

COUNSELING GROUPS FOR AT-RISK, ETHNIC MINORITY
MALE ADOLESCENTS

A DISSERTATION
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY
OF
THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF APPLIED AND PROFESSIONAL PSYCHOLOGY
OF
RUTGERS,
THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY
BY
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IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
OF
DOCTOR OF PSYCHOLOGY

NEW BRUNSWICK, NEW JERSEY

MAY 2016

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GROUPS FOR AT-RISK, ETHNIC MINORITY MALE ADOLESCENTS

Abstract

Youth violence is a major issue throughout this country, particularly with respect to ethnic minority males. There is a critical need for the development of counseling interventions for this population (Guerra & Smith, 2006). The current study developed a manual specifically designed for interventions with at-risk ethnic minority male adolescents attending middle school, who had been referred for behavioral issues, i.e., fighting, violence and aggression, as well as academic difficulties. It utilized data obtained from interviews with ten former group counselors from the Rutgers Somerset Counseling Program. The counselors were primarily alumni or doctoral students from the Graduate School of Applied and Professional Psychology (GSAPP) at Rutgers University. The qualitative data obtained from interviews were analyzed, utilizing a grounded theory approach (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) to develop themes and suggestions for group interventions and to create the manual describing the structure of group sessions. The interviews addressed all components of the counseling groups, including interactions with other adults in the school; the referral process; group screening; exclusion criteria; the structure of the groups; co-counselor dynamics; building rapport within the group; activities; rules; behavioral management of group sessions; the use of rewards and incentives; and other core topics, such as school and community violence, and gangs. Study participants also provided descriptions of crisis interventions and conflict resolutions conducted within the groups. Interview data were used to construct the Manual for Counseling Groups for At-Risk, Ethnic Minority Male Adolescents. In addition, a number of important themes emerged, including the need for violence prevention interventions for at-risk adolescents; gang prevention interventions; cultural competency in the development of groups for ethnic minority adolescents; the value of

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providing individual counseling in addition to group counseling; the importance of developing positive relationships with the boys' families; and the role of group supervision for the counselors. Interviews underscored the value of comprehensive guidelines for work with this population. Implications for future research, program development, policy, counselors, schools, families, and specific implications for training were also discussed. The manual may also be utilized by other programs in schools to provide group counseling interventions for other at-risk adolescent males.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

There are so many people who have been instrumental in this process and without whom this would never have been written. First, I want to thank my Lord and Creator, Jesus Christ, for putting this desire on my heart and surrounding me with the support necessary to finish. My earthly father, Leopoldo Gonzales, for always believing that it could happen and having faith when I did not anymore. Thank you to my mother, Marykate Gonzales, Psy.D., my real life role model, for showing me my career path, mentoring throughout, and remembering what all of this feels like. Thank you to my hermanita, Gabrielle Gonzales, for walking next to me throughout this journey, through GSAPP and life, as my accountability partner and the worlds' best, best friend. My brother, Liam Gonzales, for always being willing to listen and provide a perspective for the world outside of psychology. Thank you to my fiancé, Jonathan Swanson, for supporting me, being excited about my dream and making it ours.

Thank you to my chairs who made this dream into a reality. Nancy Boyd-Franklin who not only guided me through this program but through this dissertation, editing, encouraging me, and praying through every step of the way; I am so thankful for her unfailing support and the Bible verses she sent me each time we talked. Thank you to Karen Haboush for her continued support, encouragement, edits and perspective throughout the process. This is the most supportive dissertation team I have ever seen and I continually thank the Lord for them. Also thank you to my unofficial "student advisor" Jenny Jones for giving me that extra push all throughout this process.

Finally, thank you to all of the counselors who made time to speak with me, share their experiences, and work with these students and help to provide support and suggestions for the counselors who will next work with this population.

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Chapter I: Introduction

Youth violence is a major public health problem (David-Ferdon & Hammond, 2008), and prevention efforts directed at this population have been a major focus of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention for over 20 years. Statistics showing a decline in the adolescent violent crime rate in recent years are at odds with the public perception that this population has become increasingly more violent (Collishaw, Maughan, Goodman, & Pickles, 2004; Johnson, 2006). Once patterns of aggression, particularly for males, begin in adolescence, the trajectory becomes increasingly negative. For example, students may develop a consistent pattern of delinquency that becomes increasingly difficult to stop (Broidy et al., 2003). Reports of school violence in middle and high schools have engendered much concern, and are particularly disturbing. According to The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2015): “In 2012, there were about 749,200 nonfatal violent victimizations at school among students 12 to 18 years of age” (p. 1).

Batista (2009) highlighted the continuity in levels of aggression and antisocial behavior over time (Farrington, 2005; Lochman, Powell, Whidby, & Fitzgerald, 2006; McMahon & Wells, 1998). These behaviors are often targeted in schools due to the impact on peer interactions, and academic and socioemotional learning (Lochman et al., 2006). Schools are likely to respond to these behaviors quickly with discipline referrals and consequences; however, students are rarely provided with interventions to ameliorate these negative behaviors within the school system (Leaf & Keys, 2005). The value of such interventions would extend far beyond the walls of the school. Research has demonstrated that despite the goal of the juvenile justice system to lower recidivism rates, once individuals enter the system they are increasingly likely to reenter the system as an

adult. Therefore, taking actions that would prevent adolescents from entering the system would have wide benefits to the individual as well as society (Kirk & Sampson, 2013; Lipsey, Howell, Kelly, Chapman, & Carver, 2010; Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 2014; Ramchand, Morral, & Becker, 2009). Appropriate pairings of interventions, targeted techniques, and knowledge of the community is important for effective interventions (Durlak & DuPre, 2008). This study focused on the Rutgers Somerset Counseling Program, which targeted problem areas, such as violence prevention, as well as helped at-risk middle school students to obtain broader skill acquisition.

The Rutgers Somerset Counseling Program

The Rutgers Somerset Counseling Program (the “Program”) was created in 1993 by Dr. Nancy Boyd-Franklin and Dr. Brenna Bry to provide mental health services to students in an underserved middle school (Batista, 2009; Boyd-Franklin & Bry, 2000). The Program was a partnership between the Graduate School of Applied and Professional Psychology (GSAPP) at Rutgers University in Piscataway, New Jersey, and the Franklin Middle School, Franklin Township, Somerset, New Jersey. It offered both individual counseling in the school conducted by doctoral psychology students from GSAPP, and home-based family therapy for the youth and their families. Supervision was provided by the directors of the program and other licensed psychologists. Middle school students in the seventh and eighth grade were referred by their teachers, guidance counselors, and school administrators, and were later screened by the counselors in the Program under the direction of Dr. Nancy Boyd-Franklin. In addition to providing weekly group supervision, Dr. Boyd-Franklin taught a course, Treatment of At-Risk Ethnic Minority Adolescents, that offered counselors further training.

The school's issues with student behavior had become increasingly severe over time. According to Batista (2009):

[The] rates of fights, detentions, and suspensions because of "insubordination" and physical altercations have risen exponentially over the last ten years.... There has been an upsurge in gang activity, physical aggression, and violence within the community that has manifested itself within the schools. (p. 41)

In response to requests from the school's guidance counselors and administrators concerned about this threat, the Rutgers Somerset Counseling Program adapted its services in 2001 to offer school-based group counseling as well as individual counseling to those students at risk for violence in the school and community, and likely to experience academic failure.

Batista (2009) documented the evolution of the Program and produced a treatment manual for the groups of female adolescents. Literature suggests that interventions be designed separately for boys and girls, particularly when counseling adolescents from diverse ethnic minority backgrounds (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995; Mahalik, Levine Coley, McPherran Lombardi, Doyle Lynch, Markowitz, & Jaffee, 2013; Spencer, 2009; Sue & Sue, 2012; Schonert-Reichl, Offer, & Howard, 2013; Tomada & Schneider, 1997; Wilson & Deane, 2012; Zimmer-Gembeck, Geiger, & Crick, 2005). Interviews of counselors from the Program regarding their experiences in providing violence prevention groups for boys were conducted for this study in order to produce a treatment manual that could be utilized in the future by counselors in the Program. After the data for this study were collected and analyzed, changes in the school district resulted in the end of the Program in 2014. It is the hope of the principal investigator that the suggestions of the counselors and the manual produced from this study can be utilized by programs within other school

systems to provide needed group counseling services to at-risk ethnic minority male adolescents.

In Somerset, New Jersey, available data suggested many implications inherent in the increasing rates of student aggression and violence. The adolescent males served by the Program were not only inclined to fight, but were praised for it by their peers; taught how to be aggressors; encouraged to fight back at slight provocations; and had become primed to see these actions as a way of life (Batista, 2009). In trying to combat this peer supported and encouraged behavior, one of the greatest challenges was helping to motivate students to stop fighting.

Examining the source of aggression, and developing resources to serve increasingly at-risk adolescents, demanded that multiple theoretical perspectives be considered. The inclusion of cognitive behavioral techniques, process groups, and culturally competent methods would help mitigate the adolescent males' aggressive behavior and facilitate the retention of the new skills learned in the treatment intervention.

Target Population. Franklin Township, the location of the Program, is a diverse community in terms of race, ethnicity and socioeconomic indicators. The student population largely consists of those from ethnic and racial minority backgrounds. The demographic composition of the middle school was 48% Black, 24% White, 16% Hispanic and 13% Asian (Batista, 2009). The majority of the students referred to the Program were primarily Black (African American, African, and Caribbean) and Latino (Puerto Rican, Dominican or Honduran), most of whom were from families with a lower socioeconomic status than the community average (Batista, 2009).

The Treatment Approach. Counselors in the Program provided both individual counseling and violence prevention counseling groups in order to provide the maximum therapeutic benefit to students. Groups were composed of six to eight boys with two counselors. In addition, each counselor provided individual counseling for three or four group members. Although this study focused primarily on the group component, the importance of individual counseling cannot be understated as the privacy enabled students to confide in counselors and share personal concerns that they would not be likely to expose in a group setting. In addition, since many of the boys in the groups were referred for acting-out behavior, including fighting and other forms of aggression and violence in the school and community, the special connection each adolescent formed with his individual counselor was often utilized in group sessions to help to resolve arguments or issues that developed between the group members. It is important to note that, in addition to violence prevention as a focus of the groups, the students often discussed other topics that were prominent in their lives, including relationships, their families, and dreams for the future.

In a screening process, the two group co-counselors assessed whether a student referred by school staff was appropriate for the group. Further consultation, with the Program Director and the supervision group (the peer component consisting of all counselors in the Program), was conducted before the student was admitted to the group. The student's response to the two co-counselors was observed during the screening interview by the Director and supervision group, so that they could ascertain which of the two co-counselors would also work with the student in individual counseling.

This study documented the experiences of the counselors in the referral and screening process and the strategies that they found most useful in conducting their

groups. In addition, the treatment manual developed for these violence prevention counseling groups (see Appendix D), details the various group interventions and may be utilized by counselors working with similar groups of at-risk youth. The combination of the training process, supervision, and the counselor peer dynamic which allowed for enhanced collaboration, created a process that not only helped the counselors involved, but facilitated the objective of helping at-risk ethnic minority male adolescents.

Culturally Competent Interventions

Culturally competent and developmentally appropriate interventions are crucial to the appropriate implementation and retention of learned skills when working with clients (Bean, Perry, & Bedell, 2001; Corey, 2011; Griner & Smith, 2006; Huey, Tilley, Jones, & Smith, 2014; Imel, Baldwin, Atkins, Owen, Baardseth, & Wampold, 2011; Sue & Sue, 2012; Swan, Schottelkorb, & Lancaster; 2015). Cultural competency was a strong value in the Program, particularly given the cultural diversity of the participants and their families. Specific stressors for ethnic minority adolescents, and the ways to best target these areas of concern, need to be identified for those who work with this population, particularly since such stressors have strong correlations with later negative life outcomes, as well as behavioral concerns in school (Crean, 2004; Frydenberg, Eacott, & Clark, 2008; Gaylord-Harden & Cunningham, 2009; Gaylord-Harden, Elmore, Campbell, & Wethington, 2011; Mazzaferro, Murray, Ness, Bass, Tyus, & Cook, 2006; Mrug & Windle, 2009; Rafnsson, Jonsson, & Windle, 2006; Vera, et al., 2011; White & Farrell, 2006; Zimmer-Gembeck & Skinner, 2008). Positive ethnic identity, strong group support, and learned coping skills have been found to help these youth to succeed (Spencer & Tinsley, 2008; Vera, et al., 2011).

Chapter II: Review of the Literature

Introduction

Ethnic minority youth, who formed the majority of the students served by the Program, face unique challenges in the schools and communities in the United States. To address these issues, it is necessary that service providers working with ethnic minority youth have cultural competency. This review of the literature will discuss research on such issues as the racial disparities experienced by ethnic minority youth within the schools, including the discipline and achievement gap; and the prevalence of aggression, violence and gang involvement, giving rise to the disturbing national statistics on violence and the high homicide rate among this population. Research on strategies which have proved successful with this population are presented. These include: (a) violence prevention programs, such as Sankofa (Hines & Sutton, 1998); (b) interventions and treatment implementation in the school, stressing the importance of engagement as a protective factor, (c) groups for adolescents, and (d) the use of Motivational Interviewing (Miller & Rollnick, 2012). Policy implications will follow.

Working With Ethnic Minority Youth

Cultural competency, including awareness of specific cultural differences, has been shown to create a significant positive difference in outcomes when counseling ethnic minority clients (Singh, Williams, & Spears, 2002; Sue, 1998). A counselor's awareness of internal biases, culture, perceptions of others, and how those experiences interact is crucial to the treatment process with clients from different cultural backgrounds (Boyd-Franklin, 2003; Boyd-Franklin, & Bry, 2000; Guerra & Smith, 2006; Sue & Sue, 2012). It is particularly important that professionals are aware of the systemic

racism that has had a significant impact on the lives of ethnic minority youth (Franklin, Boyd-Franklin, & Kelly, 2006; McIntosh, 1998).

Due to the history of psychological trauma and the ongoing experience of racism, many members of ethnic minority groups are suspicious of helping organizations, the government, schools, and health and mental health services (Boyd-Franklin, 2003; 2010). Healthy cultural suspicion, a coping device which has helped many ethnic minorities confronting racism, needs to be acknowledged and understood by counseling professionals when it impacts an ability to receive vital assistance (Boyd-Franklin, 2003; 2010). Treatment modalities designed for work with these populations are indicated for outcomes to be successful:

The multisystems model (Boyd-Franklin, 2003) reminds us that many individuals and families are deeply embedded in a contextual reality that may include poverty and experiences with racism. These individuals and families, who may have many needs for concrete services—especially if they are poor and/or homeless—may feel particularly vulnerable to the intrusions of multisystem bureaucracies. (Boyd-Franklin, 2010, p. 76)

A professional's awareness of the possible presence of healthy cultural suspicion is crucial when working with ethnic minority youth, some of whom may react instinctively, but not fully understand the basis of their reaction to the suggestion of counseling or therapy as a way to help them in school (Boyd-Franklin, 2003; Franklin, Boyd-Franklin, & Kelly; 2006). In addition, many family members of African American youth may have experienced discrimination within the school system when they were students themselves, and thus may bring their own suspicions when services are offered (Boyd-Franklin & Bry, 2000).

One important aspect of cross-cultural treatment, particularly with African American and Latino clients, is an element of joining or establishing therapeutic rapport, the “use of self” (Boyd-Franklin, 2003). According to Boyd-Franklin and Bry (2000), the use of self may “include the ability to acknowledge racial or cultural differences openly and nondefensively, and to discuss areas of common ground” (p. 150). Although the students served by the Program represented many different cultures, the majority were African American and Latino. Therefore, a brief description of the treatment of clients from those two groups is presented below.

African American Youth and Families. The African American population in this country is very diverse. Ways in which differences manifest include “geographic origin, acculturation, religious background, skin color, socioeconomic status, and in the implementation of strategies employed to cope with racism and discrimination” (Hines & Boyd-Franklin, 2005, p. 87). African American male adolescents and their parents may express fears about their safety in their schools and communities. Adolescents, particularly males, may also experience racial profiling and other forms of discrimination by the police (Boyd-Franklin, Franklin, & Toussaint, 2001), a concern commonly raised by Black adolescents in individual and group counseling which helps to fuel mistrust of those perceived to be authority figures, including school staff and counselors, as well as the police. Clinical scholars, such as Gardere (1999) and Boyd-Franklin et al. (2001), have offered suggestions for professionals treating African American youth and their families about ways to address racial profiling and police brutality when those issues are introduced by clients.

Violence between peers and gangs in their communities are topics that have salience in the lives of some African American and Latino youth (Curry, Decker, &

Egley, 2002; Hanna, Hanna, & Keys, 1999). Although gangs may be viewed almost exclusively as fomenters of violence within communities, commonly overlooked is the lure gangs offer by conveying a sense of family and belonging to youth. Once trust has been established with a counselor in individual or group counseling, these sensitive issues may be brought up by adolescents (Boyd-Franklin et al., 2001).

