.

When they resisted their marginal mattering by refusing Black boy stereotypes, they became pitted against their same race peers, who may have been from different locales. In creating distance from each other, they fragmented elements of themselves (e.g., closely scrutinized their behaviors) as a mechanism to matter more to those within their schools. While this phenomena was quite evidenced in relations between Black boys from the county area and those from the city, Black boys from immigrant families also distanced themselves from U.S.-born African American boys from non-immigrant families. In doing so, Black boys were wary of each other, siloed off culturally and ethnically, and were unlikely to build cross-cultural/ethnic racial affinity coalitions or even friendships. This finding reveals the racial and ethnic politics that underscore how and why youth stand in relationship to Blackness in diverse ways. It also shows how important it is that stakeholders foster relationships between U.S.-born Black youth and immigrant Black youth from across the African diaspora to ensure they matter to each other (Harushimana & Awokoya, 2011; Watson & Knight-Manuel, 2017).

IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Similar to the usefulness of "mattering" for spotlighting challenges facing racialized communities through Black Lives Matter movement projects, social-psychological mattering holds ample promise for highlighting the impact of systemic racism on adolescents' lives (Carey et al., 2021). Mattering offers stakeholders another entry point into how adolescents build self-concepts within their world(s) by perceiving their value, worth, and significance to others. For instance, while belonging appears in the literature on sports (see Walseth,

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2006), few studies take up mattering in school and community athletic programs. Given that racially and ethnically marginalized cisgender boys participate in athletics at high levels, far more research is needed on athletic participation at the nexus of mattering, race, and gender.

Given the exotification and hyper-desirability of mixed-raced bodies in society and media (see Newman, 2019), schools can be contested terrains for who matters more based not only on race, but also on skin color, hair texture, and body features. We did have a biracial participant, Steven; but, neither our protocols nor analysis considered linkages between masculinity and skin color or phenotype. However, we believe colorism and multiracial identities should underscore future research on mattering and the self-concepts of Black adolescent boys.

Mattering is a relational phenomenon. Thus, implications urge stakeholders to address the roles that schools and individuals play in addressing relationships—to others and to institutions—that make Black boys' matter in certain ways. We summon educators, counselors, and other school-based service providers to radically affirm Black boys as robust beings who can do more and be more than what is available in static societal scripts. To achieve this comprehensive mattering, teachers must foster positive student relationships that are critical of unchecked systemic racism. This includes abandoning strategies that reinforce dominant White ideologies, such as those focused on "equality," commonly seen as "colorblind racism" rather than "equity" or "anti-racism" (Bell, Soslau, & Wilson, 2022; Farinde-Wu, Alvarez, & Allen-Handy, 2020). When educators adopt "colorblind" stances, they fail to address biases and stereotypes that reinforce Black youths' marginal and partial mattering (see Carey, 2019, 2020; Carey, Farinde-Wu, Milner, & Delale-O'Conner, 2018; Farinde-Wu et al., 2020).

School actors need to exert more efforts toward not just resisting biases and stereotypes but also creating schools that center relational teaching and trust with Black boys. Relational teaching occurs through gestures like reaching out to Black boys, establishing common interests, and advocating on their behalf (Nelson, 2016). Black adolescent boys with school-based trauma would need to revisit relational possibilities with their educators. Establishing "relational trust" (Brooms, 2021), which is contingent on educators and counselors respecting Black boys and displaying a deep knowledge of and regard for them, would foster Black boys' belief in the school's ability to help them achieve college goals and other postsecondary aims (see Carey, 2021).

Comprehensive mattering urges an existential possibility for Black boys that is aspirational. It calls upon a speculative imaginary for what could be by centering Black educational "possibility" (see Warren, 2021) and imagining Black boys outside of rigid dichotomies that uphold deficit story telling or just challenge it (Brown, 2021). As a relational phenomenon, comprehensive mattering would compel principals, classroom teachers, and clinicians to radically alter school policies and practices, so that Black boys can perceive their value and worth in far more expansive and affirming ways. Black boys who refuse mistreatment from peers and educators would not garner penalty for insubordination. Instead, they would be supported and celebrated for engaging optimal resistance strategies that contribute to not just their survival, but rather their liberation (Ward & Robinson-Wood, 2006).

Educating for comprehensive mattering would require teachers and counselors to deploy critical literacies and texts that challenge widely shared promulgations of damaged "Black males" to widen Black boys' abilities to critique and reimagine their worlds (Byrd, Washington, Williams, & Lloyd, 2021). Comprehensive mattering points educators and counselors toward the pedagogies and counseling practices that foster liberatory "Black boy joy" (Carey, 2020; Gilmore, 2021) and deepen boys' self-awareness and sociopolitical understandings to inspire them to actualize their whole selves. Educators, even those who work with adolescents, would center play and creative expression in the classroom as a means to foster Black boys' ability to see other ways—especially unthought of ways—for thinking and being in the world.

Centering comprehensive mattering is a radically affirming turn toward building the school-based relational domains that will contribute to Black adolescent boys and other racially marginalized groups forming more robust self-concepts. This type of mattering offers stakeholders the power to change relational dynamics between Black youth and school actors through the reimagining of processes and structures that limit outcomes for them. Supporting adolescents in doing so answers the invitation Black Lives Matter has brought forth—to change the world for Black youth by ensuring that they know they matter in all ways and everywhere.

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