Many African American youth have extended family structures including grandmothers, grandfathers, aunts, uncles, and cousins in addition to parents and siblings. Some of these extended family members may even include friends and neighbors. Although these people are not related by blood, they may nonetheless be considered a part of the family (Boyd-Franklin, 2003), live in the adolescents' homes, or be a very significant presence in their lives (Boyd-Franklin, 2003; Hines & Boyd-Franklin, 2005; McGoldrick, Giordano, & Garcia-Preto, 2005). Once a rapport with the African American student is established, counselors may inquire about such figures. It may be helpful in some instances for counselors to reach out to the family members who are helping to raise the adolescent (Boyd-Franklin, 2003; Boyd-Franklin & Bry, 2000). In many African American families, spirituality or religion may be important values and church attendance may be a regular feature of their lives. Some youth from very religious families may experience family conflict when pulling away from their religious practices (Boyd-Franklin, 2003; Hines & Boyd-Franklin, 2005). It is also common for families to have strong spiritual beliefs in the absence of formal religious practice.

Latino Youth and Families. There are many countries with origins that are Latino or Hispanic, all of which have their own culture. Garcia-Preto (2005) has identified these groups as including: "Cubans, Chicanos, Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, Argentineans, Columbians, Dominicans, Brazilians, Guatemalans, Costa Ricans,

Nicaraguans, Salvadorians, and all other nationalities that comprise South America, Central America, and the [Spanish-speaking] Caribbean” (p. 153). Thus, clinicians treating Latino adolescents must be aware of the many differences existing within this population. Some Latino adolescents’ families have been in the United States for many years and have become very acculturated. Others may have parents and grandparents who are more recent immigrants with limited or no fluency in English. Their inability to communicate with their children’s teachers and other school personnel may present a significant challenge to such families (Boyd-Franklin & Bry, 2000). In addition, children and adolescents often learn English once they start attending school and take on the role of translators for family members who do not speak English. This arrangement can be problematic as it reverses the generational boundaries. Furthermore, as adolescents become more acculturated into American society, conflicts may arise with parents when children deviate from attitudes and behaviors, such as *respeto* (respect for parents), that are important components of their culture of origin (Garcia-Preto, 2005).

Although Latino adolescents, if born in this country, are citizens, they may have parents and other family members who are undocumented. Such family members, who have no legal immigration status in the United States (Garcia-Preto, 2005), may have fears of deportation. This can create many challenges for children who share their family’s fears and often are forced to live with the burden of keeping the family’s secret (Garcia-Preto, 2005).

Like African American families, Latinos often have large extended families that include many relatives, both in this country and in their country of origin, which act as a strength for many individuals and families. As with African Americans, spirituality and/or religion is a prevalent value. These beliefs may be important in the lives of some

Latino adolescents who may attend religious services with their families; others, who do not share their parents' views on religion, may be in conflict with them (Garcia-Preto, 2005). Another commonality between many African American and Latino youth, particularly males, arise from the disparities they also face in schools, including the discipline and achievement gap.

Racial and Ethnic Disparities

The Discipline and Achievement Gap. There is both an achievement and a discipline gap affecting students of ethnic minority backgrounds (Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010). According to Gregory et al. (2010):

National and state data show consistent patterns of Black disproportionality in school discipline over the past 30 years, specifically in suspension (McCarthy & Hoge, 1987; Raffaele Mendez, Knoff, & Ferron, 2002), expulsion (KewelRamani, Gilbertson, Fox, & Provasnik, 2007), and office discipline referrals (Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002). (p. 1)

Black, Latino, and (although not represented in the current study) American Indian students are disproportionately suspended, or disciplined more harshly than their white counterparts, a disparity also present in the academic context (Gregory et al., 2010). A difficulty in assessing the comparative salience of these factors lies in the inability to distinguish cause and effect. In other words, which came first—did missing school or class due to disciplinary concerns result in academic difficulties, or were the academic problem indicators a consequence of nonattendance attributable to disciplinary sanctions (Gregory et al., 2010). Either way, the overlap highlights the importance of targeting interventions for such students (Gregory et al., 2010).

An additional factor that may jeopardize academic achievement for ethnic minority students is that the prevalence of low expectations for their performance may act as a self-fulfilling prophecy. In assessing the impact of a social-psychological intervention on the writing grade of African American students, Cohen, Garcia, Apfel, and Master (2006) found that students' fears about confirming negative stereotypes about their race could impact their achievement, but when given a reaffirming task they were then able to significantly raise their grade.

Jones (2013) assessed four years of longitudinal data from a high school program involving low-achieving students to view the interaction between discipline, achievement, and eventual high school completion. The study found that early academic achievement predicted future grade point average (GPA), and that discipline had a minimal impact on eventual high school success (Jones, 2013). Disparities were prominent among students who did not graduate from high school with an increased likelihood of higher unemployment rates, decreased earning power, and future incarceration rates, when compared with their peers who had attained high school diplomas or the equivalency (Ikomi, 2010; Jones, 2013).

Although no one factor prevents dropout, a variety of factors, including proactive support, structural change, and an awareness of behavioral trends, can have a positive impact on students' continued matriculation (Bryk & Thum, 1989). Both race and socioeconomic status have been found to be related to educational outcomes (Bryk & Thum, 1989). Bryk and Thum (1989) identified students who are most in danger of dropping out as: "Hispanics and Blacks, lower socioeconomic status (SES) students, and students from households with few educational resources." Due to the negative

correlating side effects, and the relative ease with which students likely to drop out may be identified, it is crucial to provide additional support for those students.

Racial Disparities in the Classification of Services. A disproportionate number of students who are male and of ethnic minority backgrounds are classified by child study teams (Skiba et al., 2002). Haycock (2001) cited the importance of focusing on teaching and curriculum, which needs to be addressed on a systemic level in order to be effective with students. One particular issue impacting Latinos arises out of the enormous diversity existing within this group. Despite their status as the largest ethnic minority group in the United States, there is a paucity of research, programs, treatment studies, and preventative measures directed toward this population and, given the diversity existing within the Latino community, as discussed above, such programs that are designed for Latinos may not have been tested on, or appropriate for, individuals from different countries of origin (Hall, 2001; Miranda, Bernal, Lau, Kohn, Hwang, & LaFromboise, 2005; Miranda, Nakamura, & Bernal, 2003; Rosselló, Bernal, & Rivera-Medina, 2012). Ensuring that programming, treatment, and support services are applicable and successful with the particular population is crucial to the work of helping professionals.

Vacek, Coyle, and Vera (2010) found that life satisfaction is important to balance out life stressors, particularly for ethnic minority youth who may be experiencing more traditional stress exposure on a daily basis. A source of life stress affecting Black and Latino youth disproportionally is the prevalence of violence and the consequent homicide rates in their schools and communities.

Violence Involving Youth and Ethnic Minorities. *Statistics.* The statistics on youth violence and homicide in the United States are disturbing. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2012) reported:

In 2010, 4,828 young people ages 10 to 24 were victims of homicide—an average of 13 each day. Homicide is the leading cause of death for young people ages 15 to 24 years old. Among homicide victims 10 to 24 years old in 2010, 86% (4,171) were male and 14% (657) were female. Among homicide victims ages 10 to 24 years old in 2010, 82% were killed with a firearm. (p.1)

David-Ferndon, Simon, Spivak, Gorman-Smith, Savannah, Listenbee, and Iskander (2015) have identified youth violence as being especially dangerous to ethnic minority male adolescents, particularly in terms of homicide rates:

Males and racial/ethnic minorities experience the greatest burden of youth violence. Rates of homicide deaths are approximately six times higher among males aged 10-24 years (11.7 per 100,000) than among females. Rates among non-Hispanic black youths (27.6 per 100,000) and among Hispanic youth (6.3 per 100,000) are 13 and three times higher respectively, than among non-Hispanic white youths (2.1 per 100,000). (p. 171)

The homicide rates among ethnic minorities were revealed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2012) to be especially shocking: “Among 10 to 24 year olds, homicide is the leading cause of death for African Americans; the second leading cause of death for Hispanics; and the third leading cause of death for American Indians and Alaska Natives” (p.1). These statistics underscore the importance of understanding the nature of aggression and violence in the lives of at-risk ethnic minority youth, particularly males, so that interventions may be developed to address this critical issue.

Aggression and Violence

Aggression may be understood as a mixture of assertion, temperament, and impulsivity. Aggression, aggressive behavior and violence have an escalating trajectory

that can often be differentiated in males and females (Kellam, Rebok, Ialongo, & Mayer, 1994; Kennedy, 2005). In a study of aggression that started when children were in elementary school and continued until they were in middle school, Kellam et al. (1994) found that increased aggression early on predicts later aggression. Their findings suggested that although aggression may be reduced, it is continuous over a lifespan and thus an enduring trait (Kellam et al., 1994).

Peer relationships are an important factor in an individual's manifestations of aggressive tendencies. Positive friends are correlated with decreased aggression. Thus, interventions targeting aggressive youth may benefit from focusing on the qualities of the youth's associates. The biological aspect between connecting gender and aggression was supported by Kennedy (2005), who reported that while aggression triggers dopamine in the male brain, it does not have the same effect in the female brain.

In a study of 979 second- to fourth-grade students, Werner and Crick (2004) examined maladaptive peer relationships and the development of adolescent aggression over the course of a year. They found that with adolescent males, peer rejection and friends' physical aggression were directly correlated with increases in the youth's physical aggression the following year (Werner & Crick, 2004). The results indicated that students who acquired more aggressive peers evidenced a socialization effect by gravitating toward more aggressive behaviors themselves (Werner & Crick, 2004).

Similarly, Beauchaine, Strassberg, Kees, and Drabick (2002) found that aggression, particularly in males, is the behavior most often responsible for child mental health referrals. Consistent with Kellam et al.'s (1994) characterization of aggression as a trait, Beauchaine et al. indicated that early childhood aggression often continues through childhood with a greater risk for later delinquent behavior (Beauchaine et al., 2002).

These findings were also confirmed by Sprague, Verona, Kalkhoff, and Kilmer (2011). Sprague et al. (2011) investigated the influence of stress on aggressive behavior and executive functioning in a study comparing a sample of 51 adults in a low-income Midwestern area with a sample of 181 college students in a similar community. Having selected samples with such divergent life circumstances, the authors hypothesized that different types of daily stressors would be experienced by the samples. Findings indicated that the stressors involved in daily living, particularly those arising out of lower socioeconomic status leading to concerns about family finances, were seen to have an influence on aggression. Perceived stress was more strongly associated with aggressive behavior in those with low executive functioning (Sprague et al., 2011).

The impact of lowered executive functioning on increased aggression among adolescents is particularly significant in light of the developmental stage at which executive functioning occurs (Blakemore, & Choudhury, 2006; Sprague et al., 2011). In their examination of changes in the human brain over time by means of functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI), Blakemore and Choudhury (2006) identified a significant growth in white matter in the areas of the frontal cortex during adolescence, indicating that executive functioning increases significantly during this period. Their findings lend support to the theory that an organic link exists between executive functioning, life stressors, and aggression.

Zimmer-Gembeck et al. (2005) performed a 3-year longitudinal study with children from third through sixth grade to look at relational and physical aggression, prosocial behavior, and peer relationships from a perspective that included gender moderation and bidirectional associations. Zimmer-Gembeck et al. (2005) found gender to have the most significant impact on the results. Specifically, with regard to physical

aggression, boys were found to be more physically aggressive throughout all grades; with regard to relational aggression, although there were no gender differences between children at the start of the study, by the sixth grade girls were found to be more relationally aggressive. These findings by Zimmer-Gembeck et al. (2005) highlighted the gender differences between male and female students, particularly during adolescence when executive functioning increases, thus exacerbating such differences (Blakemore & Choudhury, 2006; Maughan, Rowe, Messer, Goodman, & Meltzer, 2004; Sprague et al., 2011). This research indicates the need to target interventions to boys and girls separately, a need addressed in the current study, the product of which is a treatment intervention manual for male adolescents.

Zimmer-Gembeck et al.'s study (2005) confirmed the results of an earlier investigation of relational aggression by Crick and Grotpeter (1995) in which 491 third through sixth grade children in the United States were studied. The results indicated that girls demonstrated more relational aggression than boys. A contrasting result was obtained when a study was performed with Italian children. Tomada and Schneider (1997) looked at peer and teacher nominations for prosocial and aggressive behavior in Italian elementary school students and found that boys scored higher across all measures of aggression. This may indicate that gender differences between physical and relational aggression may be an artifact of American culture, as the popular media tends to present stereotypes of physical aggression as a male domain, i.e., movies featuring martial arts, and relational aggression as a female domain, i.e., the prevalence of "mean girl" characters in movies and television. Either way, aggression is often presented positively in modern American society, with the media, peers, and popular adolescent icons reinforcing this idea (Spencer, 2009).

Sherry (2001) indicated that games that both involve violence against other people or which are more fantasy-related have a stronger correlation to aggression. In addition, the duration of such game playing factors into aggression: the longer the child plays, the more the child is primed for aggressive behavior. This connection would be most evident in an arcade-type situation where there are other people who are available targets for aggression, as opposed to home, especially if parental supervision is present and time limits enforced (Sherry, 2001).

Aggression is an aggregate of temperament, physiology, learned behaviors, social motivation, and a society that may be viewed as glorifying such behavior through omnipresent imagery in the media. Accordingly, in order to be combated, the issue of aggression needs to be addressed through the incorporation of the most integrative approach (Fishman, 1999). Role models need to explain to students how to avoid aggressors, rather than assume that those skills are already known. Society needs to reconcile the conflict between prosocial behavior and a media promoting violence. Families must be part of the process with psychoeducation provided when indicated. School and home environments need to communicate the same message to adolescents concerning the consequences of violence, among which is the destruction of human lives—possibly their own. One method in which increased concerns about violence and aggression have been addressed is in the development of violence prevention programs, such as Sankofa (Hines & Sutton, 1998).

Sankofa Violence Prevention Program. Sankofa is a culturally sensitive, evidence-based, research-driven model for group treatment intervention (Hines & Sutton, 1998). Originally designed for adolescent African American and other ethnic minority youth, this violence prevention program is strength-based, highlighting the importance of

resilience in high-risk situations (Hines & Sutton, 1998). Curriculum topics include goals and values, fighting, stereotypes, personal responsibility, stages of conflict, strengthening of the internal locus of control, exercising of choices, risk assessment, nonviolent resolutions, and the ability to brainstorm additional strategies (Hines & Sutton, 1998). Sankofa, designed to fit easily into the school schedule, incorporates a multimodal version of instruction including didactic instruction, exercises, games, and multimedia suggestions. Many aspects of the Sankofa model (Hines & Sutton, 1998) were integrated into the Counseling Groups for At-Risk, Ethnic Minority Male Adolescents Manual (see Appendix D).

Relationship-based, culturally competent, strengths-oriented programs are crucial to trust building and critical thinking skill development of ethnic minority students in counseling (Hines & Sutton, 1998; McElroy, 2013). McElroy's (2013) qualitative study of youth-based violence prevention programs reinforced the importance of a strengths-based approach to decreasing violence among at-risk youth:

Without strengths-based approaches youth development programs and violence prevention programs, socially marginalized youth that reside in dangerous communities devoid of familial support, positive role modeling, motivation and academic success are ideal candidates for the cradle to prison corridor. Strengths-based community organizations build and develop prosocial, academic, character building and mental health skills that many at-risk youth lack, transforming young men and women of color into sustainable and productive members of the greater society. (p. 21)

He went on to describe the benefits of utilizing the Sankofa manual to address the dissonance created in the school environment for students of color (McElroy, 2013).

Clemons, Wetta-Hall, Jacobson, Chesser, and Moss (2011) highlighted the importance of tailoring violence prevention programs specifically to ethnic minority youth and adolescents. Clemons et al. (2011) similarly utilized the Sankofa framework when constructing their strengths-based program. Their program included involvement of the extended family; providing family training; and using a strengths-based, culturally relevant framework to best incorporate the needs of adolescents. O'Connor and Waddell (2015) formulated a manual designed to prevent negative student involvement, specifically with gangs. Their program highlights a skills-based, family-focused, community-oriented approach. In order to make interventions more culturally relevant for African American students, Talpade and Talpade (2014) identified elements of particular importance to this population, such as addressing race and the racism experienced by students, including shared experiences and group vulnerability. In the view of the authors, a treatment intervention acknowledging the importance of those factors in the students' lives would help them to feel more grounded and connected to the academic environment (Talpade & Talpade, 2014; Berry 2005). Another aspect of youth violence, particularly among ethnic minority youth, has focused on gang involvement.

Gangs and Gang Prevention. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2015) found that gang activity is a factor in many schools in the United States: "In 2011, 18% of students ages 12-18 reported that gangs were present at their school during the school year" (CDC, 2015, p. 1). Hanna et al. (1999) discussed the appeal of gang membership to youth, including a sense of family and "therapeutic factors such as universality, group cohesiveness, and catharsis [that] can occasionally be found in gang membership" (p. 401). These authors noted that by acknowledging the positive aspects of gangs, students were then more able to open themselves up to discussing the problematic

aspects of gang membership. Curry et al. (2002) discussed the relationship between delinquency and reported gang involvement, as well as the differences in levels of involvement with gangs. Dishion, Nelson, and Yasui (2005) found that academic failure, as evidenced by poor grades, and antisocial behavior in youth attending middle school, predicted future gang involvement. These researchers stressed the importance of formulating interventions to target these at-risk youth (Dishion et al., 2005).

Farrell, Mehari, Mays, Sullivan, & Le (2015) found that many prevention programs in current use appear successful initially, but have been demonstrated to have limited long-term impact. The investigators highlighted the importance of relevance, skill acquisition, and applicability so that violence prevention skills once learned would be retained. DeLucia-Waack, Kalodner, and Riva (2013) created a handbook of group counseling interventions within a psychodynamic process which targeted youth who are gang involved. The guidelines incorporated the importance of cultural awareness, different life stages, and the ability to facilitate social justice awareness.

Forster, Grigsby, Unger, and Sussman (2015) suggested that interventions for students who had been exposed to violence and were gang affiliated focus on a combination of psychoeducation and skill building designed to impact students' awareness, understanding, and decision making process (Forster et al., 2015; Spano, Rivera, & Bolland, 2010), rather than solely removal from gang life. These programs would concentrate on imparting skills that are useful in life as well as for violence prevention, such as: (a) increasing awareness of the impact of the students' actions, (b) developing their coping skills; and (c) training in methods to improve self-control (Forster et al., 2015).

Counseling Groups for Adolescents

The stage of adolescence has distinct developmental attributes. According to Smith, Waschbusch, Willoughby, and Evans (2000), adolescents experience increased abstract thought and increased overall cognitive ability, investment in peer opinions, growth in self-awareness, greater independence, biological changes, and increased demands at school (Smith et al., 2000). Such changes indicate that adolescents would benefit from being more involved in the planning process for their counseling goals, use of tangible reinforcers, group work, and training regarding self-monitoring techniques (Smith et al., 2000).

Due to the nature of adolescence, students often learn better when concepts are reinforced by their peers (Akos, 2005; Akos, Hamm, Mack, & Dunaway, 2006; Gerrity & DeLucia-Waack, 2006). At this stage in development, the importance of peer influence is well documented and can be used to assist in learning when positively directed through group counseling interventions (Akos et al., 2006; Crockett & Crouter, 1995). Thus, according to Akos (2005), group counseling is highly effective for this age group and should be considered the primary intervention within the school.

Structured peer counseling groups can also combat the feeling of isolation often cited by adolescents, as well as help them begin to mature away from the focus on themselves—developmentally appropriate in early adolescence—to an outwardly focused one (Akos et al., 2006; Broderick & Blewitt, 2003). The benefits of group counseling in a school setting are its ability to have a positive impact on social skills acquisition and academic performance, and also decrease discipline referrals (Akos et al., 2006; Hoag & Burlingame, 1997; Whiston, & Sexton, 1998). Counseling groups should be composed of a student's peers in similar circumstances to most effectively affect their behavior (Akos

et al., 2006; Gerrity & DeLucia-Waack, 2006) as positive peer relationships, the development of social skills, academic success, and school attendance are all interrelated and can be targeted through appropriately matched groups within the school setting (Akos et al., 2006; Tomasulo, 1998).

Hanna et al. (1999) indicated the importance of relationships in reaching adolescents. The authors suggested focusing on high interest topics, modeling respect, avoiding taking an expert stance, and incorporating media when possible when working with this population (Hanna et al., 1999). Accepting students' frustration as normal, and not in need of remediation, is a first step to being able to work with them, at which point developing a natural, initial rapport will be crucial to an effective process (Hanna et al., 1999). Many of the interventions suggested above have been implemented in schools.

Treatment Implementation in Schools. Resources for adolescents in New Jersey schools include guidance counselors (typically one guidance counselor per two hundred students) and a child study team, composed of a social worker and a school psychologist. The child study team members provide counseling and crisis management, the extent of which can differ on a district level. While these professionals are placed in schools to be of the best use to students and are invested in helping them, state testing mandates and the need to comply with legal documentation have resulted in these professionals' inability to engage in first person interactions with students during the times in which they may be required to spend their workday proctoring tests and collecting data (Zellmer, Frontier, & Pheifer, 2006).

Given the limited time these professionals may have with students, it is vital that their interactions are positive and appropriate to student needs. In a study by Lapan, Gysbers, and Petroski (2001), hierarchical linear modeling was used to analyze data from

22,601 seventh graders across 184 Missouri schools. Controlling for socioeconomic differences, Lapan et al. (2001) reported that:

Students attending middle schools with more fully implemented comprehensive programs reported (a) feeling safer attending their schools, (b) having better relationships with their teachers, (c) believing that their education was more relevant and important to their futures, (d) being more satisfied with the quality of education available to them in their schools, (e) having fewer problems related to the physical and interpersonal milieu in their schools, and (f) earning higher grades. (p. 320)

Identifying the most effective school mental health programs, and disseminating that data in order to implement them within schools, is crucial to best helping students. In their review of 500 studies of promotion and prevention programs to assess the impact of implementation on program outcomes, Durlak and DuPre (2008) found organizational functioning in the delivery system and the support system, including the training and technical assistance provided to the team, to be vital to program effectiveness (2008).

Research has shown that adolescents demonstrate significant results from group counseling. This treatment modality is most effective when it contains elements of cognitive behavioral therapy, group process, and social emotional development (Brunwasser & Gillham, 2009; Choate & Manton, 2014; Compas et al., 2009; Garber et al., 2009). Choate and Manton (2014) highlighted the positive aspects of the Teen Court model, a group counseling program which targets skill building and peer support for adolescents who have been referred by the juvenile justice system. Choate and Manton (2014) emphasized that the “counseling groups provide a much-needed space where the adolescents’ voices are heard and where they are not labeled or stereotyped” (p. 363).

School-based programs have also been successful in treating anxiety and trauma (Layne et al., 2001; Masia, Klein, Storch, & Corda, 2001) when implemented in accordance with provisions concerning content, coverage, frequency, and duration (Carroll, Patterson, Wood, Booth, Rick, & Balain, 2007). Carroll et al. (2007) also stressed that professionals conducting such programs be trained in terms of intervention complexity, facilitation strategies, and quality of delivery to maximize participant responsiveness.

For children with Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder, a large body of research exists confirming the benefits of psychosocial skills training interventions; however, there has been significantly less research conducted regarding appropriate interventions for adolescents (Chronis, Jones, & Raggi, 2006; Morris, 1993). This is an area where further research is indicated.

Engagement as a Protective Factor

Self-affirmation as well as engagement with supportive adults can have a positive impact on students' academic achievement and their interactions within the school setting (Cohen et al., 2006; Creswell, Welch, Taylor, Sherman, Gruenewald, & Mann, 2005). Taylor, Welch, Kim, and Sherman (2007) stressed that although social support is a benefit to all clients, an intervention may need to be adjusted if the program content is not culturally appropriate for a particular population. For example, Taylor et al. (2007) found that open sharing of information could be considerably more stressful for Asian and Asian Americans (Kim, Sherman, Ko, & Taylor, 2006) than for those from other cultural backgrounds. Thus, some students may need supplemental instruction in areas such as how to reach out to their social network, respond to their peers in distress and the ways in which to access help, to compensate for the lack of training in these skills imparted in the

home (Taylor et al., 2007). Another example of a population which may be in need of supplemental instruction is youth within the foster system (Benard, 1991). Benard (1991) stressed the importance of resiliency in these youth. He found that protective factors, such as support, high expectations, and participation in school and community activities, help encourage students to develop problem-solving skills, social competence, and self-efficacy (1991).

Woolley and Bowen (2007) found a significant correlation between the presence of supportive adults in the lives of middle school students and the students' engagement in the school setting. The higher the number of invested adults within the student's home, school and community, the greater the student's engagement in school (2007). Bond, Butler, Thomas, Carlin, Glover, Bowes, & Patton (2007) performed a longitudinal study of secondary school students and found that school and social connectedness were associated with positive, long-term outcomes. Further findings indicated that students' early experiences in school and their peer relationships had a continuing affect on mood, substance use, and matriculation (Bond et al., 2007). Bond et al. (2007) offered their perspective on the benefits of school connectedness:

School connectedness, as assessed in this study and by others, involves a commitment to school and a belief that school is important, but also includes student-teacher relationships, relationships with peers, opportunities to be involved, and feelings of belonging. Young people connected to school demonstrate a disposition towards learning, a capacity to work with others and therefore a capacity to function in a social institution....Recognizing that a major part of school is social and emotional in nature is important. Enabling, encouraging, and resourcing schools to focus on relationships—between students,

between teachers and students, and between students and learning, is likely to be key to effective interventions. (p. 357)

Other Interventions in Schools

High adult aspirations for students' success, empathic relationships, engaging techniques, and safety within the environment are strongly associated with the short- and long-term success of students (Catalano, Berglund, Ryan, Lonczak, & Hawkins, 2002; Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Schaps, Battistich, & Solomon, 2004). Broad-based group interventions facilitating social emotional skill development are increasingly implemented in schools and other community systems so as to be able to reach the greatest number of youth at one time (Blum & Libbey, 2004; Durlak et al., 2011; Eaton et al., 2008).

Implementation is crucial to the success of interventions. In research on the positive impact that groups can have on achievement and behavior, Shechtman (2002) found that group interventions are most successful when they target social and emotional skills directly. Shechtman (2002) surveyed the research on psychotherapy for adolescents and found overwhelming agreement that group treatment resulted in successful outcomes (Dagley, Gazda, Eppinger, & Stuwart, 1994; Holmes & Sprenkle, 1996; Kulic, Dagley, & Horne, 2001). Brigman and Campbell (2003) found that the combination of group counseling and classroom guidance successfully addressed cognitive, social and self-management skills for middle and high school students (Brigman & Campbell, 2003).

Dialectical behavioral therapy (DBT), cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), mindfulness techniques, and psychodynamic practices are often utilized in school settings with adolescents (Apsche, DiMeo, & Kohlenberg, 2012; Burke, 2010; Durlak et al., 2011; Graham & Reynolds, 2013; Haydicky, Wiener, Badali, Milligan, & Ducharme,

2012). School counselors adapt many of these approaches to work with specific populations because a programmatic approach, which would theoretically reach a larger and more heterogeneous group of students, may not be indicated (Whiston, Tai, Rahardja, & Eder, 2011). According to a meta-analysis conducted by Harvey and Taylor (2010), CBT-oriented groups have the greatest success rates in targeting academic and risk prevention goals. DeLucia-Waack et al. (2013) highlighted the success of DBT-informed groups with adolescents; however, due to the intensive nature of DBT, with sessions typically lasting two to two-and-a-half hours, it may not be practical in a school setting. Given its effectiveness, school counselors often adapt DBT so that it is appropriate for the setting. Thus, students receive the benefits of a session based on DBT principles without the school needing to allocate an amount of time that is otherwise unavailable in a school day (Dimeff & Koerner, 2007).

Burke (2010) assessed current research in the area of mindfulness in relation to adolescents, and found the approach useful for helping with focus and stress reduction, and discussed the pairing of the technique with CBT and DBT. Burke (2010) described mindfulness treatment as:

The core curriculum of formal mindfulness practices (body scan, sitting, movement and walking meditations), and informal mindfulness practices (where participants intentionally bring mindful awareness to activities of daily living, e.g., showering, eating, gardening, shopping). Group sessions include guided meditation practices, teacher-led enquiry, discussion of experiences, and psychoeducation (includes information about universality of the wandering mind, the role of perception, the mind/body association, stress reactivity, developing inner resources for coping and enhancing health)...[P]articipants develop

mindfulness skills and attitudes, including focusing, sustaining and switching attention. (p. 2)

Wigfield, Lutz, and Wagner (2005) discussed the importance of counseling programs targeted to middle school students to assist them in developing a positive identity. The American School Counselor Association (ASCA)'s national model provided recommendations of programs that can be implemented with students to promote positive growth (ASCA, 2003; Wigfield et al., 2005). The National Middle School Association (NMSA) also provides recommendations for programs that can be implemented in early adolescence, including those for collaborative work with other adults, parent education, transition to a later developmental stage, and the use of counseling material specific to this age group (NMSA, 2001; Wigfield et al., 2005).

Hoagwood, Burns, Kiser, Ringeisen, and Schoenwald (2001) found that there are limited evidence-based treatments demonstrated to be effective with adolescents. Hoagwood and Erwin (1997) reviewed school-based mental health services and found empirical support for cognitive behavioral therapy, social skills training, and teacher consultation as having success in affecting change. Cartwright-Hatton, Roberts, Chitsabesan, Fothergill, and Harrington (2004) reviewed the effectiveness of cognitive behavioral treatment for adolescents and found that it was primarily used in the treatment of those with anxiety difficulties, although adolescents benefited from the treatment across settings. Another intervention that has been used effectively with adolescents, including those in the current study, is motivational interviewing.

Motivational Interviewing

Rollnick and Miller (1995) described motivational interviewing as an approach to address a client's seeming inability to change a behavior that impairs functioning. Three

factors—readiness, ambivalence, and resistance—are considered to be components of the process of change. The skills that will enable therapists to use this technique include empathic listening, eliciting self-motivating statements, and responding to resistance (Rollnick & Miller, 1995).

This treatment method was originated with Miller's insight that "the counselor could use empathic listening to minimize resistance and increase motivation for change" (Rollnick & Miller, 1995, p. 106). This strategy allows the counselor to provide a shift in the therapy setting so that the onus to create change rests with the client, during a process in which the client first acknowledges the benefits of negative behavior, then acknowledges the reasons why there should be a shift in the behavior (Rollnick & Miller, 1995). Miller and Rollnick (2012) stressed the importance of: (a) the clinician's nonjudgmental empathy for the client; (b) the client developing a discrepancy between the problem behavior and his or her goal; (c) the clinician's expectation that resistance will occur during therapy; and (d) the therapist support for the client's goal of change.

According to Hettema, Steele, and Miller (2005), motivational interviewing is particularly successful with clients who are resistant to change. The goal in this type of counseling is to listen to the client and ensure that the therapist and client are in agreement as to the client's goals (Hettema et al., 2005). Often resistance arises from a client's ambivalence to the change, in which case the role of the therapist is to assist the client in (a) thinking about the process of change, (b) preparing for it, and then (c) moving to the action state (Hettema et al., 2005). Hettema et al. (2005) found that manuals are helpful in the implementation of motivation interviewing as greater adherence to the model will result in improved outcomes.

Rubak, Sandbæk, Lauritzen, and Christensen (2005) found this approach to be beneficial for clients as “motivational interviewing in a scientific setting effectively helps clients change their behavior and...it outperforms traditional advice giving in approximately 80% of the studies” (p. 309). Similarly, Burke, Arkowitz, and Menchola (2003) performed a meta-analysis of controlled clinical trials regarding motivational interviewing and found that it has a significant clinical impact on problem behavior reduction. Burke et al. (2003) also found that motivational interviewing also was a positive indicator for social impact measures, thus indicating that this approach can be appropriate for additional uses in treatment.

Perspectives on Policy

Due to the impact the discipline and achievement gap have on the education and resulting life outcomes of at-risk ethnic minority male adolescents, as discussed above, methods to address these areas of discrepancy need to be implemented (Lareau, 2001; Lee & Bowen, 2006; Skiba et al., 2002). Lee and Bowen (2006) investigated the relationship between the achievement gap and parental involvement. In a sample of 415 elementary school students, they found that all families benefited from similar types of involvement, and that such involvement impacted achievement (Jeynes, 2003; Jimerson, Egeland, & Teo, 1999). According to Lee and Bowen (2006):

Parents’ involvement at school...remains of central importance; existing inequalities in the levels of this type of involvement are likely to contribute to the achievement gap. Identifying and reducing barriers among African American, Latino/Hispanic, low income, and less educated parents should be an emphasis of strategies to engage parents *at school* in their children’s education. Creative strategies may be necessary to overcome barriers related to work schedules,

transportation, negative interpretations of cultural differences on the part of school staff, and discomfort in the school setting on the part of parents. Creating opportunities for staff-parent contacts outside of school might lead to the same benefits as contacts at school and should be explored. (p. 214)

Chapter III: Methods

The study consisted of a set of interviews with former group counselors concerning their experiences in a training program and the topics covered in the groups they led. The purpose of this study was to provide qualitative information from counselors in order to develop the Counseling Groups for At-Risk, Ethnic Minority Male Adolescents Manual (the “Manual”) (see Appendix D) that might facilitate work with groups of a similar nature in many different school settings.

Participants

The subject population consisted of 10 participants who had worked as counselors with male adolescent groups in the Rutgers Somerset Counseling Program (the “Program”). Participants included eight current or former students at the Rutgers Graduate School of Applied and Professional Psychology (GSAPP) and two students from other professional programs. Participants included five male counselors (two African American, two Latino, one White) and five female counselors (four African American, one Latina). All of the participants co-led groups of middle school students at the Franklin Middle School in Somerset, New Jersey, and engaged in ongoing group supervision during their work with the Program.

The recruitment process consisted of an email sent by the investigator to potential study participants. For those participants who were associated with GSAPP, the email addresses they had provided to GSAPP were used; for the participants who were in other professional programs, contact information provided by the Director of the Rutgers Somerset Counseling Program was used. The email included a request for their participation, and their preferred method of contact. The consent form for the study was attached to this email to inform potential participants of the intent of the interview.

Procedures

Ten participants were interviewed throughout this process. Each interview ranged from 60-120 minutes in accordance with the subject's availability. Eight of the interviews were conducted in person. As both of the remaining participants had relocated, one interview was conducted by phone and the other interview was conducted through Skype.

Interviews were recorded using multiple methods, including a video recording, an audio tape recording, and an additional vocal recording. When it did not appear to be disruptive to the process, parts of the interviews were also transcribed during the interview. The majority of the interviews were transcribed by the principal investigator after completion of the interview. The transcriptions and recordings were used to review the data gathered during each interview. Subjects were informed that the study when completed, including a summary of participant responses in the form of a policy brief, would be made available to them upon request.

Once results were compiled and analyzed, as discussed below, themes were extracted and synthesized. Similarly, aspects of individual interviews were utilized to illustrate intervention techniques, as well as case illustrations. These results are also included in the form of a manual, *Counseling Groups for At-Risk, Ethnic Minority Male Adolescents*, which was the product of the information gained from the interviews (see Appendix D).

Measures

A questionnaire (see Appendix C), examining the experiences of counselors working with adolescent males' groups in the Program, was prepared for the current study. This questionnaire addressed training, group composition, the original referral

process, and the relationship between the program and the middle school in which the program was conducted. The questionnaire also addressed individual counseling assignments, group topics, crises that occurred throughout the year, and areas that would facilitate prospective growth within the Program. The questions were framed in an open-ended manner to elicit further information that could be included in a manual to support other group counselors. The interviews were examined from a qualitative perspective to incorporate the experiences of each of the counselors (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Kazdin, 2007).

Data Analysis

Interview results were analyzed from a perspective based on grounded theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Moore, 2011). Corbin and Strauss's (2008) grounded theory technique highlights the importance of basing theory on qualitative data whereby data collected from interviews are utilized to develop a theory. The data collected in the interviews with the participants was analyzed in accordance with grounded theory. First, an open coding analysis was performed, followed by axial coding, and finally selective coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Moore, 2011).

Open coding examined each interview from a holistic perspective. Information was then distilled to create a thematic breakdown, facilitating the next step in the analysis process, axial coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Moore, 2011). Axial coding linked and consolidated different areas that were extracted during open coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Moore, 2011). The final step, selective coding, further consolidated the categories that were developed in the first two coding stages to focus on core or central themes (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Moore, 2011).

The results were compiled so that themes could be extracted. Similarly, aspects of individual interviews were utilized to illustrate intervention techniques, as well as case examples. A summary of the themes that emerged is included in the Results Chapter, as discussed below.

Treatment of Data

Interviews were confidential. When the research records included some information about the participant, this information was stored in such a manner that limited linkage between the identity and the response. Some of the information collected about the subjects included gender identity, ethnicity, and age. The investigator kept this information confidential by limiting access to the research data and keeping it in a locked filing cabinet in a secure location. In addition, each participant was given an identification code and a pseudonym. Only the researcher had access to the code key.

Consistent with Institutional Review Board policy, all identifiable information within the interviews was disguised to protect the confidentiality of the participants. All study data will be kept for three years and then shredded and/or destroyed.

Chapter IV: Results

The interviews explored all components of the counseling groups, including interactions with other adults in the school; the referral process; group screening; exclusion criteria; the structure of the groups; co-counselor dynamics; building rapport within the group; activities; rules; behavioral management of group sessions; the use of rewards and incentives; and other core topics, such as school and community violence, and gangs. Study participants also provided descriptions of crisis interventions and conflict resolutions conducted within the groups.

Relationships With Other Adults in the School

Participants were asked about their relationships with staff members at the Franklin Middle School (the “School”), and what the results were, if any, of efforts to engage such staff in outreach during the course of the treatment interventions. All of the participants (100%) interacted with multiple members of the school staff on a regular basis and all agreed that the Program met with overall support from school staff members. When asked to identify the staff members with whom they had formed relationships, responses varied widely; however, all (100%) mentioned the School’s counseling team, particularly guidance counselors. The majority of the participants emphasized guidance counselors as figures with whom they had the strongest relationships. Responses included praise for the guidance counselors’ knowledge, work ethic, as well as their support for the Program team. One participant reflected on the noteworthy responsiveness of a guidance counselor who gave the participant student schedules and permission to sit in on classes. This assistance was cited by the participant as very beneficial to treatment.

All of the participants (100%) mentioned having interactions with teachers, although the quality of these relationships varied. One participant's interactions had a direct correlation to the extensiveness of the contact the teacher had with the student, but stated that staff members were generally receptive and interested in what was happening in the Program. This participant acknowledged being treated like a collaborator, rather than someone who was in the school to compensate for their inadequacy, as if "we were watching them, or blaming them, or saying that they are not doing their job effectively." Another participant expressed regret that his relationships with teachers were not as positive as he would have liked, as better relationships "would have been helpful to provide insight on how to support the students [as they repeatedly] complain[ed] about the teachers." This participant suggested that the teachers may have been in as much need of help as the students. He stated that he would "love to help" teachers "learn how to develop...relationships, approach disciplinary issues [and utilize] counselors or mental health providers," in order to engender more positive reactions from students. Another participant attributed the level of counselor interaction with teachers to personality: "some [Program counselors] worked more closely with teachers than others."

All of the participants (100%) stated they would have liked more interaction with School staff. The greatest difficulty appeared to arise from scheduling issues, as Program counselors were in the building for a limited amount of time rather than for the entire school day. Another difficulty arose from a perceived negative bias some staff members communicated to participants about the Program or the at-risk youth it served. Half of the participants (50%) stated they confronted this issue in one form or another. One participant referred to some school staff being unsure of the purpose of the Program; another related a staff member's concern that the Program was not the proper priority for

students, as it was “some sort of luxury they didn’t need, and that what they needed was to be in class”; others mentioned sensing staff members’ lack of confidence that the students would be successful.

One participant attributed this negativity to the occasion of the contact: interactions occurred primarily as a result of a student’s academic difficulty or misbehavior. Another participant expressed a similar view in that he had little interaction with staff unless a disciplinary action arose with one of the students in his group. When asked what actions they took when behavioral incidents occurred, five respondents (50%) stated that they reached out to teachers, and/or other staff members who were responsible for disciplinary matters. One participant stated that reaching out to teachers allowed for a more comprehensive understanding of the incident in question and another expressed a view that such contact would allow the counselor to mediate between the student and teacher so that a resolution could be reached.

In addition to teachers and other staff members whose positions related to the counseling process, participants cited other personnel with whom they interacted on a continual basis, such as security guards, coaches, secretaries, disciplinary staff, the vice principal, and the principal.

Individual Counseling

In addition to group counseling, each student also received individual counseling from one of the two co-counselors who led the group in which the student was a member. Matching decisions were made by the group co-therapists in consultation with the Program supervision group and the Program Director. One participant discussed the importance of consultation with the Program Director during group supervision for the matching determination. All participants (100%) attributed the matching decision

primarily to the rapport of the student with the counselor, expressed by one participant as “[since] you have a better relationship with that particular student,...we’re going to assume [this will translate to a] one-to-one” relationship as well.

Considerations of shared ethnic/racial background, gender, and counselor style were additional factors in the matching process. Counselors, along with their co-counselors, debated whether each student would benefit more from an individual counselor with the same racial background or one of the same gender. One participant expressed this concern in terms of whether the student “needed a male influence” or that “someone more empathetic” would be of greater help. The quality of empathy was not strictly related to gender, but contained an element of style in that each of the counselors had different perspectives on how to work best with the students. The majority of the participants stated that their colleagues each had particular strengths and/or training specializations that would resonate with individual students, or be especially pertinent to issues the student would be likely to confront during the coming year. Another participant expressed the decision as based on both empathy and rapport, with the two counselors choosing “who clicked better to sustain the relationship.”

Three participants (30%) stated that once students met the team of two co-counselors, there was no set standard as to which of the counselors would lead this screening as one of the functions of this meeting was to determine who had the better rapport with the student. Once this second screening was completed, decisions were made as to which counselor on the team of two co-counselors would treat the student. One participant explained that the decision made by the team was not intellectually based: “I think we just went with our instinct depending on who we felt more close to.” Another participant stated that the division of individual pairings was based on a “sense of

empathy and rapport.” A complicating factor in this process was when students were not equally at risk. One participant stated that the co-counselors tried to divide the more difficult cases and that this decision worked out well.

Each of the students receiving individual counseling was also part of a group. As students were in both forms of counseling, some individual counseling matching decisions had ramifications for the group component and vice versa. Two participants (20%) mentioned the synergy of the dual venues. One stated that during the group interview screening process, he determined that a student who would benefit from individual counseling would have struggled in the group setting because of difficulties including “attention issues, co-morbid trauma issues, and concentration concerns.” He added that the dynamic between the group and individual processes were so different that a student could manifest a certain behavior that was very destructive within the group, i.e., subclinical conduct disorder, deriving power from instigating conflict, but that being able to witness this during group allowed him to treat the behaviors in individual counseling. Individual counseling also presented the opportunity to reframe the actions disruptive in group as possibly more positive, i.e., demonstrating leadership potential, which allowed for more appropriate channeling.

All of the participants (100%) stressed the importance of individual counseling with each student. The importance of supervision and the support network within the counselors’ supervision group was stressed in its value regarding individual counseling. Two participants (20%) commented on the considerable level of input the Program Director had, and many participants cited the valuable contribution of peer support in various situations, such as responses to crisis, resource sharing, and decision making about group activities.

Referral Process

The referral process was facilitated by the School's guidance counselors who, after reviewing their records of seventh and eighth graders, identified the male students who would benefit from counseling. In addition, before the Program started, the guidance counselors also emailed all of the teachers, administrators, the Dean of Discipline, the Vice Principals and the Principal, requesting additional referrals of students who had behavioral difficulties, such as fighting, aggression or violence in the school, but who had not already been included by the guidance counselors. One participant remarked that the outreach process had extended so far as including the students' prior elementary schools. Once the referral process was completed, the guidance counselors met with the Program Director and all of the counselors to discuss the referred students.

Nine of the participants (90%) reported that the referral process was extremely effective. One participant reported that the amount of time the student was in the School made for a more accurate determination of appropriateness for the Program, as the students who had been there the longest, i.e., eighth graders, had a more extensive history and were better known by the staff. One participant expressed dissatisfaction with the criteria used to identify students and stated that the "data points" used, i.e., "suspension, detention, attendance, behavioral referrals and course failure," might not have led to an accurate determination of "the best threshold for group members [and/or] group formation."

Screening Process

Once the referrals were made, each student was assigned to a pair of co-counselors, as discussed above, to assess rapport. Conversations between counselors and students usually centered around the student's favorite activities, television programs,

video games, music, etc. One participant went so far as to include classroom observations in the assessment process in order to get a first-hand look at how the student interacted with his peers. Three participants (30%) stressed the importance of ensuring there was a range of personality traits among the group members. Potential for leadership, without being overly dominant, was a quality mentioned that would facilitate group growth and discussion. At the conclusion of the screening, once it was determined that the student was appropriate for the group, the counselor would describe the group and ask whether the student might be interested in joining.

One focus of the screening was to ascertain the student's "social circle," a field of inquiry cited by eight of the participants (80%) as one of the core areas of assessment. One participant tried to interpret the student's response to this question in terms of a group dynamic. Having insight as to what kind of relationship the student had with his peers, as expressed in the student's own words, would allow the counselor to predict whether an individual would not be a good fit for a group, i.e., would become overly dominant, or would be suitable to individual counseling. One of the participants explained this was an important way in which to prevent fights among boys. She asked each student: "Who do you get along with, and who don't you?"

Although the predominant opinion among counselors was to include as many students as possible, one participant stressed the importance of "weighing the risk." This participant explained that they were looking for "glaring or long-standing beefs," (i.e. ongoing fights or arguments) since at that age relationships tend to "change every two seconds." He elaborated with an example of a student he and his co-counselor did not include in the group because of "long-standing issues" with other group members which he characterized as having risen to the point of violence. The co-counselors thought

noninclusion the best solution, notwithstanding a belief that the student would have benefitted in a group setting with a different cohort.

Other participants mentioned concerns about students who got along, as those friendships might be predicated upon “dominance dynamics” harmful to a group; however, one participant explained that friends were selected for inclusion as a way to achieve “group cohesion,” and only “rivals or enemies” were rejected. Another participant visualized an ideal group as one that was balanced between new people and those with whom students had already formed bonds. One participant expressed ambivalence about selecting a group made up of friends: “I felt like the kids we had meshed well, but they were...so unified, part of the same gang, literally.” Another participant had rival gang members in the same group, but “worked it out and managed it,” by having extra sessions, both group and individual, when conflicts arose.

One of the participants expressed misgivings about a decision to include a student in a group in which he had no peer relationships, so that his perspective might be added to the group and other group members would not conceptualize their group as one for only “the bad kids.” In the end, both co-counselors realized they had made a mistake: “It wasn’t beneficial for anyone, and he didn’t form a bond with any of the boys. It...reinforced the fact that he was an outsider and wasn’t going to be like them.”

Exclusion Criteria. Many of the participants stated that one of the most difficult aspects of the screening process was establishing exclusion criteria for the groups. One participant listed “severe ADHD or co-morbid trauma issues which could lead to inattention issues” as prompting disqualification. One participant stated that the group would be more difficult to orient if there was a predominance of students with ADHD, Hyperactive Type. Lack of an ability to focus and disengagement were other areas of

concern for participants. Half of the participants (50%) indicated that student comfort level was a factor, with one participant explaining that “some of the referrals were too withdrawn.” One of the participants minimized the role of counselors in group selection, stating that “95% of the time” it was the student’s decision whether “to be a part of the group or not.” Two participants (20%) used the screening interview as a decisive indicator, reasoning that if the students had difficulty relating to them, they would have equal difficulty interacting with their peers. There was agreement among participants that a certain amount of extroversion and comfort within a group setting would signify that the student would be able to contribute to, and benefit from, the group process. This was corroborated by the experience of one participant who stated that the students who were less initially invested never fully engaged. They had spotty attendance, when they failed to participate, and thus were unable “to benefit from the process.”

Another area of concern brought up by four participants (40%) was the amount of risk factors. Given the nature of the groups as being for at-risk youth, problem behaviors were to be expected, but if the issues were not inconsistent with effective group treatment, such as subclinical conduct disorder, the individuals were not excluded. Examples of risk factors included suspensions, history of police interactions, and a history of fighting in school, as well as academic difficulties. Additional areas considered at risk arose out of nonschool situations, such as familial gang involvement and a lack of support at home. The issue for one participant was deciding that the students not be “so high risk that they would not benefit.” One example would be a frequent truant—the counselors did not want to make a commitment to someone unlikely to show up when they could work with students who wanted to be in the groups.

Another area that was brought up was potential “targeting.” Three participants (30%) mentioned the danger of including a student who diverged significantly from his peers so as to make him liable to become, as one participant expressed it, “set up” to be a scapegoat. As the counselors were new to the school, it was necessary for them to learn its social history to prevent such a situation from occurring.

Group Structure

Five participants (50%) worked with seventh grade groups, four (40%) worked with eighth grade groups, and one (10%) worked with a combined group of both seventh and eighth grade students. Each student had individual counseling with one of the group’s co-counselors regularly, either weekly or twice a month, in addition to the group session. All participants met with each other and the Program Director in a supervision group for a minimum of three hours per week during the academic year.

All of the participants (100%) stated that they had a positive working relationship with his or her co-counselor. Two participants (20%) were paired with a counselor of a different gender, which they reported to have had a positive impact on the group dynamic. Four participants (40%) reported having a different theoretical background from their co-counselor, such as one counselor who was psychodynamically oriented paired with someone from a more behavioral perspective, such as Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT).

Building Rapport Within the Group

The importance of building rapport with group members was stressed by eight of the participants (80%). One of the most interesting aspects of building rapport was how instrumental it was to the treatment process. One participant stressed rapport in terms of selecting ice breakers; one discussed strategies for developing rapport within the group;

one stressed the importance of rapport early in the relationship; one stated that the procedure of forming group rules was highly important for building rapport; and another stressed its importance in group and individual work. All participants (100%) verbalized the importance of identifying rapport-building strategies and tailoring them to the student and group in treatment. Given the unanimous agreement, the participants identified rapport-building techniques as an area that should be addressed prior to working with adolescents and incorporated throughout the group process.

One element of building rapport cited by a participant was identifying common interests with a student. First he asked the student what he enjoyed, then the participant shared that he “enjoyed the same things.” He expressed that his ability to make a connection arose out of his familiarity with video games and, given the students’ interest in clothes, conversations about fashion—conceding that connection building of this nature may have made him appear “less adult.”

One participant reported that the strategy he and his co-counselor pursued to promote rapport building was to allow the students to set the agenda for each session by identifying the topic to be discussed: “We facilitated....They directed the learning and we organically worked with that process.” He explained that this collaborative process increased students’ investment in the group, engagement in the session, and connection: “It was about them every single group.”

Another participant discussed his technique for rapport building as a result of communicating to the students that they were valued. Once that was accomplished, the students listened because they “really liked us.” In common with another participant, he stressed shared interests by discussing pop culture with the group, which enabled the counselor to “prove how not uncool we are.” He was aware that boundaries were

important and adopted a more serious demeanor when necessary. Establishing consistent, positive, aware boundaries set the tone for the group and allowed students to learn to their best ability.

Icebreakers

One of the first opportunities for group counselors to work with students was during an “icebreaker” activity, which usually occurred at the beginning of each group session. All participants (100%) acknowledged the use of icebreakers. Since some of these young, middle school adolescent males were adverse to begin with talking exercises, six participants (60%) utilized “games” to help orient the students and begin the process of learned sharing. One counselor explained that these starting activities “reined the boys in” and “were good for them.”

One participant termed his first session icebreaker “The Name Game.” A beanbag was thrown from one member to another. The person who caught the beanbag stated his name, the name of the person who threw the beanbag, and the name of the person to whom he was throwing the beanbag. Later, a second beanbag was added. This game served two purposes while helping to cement the students’ membership in the group. It allowed students to learn each others’ names in a fun way and they didn’t have to sit in a chair during the process. As the counselor stated, his group really enjoyed “anything that required moving.”

Another icebreaker his group utilized was students introducing themselves in terms of a movie. The student would give the movie a title and tell the group which actor he chose to portray himself. The participant described this as informative and very popular with the group, while it put students at ease with the process of discussing their lives with one another. This participant described another icebreaker activity his group

engaged in, a “human knot,” in which group members tangled and untangled themselves. The participant acknowledged that this could get noisy, and not everyone would want to embark on it with seventh graders, but he found that giving the group an outlet for their energy balanced out that slight drawback.

Another interviewer offered the perspective that icebreakers were helpful not only at the start but throughout the session, as such activities maintained a positive tone for the group. One of the early icebreakers this counselor found effective was titled “Getting To Know You Jenga.” This involved painted Jenga pieces, in which each color represented different facets of an individual’s life. For example, red might be something the student didn’t like, yellow something he hoped for the future, and blue might be something nobody knew about him. The color of the piece would be matched with what it represented on the board, and the prompts were infinitely changeable. Students would select a Jenga piece, and then speak about the topic corresponding to its color. The participant explained that this type of activity provided a format for adolescent males to share with one another. She also used other games, such as Kerplunk, as icebreakers.

This participant reported that her co-counselor had a different focus for icebreakers: games would be based on the objective of the group for that day. Her co-counselor would typically write down questions related to the day’s topic on sheets of paper which he would place on a table. Each student selected a sheet of paper and had to answer the question it contained. This worked very well as “the guys loved” it, the discussions it engendered were always on point, and it was “so simple, straightforward.”

Another participant discussed a game called “Two Truths and a Lie,” in which each student stated two things that were true about themselves and one which was untrue. Then the other group members would try to guess which statements were true and which

were not. This accomplished three objectives: It allowed group members to share facts about themselves that they would like for others within the circle to know, opened the group up to discuss ways to tell when members were fabricating, and provided an outlet for creativity.

Four participants (40%) began their group with an icebreaker other than a game, as the participants expressed that the students were sufficiently mature to start the session with an activity more related to the purpose of the group. For example, one icebreaker popular with these participants was to open the session with a quick summary by each group member of the positive and negative events in his life during the prior week. Some of the groups that opened sessions with games also engaged in this activity, which six participants (60%) termed “Touchdowns and Fumbles,” and one participant (10%) titled “Cookies and Spinach.”

There was reluctance among some of these participants to characterize this weekly update as an icebreaker since the processes it entailed—sharing with peers, distinguishing behaviors that are positive from those that are negative—were so integral to the purpose of the treatment intervention. Each adolescent group member sharing the high and low parts of their week added continuity and stability to the group and allowed all, counselor and member alike, to be aware of important aspects of each member’s life. Although this activity was benign and often beneficial to the adolescents because it, in the words of one participant, “gave them the opportunity to talk about something personal,” it needed to be modeled by counselors and monitored lest it take on, as the same participant noted, a “negative focus or create an opportunity for them to vent and feed off each other.” She said that some students used this as an opportunity to disclose problem behavior, such as being “kicked out of class.” However much it was a “fumble”

for the student involved, it could serve a therapeutic purpose—as the starting point for a discussion that was relevant to each student in the group.

One counselor stated that they simply began with a fun fact prior to each group. Another highlighted the option of “unstructured time” after the students delineated their touchdowns and fumbles. He said that the students often had concerns about events that had occurred in their lives since the last session. Prior to the start of the formalized activities, he and his co-counselor would decide whether to allow a particular issue or problem to be discussed with the group. If it seemed to them that it would be more valuable to pursue the topic(s) brought up by the student(s), discussion of the scheduled topic would be postponed.

Group Rules

The creation of group rules was an extremely important part of the process given that referrals had often been based on behavioral problems, such as fighting. According to the model of the Program, rules were formulated by each group’s members and approved by the group counselors in one of the early sessions (Batista, 2009). Written copies were posted during sessions, so that counselors might refer to them if issues arose. Eventually, as group norms were developed, the students themselves would refer back to the group rules without prompting.

One participant mentioned that she and her co-counselor “thought a lot about systems” prior to beginning the task of creating group rules. She stressed the importance of differentiating between positive and negative norms. The counselors had each student write acceptable behavior on one sheet of paper and unacceptable behavior on another and placed them in separate sections of the room. There was no prompting by counselors: “We just let them say whatever they wanted.” She and her co-counselor were extremely

impressed by the students' choices during the formulation process, especially when students made choices the counselors would have been uncomfortable making. For example, one student's entry was "we can't say the n-word in group," which indicated to the participant that the students were invested: "Yes, they really took ownership." She considered it noteworthy that it would not be the counselors imposing "discipline," but the students regulating this issue themselves. She also attributed this exercise as a rapport-building activity as the students collaborated to create the norms for the group.

All participants (100%) stressed the need to reaffirm the group rules as the group progressed. One participant commented that adherence to the group rules was a challenge given that the group members were male adolescents and at the stage where they "get goofy," and have "lots of energy," which necessitated that counselors had to "reign them in." When the students were in group longer, they became "more comfortable testing boundaries" and could get "disruptive." At that point, it became important for the counselors to be "assertive" and "firm," and remind students of the "initial rapport" evidenced by their acting as a cohesive group to create the rules.

Group Management Techniques

Session structure was one of the core areas participants mentioned when group management was discussed. All of the participants (100%) began each session with an icebreaker activity. Although each group went around the room for students to share their most positive and negative experience of the prior week, only two participants (20%) labeled this activity an icebreaker while eight participants (80%) did not, preferring to characterize games, topics, or questions as enabling the students to settle down so that the counselors might lead them into the core activity for the day.

The monitoring system used to help form the norming relationship within each of the groups was described in different terms by the participants, but each attributed much of the success to the group members themselves. One participant stressed that her group “used a lot of humor, and...were not punitive by any means,” and attributed the dynamic as primarily fueled by “incentivized pro-social behavior.” Another participant explained his emphasis on transparency and self-regulation in the group: “This is your group, we want your input....We want to hear everyone.”

Nine participants (90%) stated that they had a system in place to facilitate adherence to rules of behavior and respond to violations, such as students being disruptive. One participant stated group rules were never needed to address violations as the norms were clear during the group process. He stated that he could not remember an instance of disruption because of the focus of the session—“it was about them every single group”—and the subject matter, issues with which they could “really identify.”

All participants (100%) referenced behavior management techniques, and varied in their responses to negative behavior within the group. One participant used a hand signal; one, a group sound as a signal; two referenced the importance of counselor proximity to redirect misbehavior; and another stated that inappropriate behavior prompted discussions with students about the psychodynamic process involved. All of the participants (100%) had some variety of a group reward program to acknowledge positive behavior, primarily involving food and, specifically, often candy. All participants (100%) emphasized the importance of praising an individual student’s positive behavior, and responding when the entire group was showcasing rule-abiding behavior. Aside from the verbal and food rewards, which were utilized by each participant, the alternative responses to student behavior were different.

One participant differentiated between the two types of disruptive behaviors, separating the “stuff outside the group where they’d get suspended,” from the experiences within the group. He explained that when discussing either type of concern “whenever we needed to intervene, we always went back to the rules,” and then proceeded to help group members discuss the area of concern. The importance of refocusing on the group rules was stressed by all participants (100%).

Three participants (30%) stated that they had established signals that would alert group members to return to order. The overall consensus among these three participants was that the method should be quiet and natural within the setting for it to be reinforcing. One participant explained that she and her co-counselor allowed the group members to select the method: the hand sign for “respect” in sign language. She was gratified by this choice as she had concerns that the students might have selected “gang signs.” When the counselors used the signal, the members would quiet down. At that point, the participant brought up a method of positive reinforcement for good behavior common among participants—the distribution of sweets, in this case, Munchkins (small donuts). There was no comparable negative reinforcement for poor behavior because, as the participant stated, we “didn’t have anything to take away.” Students’ misbehavior in group often revolved around targeting, an issue discussed above in the context of the decision making process of whether to include or exclude students from groups. In this situation, and others where the student was “really disruptive,” the co-counselors “would have them step outside to calm down” accompanied by one of the counselors, and tell them they could return on the condition that they behavior properly, i.e., “you have to not pick on ‘that kid.’”

Another group's method of self-regulation was reported by a participant to be clapping. The students agreed that a rule infraction would be indicated by clapping twice. Although the participant termed it a "good idea" and a "good social gesture," it had to compete with the other noise in the room and was thus difficult to hear. Another participant explained their system for acknowledging a disruptive student was for one group member to put his hand on his nose, at which point all had to follow, with the disruptive member often the last. This method was consistent with the participant's desire to not "be so directive." The participant did intervene when "we needed to reign things in." The co-counselors "would work together to say, 'okay, let's pull it back.'"

In order to manage the students, two of the participants (20%) highlighted the impact proximity to the counselor can have on positive adolescent behavior. One participant revealed that she and her co-counselor "sat on opposite ends of the table [with] one kid on either side and one in front of us." She contrasted the behavioral difference of the students in proximity to the counselor from those who were not. The student in the least proximity to the counselors often presented the most behavioral issues. When this occurred, the counselors switched seats to be next to the disruptive student. Another participant affirmed the connection between counselor proximity and behavior: "If the guys were talking to each other, [one of us would] sit next to or between them, [and] tap on the desk...calling them out without calling them out." He commented on how much of an asset gender played in this situation: "They were comfortable because [they] have a positive male presence who is embracing them, while telling them they're in the wrong at the moment."

Three participants (30%) mentioned the importance of flexibility. One explained that he and his co-counselor had to make a determination as to whether a situation was in

need of counselor intervention. They allowed it to proceed if it was a benign case of students laughing and bonding over silly behavior, but addressed it if they decided it was evidence that “we’re losing control.” He explained that the distinction between “it’s bonding versus when they start insulting one another or talking negatively” was crucial to the group members’ ability to understand his efforts to relate to them and their continued respect. Another participant stressed the importance of humor, stating that the co-counselors worked to “incentivize pro-social behavior.” As with the prior participant, the importance of being able to distinguish the nature of the behavior, whether it was an “area of difficulty” or “needed a step back approach,” was mentioned. Another participant discussed the importance of flexibility, i.e., the need to have a “Plan A and a Plan B.” This level of flexibility entails a greater responsibility for preparation, and this participant encouraged counselors to “always have three ideas a day” For example, a counselor may program a writing exercise for the day, but sense that in the best interests of the group a more active endeavor may be indicated.

Another participant revealed the importance of flexibility as a component of the co-counselors’ planning process:

[A]s we did our check-ins, we would decide how to tailor or table our activity, based on what was going on with the kids. If the kids came in from a fight the day before, we would process what happened versus going with our scheduled plan.

One participant stressed his reliance on nonverbal reminders. Sometimes this took the form of “the parent look,” and other situations called for another form of nonverbal communication, such as putting a finger over the mouth when students were engaged in questionable conversation “to signify that it’s not appropriate.” This participant had varied techniques when verbal communication was indicated:

I said their name first and then I said the behavior and what I wanted them to do with it, [trying to] make sure it was a positive reinforcement thing. [For example], if I didn't want [something negative] to be displayed, [such as] maybe two or three students talking, [I would say] "So and so, thank you for not talking," [and then the] other students would catch on and say, "We're not talking."

In this manner, the students who were behaving appropriately were acknowledged, and invested in the process of signaling to the misbehaving students.

One participant attributed the rapport he had developed with his group to their willingness to listen. When that wasn't adequate to the situation, he and his co-counselor would adopt a "more serious tone." They would each say something to the effect of "'Are you done yet?'" Sometimes there came a point when the counselors realized that continuing, and perhaps even escalating, their admonitions was futile and they would "drop the rope," a phrase which signified that it was time to move on. The timing of the decision of when to move on was crucial to the balance of the group and the responsiveness of the students.

One participant led a group which he described as very "process oriented." He addressed inappropriate behavior within his group with a "combination of psychodynamic process-oriented techniques, along with more structured redirection [consistent with] a more strictly CBT skills group or a systems therapy." He and his co-counselor would typically "invite the group to step back and take a look at the disruptive behavior." This was a process wherein students were asked to analyze where each step of inappropriate behavior was taking each of the students. The need for them to reflect on their behavior was especially indicated in cases of targeting a scapegoat (or encouraging this behavior), or "making jokes to distract" the other students in the group.

The participant explained that his use of his psychodynamic training and manner of interaction was crucial to the running of his group. He also distinguished the type of intervention as a function of the stage the group was in. In the first stages of group, he focused more on redirection, “asking them to simmer down and focus on the task or skill we were trying to teach.” In later stages, after they’d learned about conflict resolution, and a situation arose: “It’s an opportunity for them to practice....Here is a conflict....How do you think we should address it with the skills we learned?” As the group progressed, his focus evolved from “redirection and skill rehearsal, then [to a] more process-oriented intervention [when the group was able to] rehearse learned skills and go deeper.” Students were able to incorporate their learning and demonstrate their respect for the group when discussing questions such as: “Do we become anxious when we talk about fighting in school?” and “Do we distract by targeting someone in the group?”

Reward and Incentive Systems

All participants (100%) stressed the importance of utilizing a reward system with the adolescent males in their groups. The areas that the participants discussed the most in terms of a rewards system included both short-term and long-term incentives as motivation for students to reach achievable, easily understandable goals. All of the participants (100%) noted the contribution positive incentives made to buy in, students’ continued enthusiasm, and the counselors’ ability to affect change within the group. Such positive incentives also provided the entryway for counselors to help the students verbalize their behavioral and academic goals. This connection was particularly relevant for students who were not currently invested in academics.

Although all adopted incentives, and considered them effective, details differed as to how often incentives were offered; how the prizes were achieved; and the specific rewards, although food was involved in the reward system of all participants. Nine participants (90%) used a combination for long- and short-term rewards and one participant (10%) used only a long-term reward. One participant based the group's rewards system on attendance. When there were absences, each attendee got candy. "If they were all there they got pizza." Since the group members maintained an excellent attendance record, a larger party was held "at the end of semester."

One participant stated that his group used small candy prizes, i.e., Skittles or M & Ms, to incentivize promptness at each session, with a larger prize if students were prompt over a longer period of time. This system had to be adjusted as students were often required to miss group because of another school-related activity, and the counselors did not want them to be penalized when they had to take a test or were scheduled to go on a class trip. He reported that this incentive system was "not as effective as they wanted it to be," but may have contributed to the students' investment in the process both initially and through the academic year. It was also self-reinforcing: students not only made sure they were prompt themselves, they reminded their peers to do likewise.

One participant used "paying attention" as the standard for candy distribution so that students knew they needed to be listening for the counselors to slide the candy to them. She and her co-counselor also designed a "puzzle prize" as a long-term incentive. Each week a student did not have ISS (In School Suspension), he would be able to earn a letter and once all the letters were put into the puzzle in order, the students, as a team, would earn a surprise. On one occasion, watching a movie and eating popcorn during the session was the surprise. She stressed the collaborative aspect, and ensuring that the prize

was “never so big” that students felt incentivized to compete with one another, rather than be supportive. She also highlighted the importance of Program counselors’ corroborating the students’ self-reports of their in-school behavior with the guidance counselors to verify that the students were truthful. In addition, the feedback from the guidance counselors offered insight as to whether group counseling was having an impact on student behavior.

Another participant used a “point behavior card,” a strategy he deemed successful. Although there were immediate individual rewards within the session, the goal of each student was to achieve 30 points by the end of the academic period to receive a prize. The point system also functioned as a reward for the group once enough members achieved individual goals.

Another participant rewarded students with candy for promptness, and the person who had the most candy received a further incentive, more candy, and the ability to “pick the prize for the next week.” She praised the students’ selection of prizes as reasonable, and a method by which the students were helped to be invested in the process. Candy incentives proved so successful they were used in circumstances other than to reward promptness. When she and her co-counselor “started to notice problems,” they would create new rules to incentivize proper behavior. In addition, this system was in place to monitor and reward behavior occurring out of session, both in school, i.e., In School Suspension, out of school, i.e., reports of negative community behavior or police involvement.

Small candy incentives were used by another participant as an additional form of positive reinforcement. While the students in her group “really responded to praise and high fives and positive feedback,...each time they did something well they were

immediately reinforced by Skittles,” with the provision that candy couldn’t be eaten until the end of the session. This combination of positive verbal praise and immediate physical reinforcement was utilized by the vast majority, nine (90%), of participants.

Another participant also used long-term rewards for out-of-session behavior, such as not getting into In School Suspension or Out of School Suspension for the week, with students getting more points for not having the more common In School Suspension. Unfortunately, she and her co-counselor discovered this system to be ineffective. Students never won prizes, because point achievement “was so difficult for them to get.” Recognizing the need to be flexible, a quality mentioned by many other participants, the co-counselors switched their strategy to “immediate rewards, candy for each time they followed the norm.” She stated that this “kind of worked,” but admitted to experiencing some frustration that students “were just following norms for candy.” She also had a system for a long-term reward, a larger party at the end of the year.

When asked about rewards, another participant replied “Munchkins.” His routine was to go to Dunkin Donuts “each morning before school” and purchase a box which contained 50 Munchkins. Distribution times within the session varied when counselors discovered that if students got the reward at the beginning it sometimes proved an inadequate way to motivate continued good behavior. The system the co-counselors settled on, which he described as an “application of behavior modification,” was that students who were prompt received Munchkins at the start of the session and those who were tardy had to wait until the end. Munchkins were withheld from those who were disruptive, and those who behaved well could be rewarded with two. He conceded that there were clearly “limits” within this model; however, group members “learned to self-regulate,” so that over time counselors rarely had to resort to the negative reinforcement

of withholding the Munchkins. As with many of the other participants, the counselors gave a pizza party to the group as a reward at the close of the school year.

The one participant who offered no short-term rewards for his group members offered a sizable prize at the end of the school year. The co-counselors obtained written permission from parents and from the school administration to take the students to a movie after school, the prospect of which engaged the students “for weeks,” and minimized behavioral concerns.

Group Activities

When asked about the activities in groups, participants offered a wide range of replies. One participant explained that his group was “already verbal, very talkative,” and receptive to “any sort of direct activity,” but cautioned that the material needed relevance to their lives in order for them to retain skills or participate. They were often receptive to activities they found appropriate. (Activities that proved successful with the groups are detailed in the Manual. See Appendix D.) For example, when only two group members were able to attend a session, the participant did not want to conduct important group work. “We showed them episodes of some shows, like *Glee*....The participant attributed this choice to his co-counselor, stating that the subject matter, “relational conflict and gossip,” did not resonate with his students: “It didn’t sit well with them.” One of the students mentioned a show whose lead character was, like him, an African American teenager, and the participant thought this would have been a better choice. Another participant related a team activity where students developed a list of “what makes a man.” The team with the most extensive list without repetitions won a prize. This engendered a group debate over the qualities that are truly valued in males as the lists were whittled down.

Four participants (40%) referenced the importance of media in their students' lives, and the celebrity culture in particular. Participants used this interest to discuss topics relevant to treatment. For example, abusive and violent relationships were discussed within the context of celebrity couple Rihanna and Chris Brown. The participant stated that he made an effort to "choose celebrities correctly" to make a larger point. Another illustration of this strategy was the rapper Ludacris, someone they looked up to. The counselors reported that Ludacris had a solid education in that he had attended college, reinforcing an additional lesson that they "can't judge a book by its cover." A related topic was introduced by another participant concerned that media depictions of African Americans in gang-related movies, such as *Boys in the hood* and *Menace II society*, may have contributed to the negative stereotyping which the students confronted in their lives. An additional participant showed Youtube clips that had violence prevention themes, and footage from a film about a violence prevention treatment program, Sankofa, referenced above.

In order to address issues related to cultural competency, three participants (30%) engaged in activities related to stereotyping. One participant asked the students to write down on sheets of paper different identities that were subject to stereotyping, i.e., Whites, Blacks, police officers, Mexicans. The sheets of paper were passed around and the other students were given 10 seconds to write down a word associated with that identity, positive or negative. After every student had an opportunity to contribute an attribute, the group discussed the nature of stereotypes and the degree to which they are "realistic and not." Another participant conducted an exercise about gender. He read statements about males and females and students had to indicate whether they agreed, disagreed, or had no opinion by standing in a particular section of the room. He said that it was interesting to

“see the wheels turning in [their] heads,” as they witnessed the decisions made by their peers: “‘Should I go or stay?’ ‘Am I gonna be made fun of for staying, or should I go with the group?’” This exercise provided a good opportunity for discussion and for counselors “to give feedback.” Another participant used cards listing numerous professions and the students ranked the cards from the most important and successful to the least. Then the students were asked to explain their choices. Later, they applied a variant of this activity to themselves and discussed possible ways in which they could rise in rankings.

Another participant described an activity her group engaged in that revolved around stereotypes. She used photographic images of people—“some looked professional, some more urban hip hop style”—and asked students what conclusions they drew about these people based on appearance. A typical question, “‘Which one of these people [was] a college grad?’ [would be asked to] get them engaged.” Given that they were adolescents, the students could be “a little silly,” at first, identifying one male as someone who “has all the girls,” but this technique opened up a conversation that was “directly applicable to life, [and] helped all the students,” as even those who did not respond to the image became involved in the conversation it engendered.

Two participants (20%) devised activities for goal-setting and self-reflection. One introduced the prospect of their moving on to high school and asked students to identify areas for growth they would like to accomplish before achieving that milestone. Another participant used pictures of various objects and students gave their reactions as to what they liked and disliked, related to or did not. This activity was considered by the participant to be “a self-analysis or reflection of who they thought they were. [It] gave context for...how they engage with themselves and their peers.”

Another participant explained that their activities often arose out of discussions concerning what is the “good” or “bad” way to react in a certain situation, with an emphasis on “good” being the “stable thing to do.” Examples of “good” included references to others, i.e., “respecting others, taking care of women in your life,” and “giving money to the poor”; attributes consistent with being a male in society, i.e., “being protective, strong, having confidence”; spiritual qualities, i.e., “praying”; exhibiting self-pride, i.e., “dressing like a gentleman”; and one that may have represented the adolescent view of male-female relationships: “buying women what they want.”

Additional Activities

Since the participants were interviewed after the groups had ended, many of them reported additional topics that would have contributed to their sessions, and one reported that he would have liked to have incorporated more of his training in motivational interviewing. Two participants (20%) mentioned substance abuse as a topic they would like to have incorporated into group. For example, one participant reflected on his students’ view that “weed is okay,” and the benefit of their coming up with both sides, the positive and negative, and have more information upon which to base that opinion.

Another participant mentioned that he would have liked to have spent time with his group discussing grief and loss: “how they’ve gone about coping and mourning...honoring and memory.” Similarly, a participant referenced a related issue, trauma, and expressed how she would have liked to have incorporated art therapy “for kids with trauma backgrounds,...letting them express their emotions and feelings on paper. She did not believe this to be an appropriate topic for group discussion given their developmental stage: “At that level, they don’t know how to...label their feelings or emotions.” She stated that she regretted not having been more knowledgeable about art

therapy at the time, as “art is a good outlet for them to express how they’re feeling.”

Additional knowledge she regretted not having been able to include in her counseling group had been gained in a subsequent course she had taken on the family. One of the assigned readings, *Teens who hurt*, gave her insight into how loss affects an adolescent’s “sense of community [that may influence their engaging] in violence and aggression.”

I could visualize the boys. All the time I was reading, I was like, “I wish I would’ve known this and how powerful this sense of devaluation, and the loss of dignity and respect, everything taken from them, [that] they go through.

With her now-increased knowledge, she would focus on “the power of validation.”

Another participant explained that he would use more of himself in the work now and assess whether the increased “interpersonal spin”—referencing himself as “a tall, White dude”—would be helpful in engendering “more interpersonal, real life interactions between group members.” He debated whether adding that element to group discussion, i.e., “You just said this to him. How did that make you feel?,” might not have been indicated for adolescents at their stage of development, “they might’ve been able to go there or not,” but if they had the ability to engage at that level, he expressed that it “would’ve been valuable.”

Another participant referred to an activity that she didn’t engage in with her adolescent group, but consistently uses in her work, asking group members to tell the group about the story of their names, what they mean, or the person after whom they were named (Springer, 2006). She had performed this activity with a group of “older Black and Latino males” who had been her dissertation participants: “It was so interesting how they all engaged.” She mentioned identity, including sexual identity, as another topic she would have made more of a priority with her group:

I think I probably would've done more around exploring their identities a little more. We did some of that, but it wasn't always...intentional....Race, ethnicity, class gender, sexuality....When I think back, I always wonder [whether] any of them [were] gay, and did we not provide the space for that...to be expressed.

Another participant expressed the possibility of having not paid the amount of attention to skill building, i.e., “communicating with teachers and adults,” as he did to “rapport building,” possibly due to time management issues:

We had them there and I think that we probably didn't fully utilize all the time we could've had with skill building....I think that the year seemed like it went so fast.

I felt like there...were missed opportunities [when] we could've done a bit more.

Another participant stated that “incorporat[ing] games more” would be something he'd change.

Core Topics of the Counseling Groups

When asked about the core topics discussed in their group, participants differed in the details, i.e., time devoted to the topic and specific elements, but seemed to share a consensus that the primary focus was on areas that would benefit the group members in terms of skill acquisition. Topics mentioned by all participants (100%) included relationships, behavior, violence, self-esteem, stereotypes, conflict, and gangs. Three participants (30%) identified problematic relationships with others, especially with teachers and their peers, or the broader underlying social dynamics, as the core areas of discussion for the groups. Two participants (20%) mentioned conflict resolution and fighting as the main topic.

One participant remarked that each topic discussed was likely to evolve over the course of the group. A topic that was mentioned in all groups, and will be discussed more

fully below, is gangs. For one participant, an initial conversation about this topic branched into discussions of “encounters with the police, police and the community,...how to relate to them and manage and survive encounters with the police.” Eventually, this included skills training regarding “underlying anger and disrespect that can come with dealing with the police,” which progressed into the group “talking about underlying systemic forces that affected...systematic racism.” The Latino students brought the perspective of “colorism in communities [and] colonialism” into the conversation as well. At which point, the discussion evolved even further, moving on “to bigger topics, like community violence,...profiling,...harassment, and racism.” The participant’s experience is also an illustration of the flexibility necessary in leading groups, when a topic is one thing in the beginning and takes on new forms as students respond with their experiences, views, and demonstrations of interest.

One participant identified behavior, specifically “how their behavior affects school, home, and the community” as “a pretty big conversation.” Another topic brought up by one of the participants was how the students envisioned their future: “what they wanted to be when they got older,...[their] goals.” Another participant highlighted discussions concerning gender stereotypes and the importance of positive role models, perceptions, and plans. Additional topics mentioned by participants included future dreams, family, community, sports, media, race, ethnicity, decision making, social dilemmas, drama, perceptions and misconceptions, violence, and anger management. One participant listed the wide range of topics that arose when discussing how they saw their future with group members: “We created timelines [regarding] what goals they wanted to accomplish.” He devoted one session to the subject of sex. They also had a discussion about incarceration. Another described his group’s discussions as including “conflict

resolution....decision making....social dilemmas...fighting, or trouble in school, or something happening at home.” After a general discussion of the topics, individual students added to the conversation by offering their relevant experiences.

Aggressive, Violent or Inappropriate Behavior in the School and Community

Putting students’ behavior into the context of the school, home, and community was an important topic for all participants. Behavior in school was not only a critical topic for group conversations, it was also a prime component of the rewards system, as discussed above, in each of the groups. One participant devoted one discussion on “defining the problems in the school,” and then behavior in school was related to behavior in other settings, such as the home and the community. Focusing on behavior was important not only in helping students to understand how they were functioning in school. Demonstrable improvements in student behavior would help to provide continued support for the intervention from school leadership and community members.

The subject of behavior encompassed many subtopics. For one participant these included “violence, gangs, sports [and] media.” Behavior was also an integral component of conversations about gangs, as discussed more specifically below. There were additional topics identified by some participants that were likely to have been discussed by other participants’ groups, but which were not specifically mentioned by them during interviews. These included stereotypes, mentioned by three participants (30%); fighting, mentioned by five participants (50%), and community, also mentioned by three participants (30%).

Three participants (30%) referenced using Sankofa, an evidence-based violence prevention program (Hines & Sutton, 1998), as a source for group discussions. One participant mentioned his adoption of the technique of the “personal shield,” whereby

each student “create[d] a personal shield [to delineate what] was important for them.”

Another said that they worked through Sankofa’s (Hines & Sutton, 1998) lessons regarding conflict resolution, including “What starts a fight and what keeps it going? How do you short circuit a fight, intervene for yourself? [What are the] underlying reasons for why we fight,...including respect,...community violence, [and the question of] how does violence reproduce itself?” He said that his group also used Sankofa modules (Hines & Sutton, 1998) modules to discuss “group members and others at school [experiencing] the intergenerational transmission of gang involvement.”

Fighting was a topic discussed by all participants (100%) in their groups. One participant stated that when the issue came up, discussions veered into other important subjects for these adolescents, such as “how to handle beefs,” and “what it means to be a man.” She and her co-counselor were constantly “brainstorming [to find] activities to challenge their way of thinking.” One participant delineated how his group worked through the process of learning about conflict resolution (Springer, 2010), and the technique the counselor used, students’ interest “in drama,” to fashion an approach to conflict resolution that would help “make it applicable, memorable, and relevant to their lives”:

[We started with] anger management, in terms of the antecedents of an altercation or a fight....What leads up [to one], or how to defuse something that’s happening rather than clean [it] up....We based it around their current drama. They’re all in the same circle...so, if there was real drama we would unpack it. We drew timelines on the dry erase board and they engaged.

Gangs

Although several participants mentioned topics evolving over the course of the group, one core area that went through that process more than others concerned gangs. Although all groups discussed gangs, participants reported different emphases and amounts of time devoted to this topic. One participant's group discussion on gangs included "what it means to be courted [by] a gang, first and second blessings, respect and anger." Another participant stated that many facets applicable to students' lives were incorporated into gang conversations: "Towards the end we [discussed] some hot issues on gangs [and explained that] a lot of it was relational in nature." He said that one session involved how "gossip...leads to serious altercations"; another session explored "substance use and gangs together."

One participant stated her concerns about how some students seemed to gravitate into gang life, even at their young age: "by eighth grade,...they were being pruned/guided in the way of the gang life." At this point "they didn't get into a lot of fights," their role was more "instigating." She described one particular student who "always seemed to be there in the mix of something." He would typically "be the 'hype man' in the beginning, [and then] at the end he was trying to keep the peace." This appeared representative of how group members became enmeshed in the world of gangs. Another participant explained that he felt that the students he worked with typically "felt prejudged about affiliation [and often] felt like they did something bad." He went on to report that the students "were pretty honest,...so aware of that [perception that] no one believes us, no one's on our side." Another participant revealed how enmeshed students became with the gang lifestyle: their "association with the gang...gang life, criminal activity, that's what was most important for them." When the participant tried to

influence discussions away from gangs, he was unsuccessful: “We talked about relationships, but it always came back to the gang. The gang was their life, their relationships, their everything.”

Other Topics

Although the primary focus of these groups was on behavior management, the participants encouraged the group members to raise issues that were major concerns for them. Two participants (20%) mentioned clothing as an interest of the students in his group: “Swag, fashion,...their clothes came up [a lot].” He said that he and his co-counselor were able to utilize this topic in order to discuss the important issue of stereotypes, impressions, and perceptions of other people. Another explained that they discussed “fashion and what makes ‘guys look like guys,’ role stereotypes.” The most common topics brought up by students included relationships, their dreams for the future, and their family dynamics.

Interpersonal Relationships. Family was a topic with much prominence in each of the group sessions with all participants (100%). One participant described the importance of this focus, along with other interpersonal relationships: “A lot of [group conversations concerned] family; experiences and dynamics; community issues; particularly around gangs and bullying, but they didn’t phrase it as bullying. So it was not bullying, but fights.” He continued to elaborate:

The other piece,...relationships with females or their teachers, was huge....Almost every session opened up with an experience they had with a teacher...with girls, [in addition to] community issues around gangs, and family dynamics and experiences, and how to manage family issues.

Eight participants (80%) mentioned relationships as a core topic area for their group. This topic included problematic interactions with teachers, peers, and family members, as well as romantic relationships, including sex. One participant explained how discussions on relationships were able to lead to another important conversation: “[While we discussed] relationships with others, especially with teachers and their peers, [we] also did some self-esteem topics, [including] how to interact positively with others,...how to build up your self-esteem, [and] how to deal/get out of difficult situations.” Another participant emphasized the importance of the topic of relationships for his students: “I would say the bulk [of the groups concerned] relational conflict,...gossip and dealing with women....Those were the big issues for them.”

Other participants also noted how the core topic of relationships led into additional topics where group members’ could discuss issues of importance to them. Five participants (50%) reported scheduling specific sessions about girls. One participant devoted a session to “their perceptions of women,” another engaged the group in a wide range of issues emanating from the core topic:

[We discussed] courting, relating [to women, and] how to express affection that’s respectful. [Conversations concerned] “Would you want your mom talked to that way?,” and how to manage rejection. [I would use prompt examples like] “Is Mindy a b*tch ‘cause she didn’t accept you? Or could there be other reasons why?...Could it be related to you saying she’s a b*tch?” What are the antecedents to getting rejected or consequences?

He stated that they would then move on to assess whether the students’ thought patterns were based in reality, and “conducive to getting a girlfriend or dating,” or being successful in a way that they would appreciate at their developmental stage. He brought

up an instance of the media's tremendous influence on the adolescents, as discussed above, and used their interest in a then-current song by a popular artist as a method by which to conduct an important discussion: "There was a song that came out by R. Kelly called *Girl, I wanna get you pregnant* that generated a lot of conversation within the group.

Another participant brought up a similar incident with a song very popular with group members during the semester, *It's hard out there for a pimp*. The participant decided to build upon the boys' interest, "they all wanted to be pimps," to engage in skill building: "We reframed it for them. 'So, what are some of the strategies you use when you're pimping? What can you use while you're in school?'" Another area the discussion led to was the respectful ways to engage with females. The counselor devised an activity, framed much like a research project in school, suggesting that students reach out to their female friends and ask them to offer their views as to what they considered respectful treatment. The participant acknowledged that because these adolescents were so enthusiastic about the topic of "girls they liked," they embraced the assignment, at which point the discussion evolved into skill building. The counselors asked the student: "How do we use the skills [you] know [you] have in other ways?" Once students realized this capability, they could "use it to inform their school work and [with] the same level of confidence 'cause they're so prepared in the engagement with females. They're not as prepared in school." He said that this exercise was particularly important because it helped them to learn that emulating the lyrics in popular songs was not consistent with what females considered to be respectful treatment. In the participant's words, students would learn that "you can't talk to females that way." An additional method he used to communicate this message was to relate it to their experiences. How offensive would it

be to them if disrespectful language was addressed to people they cared about? “The members of the group were asked to consider how they might feel if someone talked to their mother or their sister in that manner, which led them to reflect more deeply about their actions and their words.”

Dreams for the Future. The Sankofa violence prevention program (Hines & Sutton, 1998), as discussed above, provided many exercises that participants utilized, among them, students exploring their dreams for the future. One participant explained this as: “Dreams...what they wanted to be when they got older, goals...long- or short-term, [including] what they wanted from the semester. Almost every session we were like, “Where do you want to go from here?” That was a big thing...the future.” He added that this topic had so much salience that it often came up in discussions of other subject areas. Another participant stated that this question engendered many discussions concerning life “after high school and college,” such as: “Can you make it as a black and brown kid? Not just [as] a football player, rapper, or gangster.”

Participants’ Reflections on Areas They Would Have Discussed More

Subsequent to conducting the group sessions that the current study explores, participants went on to work with other populations (similar and different) and acquire additional training. When they were asked by the investigator what they would change or add to group sessions given their enhanced experience, participants offered a range of responses. One participant stated that he would have allowed less downtime during the group as he is now aware that students do not need as much time “to decompress coming into a room.” Another said that he would like to bring up more “skill building activities,” specifying that this is an invariable concern when looking back at client treatment. One participant expressed misgivings about his choices when using media:

I think with movie clips, we didn't pick the right ones. It's hard because you don't want to reinforce images they have of themselves, don't want to play *Boys in the hood* or *Dangerous minds*, reinforcing this [gang-related] image that they aspire to.... They may not be there yet, [and] helping them to identify with these roles could be dangerous. To counter that, I would do different clips and it would be things that I pulled together the night before [such as] *Glee* or *New girl*. I could see them watching it and laughing, but [they also] had trouble abstracting to that extent.

He acknowledged the difficulty between balancing caution against "helping internalize...negative images," with presenting material that offers "more positive characters to identify with," but expressed concern that media portrayals of positive characters may be too far from the students' "normal range of experience," and thus render identification difficult.

This participant elaborated on the way that gang life was delineated within their group dynamic. He "primarily followed the Sankofa model" (Hines & Sutton, 1998), including: "how to short circuit a fight, intervene for themselves, underlying reasons for why we fight, how does violence reproduce itself, [and the] intergenerational transmission of gang involvement" (Hines & Sutton, 1998). The participant proceeded with conversations about gang life, and other related issues, such as encounters with police and racism, as discussed above. He stressed to his students that their ability to distinguish "the veracity of those thoughts" was crucial to their daily living skills.

Two participants (20%) brought up the significant losses that had occurred in the lives of the group members. One participant stated: "We never really talked about...loss. All of them had endured really hard losses.... That's something that would've been

helpful to talk about, to see it's something they have in common and something [which] they could support each other." Another participant added that a discussion of loss could have been a component of the group's skill-building process.

Crisis Intervention in the Counseling Groups

All of the participants (100%) mentioned various crises that arose within the group settings, such as dealing with significant losses experienced by member(s), and conflicts arising between group members during the session that could infrequently escalate to violence. While each stressed the importance of group supervision in managing a crisis, different strategies were employed in each instance.

One participant related the experience of a student bringing a weapon to group: [The student] went into the art room and grabbed what looked like a knife, really a sharp tool, and showed it to [the counselors. We then] had to report it to the vice principal. [The student] became really angry and upset that we had reported it. The co-counselors discussed the event and its ramifications with the rest of the group, but were left with concerns about what consequences their actions would have on their relationship with the student and the competing interests they had to consider:

It was hard to deal with, because we felt we broke his trust....But we were protecting him from hurting anyone, and protecting the other students....He is our client, but the school is [also] our client, and we have to look out for everyone.

Another participant brought up a serious incident that occurred in the group—members reported an instance where they had been involved in the gang rape of another middle school student. The school and the police were notified, and this was discussed at length in individual and group sessions. The participant's challenge in responding to this issue also concerned balancing "what is confidential and what isn't." The consequences

to the group were far reaching when the students were “sent out of district” resulting in group dynamic changes, i.e., “dealing with the kids who were left behind and how they felt about it.” Other participants had similar experiences of students being sent out of the district, but possibly because the underlying cause was not as significant, did not report this as changing the group dynamic.

Three participants (30%) noted that gang dynamics created crises within the group. One participant stated that there were “rumblings of gang activity, [as well as] students who divided into groups with names, [but] by the time [the counselors] rallied resources, [the crisis] was over.” Another participant’s students had “heavily gang-involved...close family members,” which caused “trouble on the radar,” as the connection often influenced students in various ways, including perceptions regarding fighting, negative thoughts, and prospective plans for the future. Another participant discussed the process by which his students were slowly incorporated into the gang, with one student spending a weekend “having an initiation,” and returning to the group “as a gang member.”

One participant recalled a crisis in the aftermath of the suicide of a classmate—a young girl—which affected the entire community. He said that his group discussed “who was connected” to her. He helped them to “grieve and talk through the process.” This event had far-reaching consequences. It was “a school wide crisis that affected the group in different ways.”

Another participant brought up a bomb threat in the school that had occurred while the counselors had not been present in the building. The counselors were struck by the racial aspect of the group members’ response. He stated: “The students kept saying, ‘the White kids they were terrified’....The counselors replied, ‘What does that mean?’ To

which the students replied, ‘Black people have been through too much [to be scared].’”

This reaction was an opportunity for the counselors to engage with the students, concerning other areas of relevance in their lives, “exploring their perceptions in terms of their [racial identities] and their community’s history.”

Case Examples of Violence Prevention and Cultural/Racial Interventions

All participants (100%) offered different illustrations of techniques that worked best with the students in their groups. One participant mentioned the response to conflict taught to the group arising out of an incident occurring during the session:

One student was gang involved, but we didn’t know how [he was] getting pulled into the gang. [During one group, a student] was caught saying a curse word [which another student] did not take kindly to. He said that he wanted to beat [the other student] up....So we tried to do a conflict resolution between the two. [Originally] we tried to do a [classic] conflict resolution, [but] it didn’t work out. So, what we did was individually tried to patch things up. [The next group then became] a process group, [discussing the ways that] things will happen. [We had to accept both of them during the subsequent group behaving] civilly with one another as enough of a repair, [and] eventually it became enough. It was squashed just by having them in the group and proving to themselves that they could act civilly.

Although this had not been planned as part of the lesson, the participant believed that the impact of witnessing two group members being able to avoid the threat of violence and interact appropriately with one another was very valuable to the students, and led to significant retention of the underlying conflict resolution skill. The experience of learning how to work through a problem with support was crucial for the students. Being able to

“learn the normalcy of that,” as opposed to other methods of response—many of which have been taught within their communities and accepted as the norm by adolescents, specifically violence—is a skill that may serve them well in the future.

Another participant described how conflict resolution occurred in his group. As with the prior participant, this had not been a planned lesson. He drew on his training in the conflict resolution process as a skill-building activity (Springer, 2010) when the need arose in his group. The therapist stated that he and his co-counselor “went through the whole training including identifying the facts and information on both sides, and determining the end result desired and what is needed for that to occur. The therapist stated that at the end of the conflict resolution exercise, “the two students shook hands.” One of the key elements that this therapist added to the conflict resolution session was that he and his co-counselor “stepped out of the room, and let them talk about it.” He said that the counselors needed to “be flexible” and “took a risk” to help ensure that the process would have long-term benefits for the students in their group.

Nine participants (90%) stated that their group had significant discussions about racial issues concerning the students, such as stereotypes, perceptions of themselves and others influenced by race, and the history of systematic oppression. One participant mentioned skin color as a racial issue discussed in his group. It may have been discussed in other groups as well, but the topic may not have been as significant as in this case. A group member, who the counselor also saw individually, was “considering bleaching his skin.” She reported that “his mom used it often. She said he could use soap to lighten [his] skin over time.” This was an area that stuck with her because of the home impact, the impact it had on his self-perception, the difficulty in discussing such a sensitive topic with a student, as well as the possibility that this could be considered a form of corporal

punishment. While the student disclosed this in individual counseling, it was explored with the group as well in terms of how skin color influenced others' perceptions.

In common with the high degree of diversity within the school district, as discussed above, the Program counselors were from different ethnic, racial and cultural backgrounds. Each counseling team was diverse as well with counselors of different ethnicities. Eight participants (80%) indicated that his or her race may have had an impact on the response of the students. One illustrated that his ethnicity prompted students' comments to him evidencing their incorporation of stereotypes into their perspectives, such as, "'You can't be Spanish because you're getting a degree,' or 'you dress nice,' or 'you talk nice.'" In addition to discussing the importance of using such student reactions as the basis of a conversation regarding stereotypes that became memorable, teachable moments for students, it prompted this participant to reflect on "how I presented."

Impact of the Groups

Impact for Students. In terms of overall impact, nine participants (90%) mentioned that they hoped that the students had taken note of their consistency—they always showed up. One participant expressed this as the counselors representing adults "believing in them." Similar positive concepts, such as, "there were people who really cared about them," and that students "had the potential to do things different if they really wanted to" were restated repeatedly by the vast majority of participants. Student awareness of how to interact positively with adults was considered as crucial by many participants for its adaptability when the need for help exists. Students now know, "I can go to people and say, 'I have this problem. Can you help me?' And get their opinion," rather than being left with the perception that their only option was to go to a peer.

Four participants (40%) mentioned their hopes that the students would retain the skills that were worked on in the group. One participant identified the most important skill as “conflict resolution, [including the ability] to intervene and deescalate.” Their “being able to do a functional analysis, a very simple one, with an antecedent, function, and a consequence” and a recognition of how violence impacted communities would build up their “resilience [with the] skills learned to help them develop in terms of self, individual, and collective identity.”

Counselor Growth. All participants (100%) came away with both a personal and professional sense of growth after working in the Program. Participants reported acquiring greater knowledge and awareness of the following: personal character development, behavior management skills, family dynamics, therapy within schools, methods of dealing with opposition, systems knowledge, and student strengths. One participant acknowledged that prior to this experience she “ didn’t have the language” to discuss students struggling with emotional issues:

Kids at risk all look different. Instead of acting in, they [may be] acting out—that can be detachment from prosocial behavior or withdrawal or oppositional behavior. [They may look like they are being inappropriate], but that could be depression expressed in this sense of hopelessness and detachment from social norms....I saw that with these kids.

Training for Future Counselors

One of the core recommendations for future counselors in training included having more familiarity with research findings discussed in the literature prior to engaging in treatment interventions. Participants brought up concepts and techniques, such as motivational interviewing, the power of validation, school culture, systems,

developmental history, and the core ambivalence of the adolescent as areas that would benefit from additional training.

There can always be additional preparation prior to working in any field. Each of the participants identified different areas—often a reflection of the particular crisis he or she confronted—in which more preparation was indicated prior to treating students. Sexuality was brought up as a topic by two participants (20%) that could be expanded upon more in the literature and discussed more thoroughly, especially in supervision and training for clinicians working with adolescents. Without such additional training, participants were concerned that their discussions with students might be hampered by not knowing what is appropriate, and reactions inconsistent with a professional demeanor. One of the participants would have wanted more training on how to approach and communicate with school staff members so as to enhance student behavior and academic performance. Another brought up the need for further training in groups being led by a co-counseling team to ensure that the nature of the framework is understood.

Additional areas, such as grief and loss, were brought up by individual participants. One participant mentioned that one of the students in the group had a parent with a chronic illness. The participant said that the student's guardian contacted the counselor because she "wanted all of them to talk about it" in group. The participant stated that in retrospect he would have responded to that loss and, additionally, would have opened the group up to discuss losses other students may have experienced, as well as how to respond to similar situations in the future. Each of the participants had ideas for areas that could have been expanded upon. However, they all also saw significant growth, change, and skill retention in each of the student group members during the course of the year. One recommendation, reiterated by a majority of the participants, was the request to

assess the skill retention of group members over time to demonstrate the impact of the group intervention in the students' lives.

Chapter V: Discussion

Introduction

This chapter provides a discussion of the important themes and results that emerged from this study. The initial themes address the importance of counseling groups for at-risk ethnic minority male adolescents and the need to include gang involvement as a component of such programs. The topic of cultural competency follows, with a particular emphasis on the ways in which participants in this study utilized their knowledge to enhance the counseling process. The findings in the current study were incorporated into the Manual for Counseling Groups for At-Risk, Ethnic Minority Male Adolescents (the “Manual”) (see Appendix D). The Manual may be a valuable resource in the development of counseling programs treating a similar population of male adolescents.

The second part of this chapter will address themes that emerged from the counselors’ use of strategies they found effective in the formation and implementation of their groups, including: (a) the importance of building therapeutic rapport with students; (b) productive relationships with school staff members; (c) providing professional development for staff; (d) the benefits of dual services which include individual, as well as group counseling; and (e) positive relationships with families and outside systems. A discussion of intervention strategies follows, including the importance of deliberation during the group formation process; involving students in the group process; and developing rapport between co-counselors. This analysis, incorporated into the Manual (see Appendix D), may be very helpful to counselors in other group programs. Limitations of the study are then presented. Finally, implications for future research,

program development, policy, counselors or clinicians, schools, and training are discussed.

Themes

Importance of Addressing Violence in Counseling Groups for At-Risk Male Adolescents. Youth violence is a major public health concern, particularly for ethnic minority youth (David-Ferdon & Hammond, 2008), as discussed above. All of the students referred for these groups had a history of violence in the school, primarily fighting, and many had received in-school and out-of-school suspensions. Such suspensions resulted in compromised academic performance. The need for, and value of, counseling programs and groups for such youth is stressed in the literature (Guerra & Smith, 2006), and was corroborated by the experiences of the participants in this study. All participants incorporated violence prevention interventions from the Sankofa program (Hines & Sutton, 1998) to address conflict resolution, the anatomy of fights, and to motivate the students in their groups to modify behaviors that counselors hoped the adolescents would recognize as harmful to their families, school and community, as well as themselves.

All of the participants needed to intervene in fights or arguments between the group members. Thus, it was very important that counselors had training in crisis intervention and conflict resolution techniques (Springer, 2010). The need for such training for interventions with at-risk youth has been stressed in the literature (Boyd-Franklin & Bry, 2000; Guerra & Smith, 2006; Hines & Sutton, 1998; Springer, 2010).

Addressing Issues of Gang Involvement. Issues of gang recruitment and participation were concerns of the counselors interviewed. This is consistent with the research and literature on at-risk, ethnic minority adolescents (Forster et al., 2015; Hanna

et al., 1999). The importance of intervening when youth are at risk for gang involvement before they become entrenched in gang activities was emphasized by Forster et al. (2015) and other researchers (Hanna et al., 1999). Thus, the need exists for preventive interventions that target students in middle school, who are at the age when gangs in their communities begin to recruit new members. Research findings have stressed the importance of keeping adolescents out of the juvenile justice system (Lipsey et al., 2010; Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 2014). The longer students are involved in community violence and gangs, the more likely they are to engage in criminal behavior (Curry et al., 2002), be arrested, and enter the juvenile justice system (Kirk & Sampson, 2013), as discussed above. Counseling groups for at-risk youth, such as those presented in this study, can serve a preventive function and may help to keep adolescents from involvement with the justice system (Guerra & Smith, 2006).

Cultural Competency. The value of cultural competency and the need for counselors to be knowledgeable about the cultural backgrounds of their clients has been stressed in the literature in the field of multicultural psychology (Boyd-Franklin, 2003; Boyd-Franklin & Bry, 2000; McGoldrick et al., 2005; Sue & Sue, 2012), and was confirmed by the experiences of the current study's participants in treatment interventions with African American and Latino male adolescents. Issues of particular relevance to the population treated included racism, racial profiling, and negative interactions with the police. Another topic of concern to group members was stereotype threat. Counselors developed a number of exercises focusing on this issue. The counselors also modeled how difficult issues, such as those listed above, could be discussed. The specificity of this content, incorporated into the Manual (see Appendix D) is rare in the literature on cultural competency, and provides a framework for

practitioners, who may be of different ethnic, cultural and racial backgrounds, to offer effective treatment to ethnic minority male adolescents.

The Manual for Counseling Groups for At-Risk, Ethnic Minority Male

Adolescents. A result of the current study, as discussed above, was the treatment manual for counselors working with groups of male adolescents (see Appendix D). This manual incorporated some strategies from Sankofa, an evidence-based violence prevention program (Hines & Sutton, 1998), which counselors in the Program found very helpful in explaining the trajectory of a fight to the adolescents in the groups so that they would be able to identify the points at which they could de-escalate conflict. All of the study participants viewed a manual, detailing the techniques that they found most useful in counseling groups of adolescent males from ethnically diverse backgrounds as valuable to counselors treating this population. The activities and treatment concepts incorporated within the Manual (see Appendix D) have been tested and found effective by a significant number of counselors in the Program and may be used in clinics as well as schools. The Manual may assist in best practice, learning, and growth for the students and clinicians and may prove especially helpful to practitioners with high caseloads who might benefit from a structured list of suggestions for working with this population in groups (Zellmer et al., 2006).

During the check-in system at the beginning of the session, an essential element of all groups, each group member described one positive and one negative experience from the prior week. The members were able to introduce issues or topics that were important to them such as relationships, stereotypes, family issues and their dreams for the future, as well as conflicts. If a group member identified a conflict or fight as a “low” of the week, the counselors also had the opportunity to reinforce the conflict resolution

techniques (Springer, 2010) that the adolescents had learned once that material had been covered. Although the Manual focused to some degree on violence prevention skills, the Program was flexible and allowed the counselors to be responsive to current issues or crises in the group members' lives. The Manual reflects this in its descriptions of activities or discussions introduced or initiated by group members.

As many group members had been referred because of behavior problems and/or fighting, the establishment of group rules was extremely important. It introduced, early in the sessions, the concept of self-regulation—a quality further reinforced by the counselors through behavioral rewards and incentives. One of the key findings of this study was the importance of building therapeutic rapport with students in these groups. The Manual contains a number of icebreakers and other activities that counselors can use to increase the engagement of a similar population of at-risk middle school students.

Importance of Building Therapeutic Rapport With Students. Many of the current group intervention programs were originally developed for high school students. In order to adapt the group interventions to adolescents in middle school (aged 12 to 15), particular attention was paid to the process of engaging these students and building rapport. All of the participants stressed how crucial building rapport with the students in the group was for the therapeutic relationship. The first opportunity arose with counselor selection when rapport helped to determine the match between the student and the counselor for individual sessions. Taking advantage of the initial connection between counselor and student is beneficial in that: (a) it is a starting point for a future positive relationship to develop; (b) it conveys that the counselor values the student; and (c) it facilitates the student's sense of personal connection to the counselor.

Skills. Rapport can be facilitated through increased knowledge about the students in the group, awareness of students' interests, and attention given to relationship building. Selective sharing by the counselors of their own points of view can also be beneficial. For example, icebreaker discussions on subjects such as favorite foods or sports teams are occasions for counselors to express their opinions to help build a connection with the group. Crucial to the rapport building process, however, is the counselor's ability to assess the personal information he or she shares as appropriate and beneficial for the students to know.

Materials. Culturally relevant materials are necessary for the initial engagement and ongoing involvement of the students. Media can be used as a resource to help with relevancy, and students should be given an opportunity to voice concern over current events. Counselor discretion is important; however, the subject matter should be consistent with the curriculum and capable of being incorporated into teaching lessons.

Methods. A reward system is also crucial to the development of rapport. Rewards can be small and instant, i.e., positive words or candy, or can be incremental, i.e., chips or tokens, that can be aggregated to result in a larger reward. Participants stressed the importance of consistency in the reward system, so that students are assured that both positive and negative consequences are based on a clearly delineated set of rules. Such predictability can act to ensure that all group members can feel comfortable with the process and that no individual student feels targeted, a situation which might exist if the counselor actions appear arbitrary.

Importance of Positive Relationships With Staff in the School. Positive connections with members of the school staff who interact frequently with students helps to facilitate the work being done in school-based intervention programs and influences

whether results are maintained over the long term (Blue-Banning, Summers, Frankland, Nelson, & Beegle, 2004; Bryan, 2005). Participants in the current study referenced different types of relationships with school staff members, such as guidance counselors, child study team members, administrators, security guards and teachers, as well as local service providers, but each participant emphasized the impact that positive relationships had on their work with students. Five participants (50%) mentioned that certain staff members had negative perceptions of the students in the counseling groups, allowed those perceptions to influence their interactions with the students, expressed doubts as to whether these students' behavior would be improved with group counseling, and relayed such sentiments to other staff members.

The participants stressed the contributions that school staff can make to programs that do not originate on site, such as providing background information on the system, students, and community. In addition, consultations with school staff, who are aware of and can share related discipline, attendance and testing records, can be instrumental to tailoring interventions to individual students. Working closely with all of the key players to facilitate: (a) open and frequent communication; (b) shared short- and long-term goals for the students; and (c) knowledge of the goals and results of positive supportive counseling relationships being disseminated throughout the school setting, is crucial in ensuring that interventions are optimally effective.

Participants suggested that one method by which positive relationships with school staff could be encouraged was by acquainting them with outside resources that would benefit students. As other Program counselors and the Program Director became more aware of the unmet needs of students, they organized tutoring and additional after-school programs in the school district. Such initiatives, and further ones undertaken by

outside professionals working within the schools, such as mentorship programs and other after-school or weekend programs, would help to facilitate buy in with staff.

Providing Professional Development for Staff. Many participants expressed a desire to have had more interaction with teachers in order to: (a) give teachers more knowledge concerning mental health conditions; (b) give them tools that would facilitate their work with students; (c) provide support on a systematic level, including offering suggestions for behavior management and (d) offer guidelines on building rapport with their most difficult students. Informing school staff of the benefits to students of individual and group counseling and skill-building instruction, as well as apprising them that outside professionals performing in-school services are a resource they can access for support, will not only assist the school staff members themselves, but will also help students as staff will then be more able to reinforce counseling interventions.

Benefits of Dual Services: Individual and Group Counseling. The addition of individual counseling to group counseling allows for targeting individual student goals, more opportunities for relationship building between the student and the invested adult, and a venue in which students may share concerns they might not be comfortable sharing in a group setting with peers. This is particularly important for middle school students. Being able to distinguish material appropriate for sharing with peers, from that which is not, is a key social skill to acquire in this age range. Individual counseling provides additional benefits for group counselors as the increased connection formed during individual sessions can be helpful when behavioral issues arise in group meetings.

The individual counselor monitors the student's progress in school, including both the behavioral and academic aspects, and follows up with the relevant school staff members and the students when issues arise in those areas. Many school systems now

provide staff online access to student information, such as grades and disciplinary records, through its computer system. Monitoring helps to facilitate honest communication with students and reassures them that the counselor is invested in their overall success. In addition, this monitoring may help to reassure the school and the family that all adults are working towards the same goal of school success.

Importance of Positive Relationships With Families. Each of the participants stressed the impact that family members and other individuals close to the student can have when they work in collaboration with school staff members who have significant interactions with the student. As the continuity between school and home can have a major impact on students' academic performance, increased parental engagement in the school process helps to facilitate learning (Hoover-Dempsey, Walker, Jones, & Reed, 2002). Reinforcement of important skills can influence the direction students choose both on a day-to-day basis and as they transition out of middle school. Thus, it is important that family members and others close to adolescents are identified and act in concert with counselors on setting goals for the student. Family participation is a crucial support when students receive counseling wherever the venue—school, clinic, or treatment facility.

Interventions that increase parental knowledge and facilitate interactions with school staff members provide another layer of support that can continue beyond the work of the initial intervention (Feinberg, Beyer, & Moses, 2002). Methods by which increased parental awareness may be accomplished include phone calls, letters, invitations to events run by counselors, student updates and, when indicated, participation in the counseling group itself. Incorporation of the student's family or alternative support network can have an impact beyond the school year or the grade level of the student. It provides not only another level of support for students (Dinnebeil, Hale, & Rule, 1996,

2000), but accountability partners outside of the school setting for students to continue to work on skill acquisition. This research is consistent with the participants' statements regarding the importance of incorporating the family into the work being done in groups, schools, and other settings outside of the home.

Importance of Positive Relationships With Outside Systems. Collaboration between families, schools, communities, and others involved with youth can have a major impact on the success of interventions (Adelman & Taylor, 1997a, 1997b; Children's Aid Society, 1997; Feinberg et al., 2002; McKnight, 1995; Roberts, Rule, & Innocenti, 1998). Individuals, such as outside clinicians, local community leaders, coaches, religious leaders and figures who are not related by blood but extremely close to the student, in addition to community resources, i.e., treatment centers and youth-oriented organizations, can have a strong influence outside of school hours, provide support, and may also offer another location where students can be engaged outside of the home. After-school programs and activities can also be a support for students (Newman, Fox, Flynn, & Christeson, 2000). Informing families and schools of activities and existing programs, making appropriate recommendations, and then following up if further encouragement is needed before students avail themselves of opportunities, can all make a major difference for students. In addition to teaching social skills, participating in activities outside of the school setting after school hours is important in keeping youth safe and engaged in a positive course (Newman et al., 2000). The current study is consistent with the research documenting the significant impact productive use of after-school time and alerting supports in students' lives of available resources and activities can have for adolescents.

Group Supervision for Counselors. Training, peer support, and group supervision are crucial to: (a) facilitating new groups, (b) the growth of counselors in

existing groups, (c) the ability of counselors to get additional perspectives on areas of concern so that the needs of the clients are responded to effectively, and (d) to prevent burnout. All of the participants stressed the benefit of the weekly supervision process in terms of constancy, and providing a much needed source of significant support and additional input for them. It should be noted that such supervision need not occur on site, but can be held at an alternate location as well.

Ongoing training needs to be reflective of best practices in the field and the population to be treated. For example, the counselors for this intervention required ongoing training in motivational interviewing and relationships, as well as state-approved curriculum requirements. Treating at-risk ethnic minority male adolescents required additional ongoing training in conflict resolution, gangs, and cultural competency.

Training in culturally competent counseling, incorporating differences in gender, ethnicity and culture, is crucial to working with diverse students. Knowledge of the local area is important in preparation for appropriate interventions. For example, training provided to the group counselors on the specific gangs recruiting adolescents in the area provided helpful information to the counselors and allowed them to customize relevant treatment. It also influenced the focus of group sessions about gang involvement.

Importance of Agreement on Scheduling Priorities. Group therapy sessions can be extremely difficult to schedule given that students also have to incorporate academic subjects, extracurricular activities, and testing into a school day as well. Ensuring that teachers and other school staff understand that counseling, and the social and resilience-oriented skills that are learned during the session, are equally valuable to the adolescent is crucial. All of the participants stressed that positive relationships with staff members, such as school secretaries, whose positions entail an awareness of the

school's organizational structure and calendar, i.e., the dates of holidays and other school breaks, school trips, assemblies and statewide testing schedules, can be pivotal in making the best use of the limited time available in a school day for counseling. These staff members can also be of significant assistance in: (a) checking to ensure that students are not double booked, (b) communicating to other staff members the benefit of the groups, and (c) providing channels of open communication crucial to day-to-day interactions and use of the intervention process.

Staff members who are aware of both the school system and the students are situated to facilitate the referral system that will best serve the intervention. A clearly structured plan, combined with open communication between the school staff and group counselors, is necessary for students in need of services to be paired with the appropriate group. Interventions would not be effective in a group where there is an overabundance of peer difficulties or when a group consists of members whose needs for social skills acquisition are inapposite. For example, if some of the group members are struggling with being victims of bullying and others are typically aggressors, it would be beneficial to split them into two groups. Treatment is possible with a mixture of issues in the room, but the process is more efficient when group members' issues are more similar than different. Students with externalizing difficulties, such as aggression and discipline concerns, were targeted by the interventions described in this study. Proper identification by knowledgeable staff during the referral process meant that those students' issues could be addressed in a helpful setting.

Importance of Deliberation During the Group Formation Process. Counselors should be aware of the potential of power struggles in the group, whether they are between counselors, among the students, or among the counselors and students. When

such difficulties are anticipated at the outset, counselors may be able to prevent them or, if not, address them quickly, consistently, and without favoritism. Conflicts between students should be dealt with during the group session, when possible, to prevent students from choosing sides, leading to further divisions.

When interviewing students for the group, counselors should ask them if there are any classmates with whom they would be unable to work. If a fellow student is identified as “an enemy,” the counselor should be alerted that these adolescents should not be in a group together. Middle school students often form cliques and there are times when students in opposite cliques can work together positively; however, this is not the case with students who have formed rivalries. Counselors need to monitor the interpersonal differences among group members proactively. Other facts for exclusion, as discussed above, include a student’s (a) presenting too many risk factors; (b) concurrently receiving other multiple services; (c) demonstrating an inability to focus; (d) being unable or unwilling to engage in conversation; (e) frequent truancy; or (f) history of being “targeted.” Use of such criteria during group formation will leave room for students who are more likely to benefit from the group or, in the case of the student who is often targeted, not place him at greater risk.

Student Involvement in the Group Process. Participants stressed the importance of building rapport with students, confirming research findings that rapport is crucial to the learning process of adolescents, particularly those who struggle with authority figures (Batista, 2009; Thompson, Bender, Lantry, & Flynn, 2007). Some of the techniques in the current study that established rapport included: (a) age-appropriate icebreakers in the group; (b) individual time with students; (c) positive verbal reinforcement; and (d) rewards for behavior.

One of the challenges in conducting groups for adolescent males is keeping them engaged in the process. Participants mentioned several strategies to maintain student interest pertaining to activities, methods of conducting the group, level of student input in governance, and the need for counselors to be flexible. Participants mentioned that gender- and age-appropriate tasks could orient adolescent males around a table and keep them engaged. Similarly, since their academic classes primarily consisted of lectures, the conversational nature of the groups promoted engagement. Participants acknowledged that students had high energy levels and one mentioned the utility of activities that “kept them moving.” Motivational interviewing techniques (Miller & Rollnick, 2012) are particularly attractive to adolescents as such techniques allow them to explore the pros and cons of different choices, resulting in an empowering decision making process. Integrating this technique into their everyday lives will facilitate making more considered decisions in the future, when the counselors and peers in the group are no longer available for input.

Allowing the students to be a part of the process of creating the group rules can set a positive tone for their participation, and informs them that their role is very different in this setting from the rest of their school day. Beginning with this collaborative setting of limits together gives students’ ownership, showcases their value to the group, and also alerts them to the boundaries allowed by the group counselors. Student-initiated methods of helping peers to manage their behavior, such as raising a hand or raising three fingers, to signal a violation of the agreed-upon rules, can contribute to the students’ ownership over the group process and reinforce self-regulation skills.

Although topics and activities can shift each week, core aspects such as the goals, leadership, rules, and structure should remain the same. Maintaining the framework of

the group by engaging in consistent activities, such as icebreakers and high and low discussions, are other important structural aspects of the intervention, and can help the students to achieve a level of comfort during sessions and become committed to the process. Flexibility is essential to the continued engagement of adolescent males. When counselors are adaptable to changing the day's scheduled topic in response to students' relating their "highs and lows" of the week at the start of the session, the interest level of students is increased, they are helped to keep focused, and their sense of empowerment is validated. This flexibility also illustrates to students that the group's purpose is based on students' individual goals and growth, rather than superimposed by the adults in the room. Counselors' ability to "go with the flow" creates a unique space within the school day for students to be active in setting the agenda.

The importance of student input in the day's topic, in addition to engendering a high interest level conversations, creates opportunities for students to learn from one another. Experiences related by peers, and having positive choices affirmed by fellow group members, can be more meaningful to adolescents than when such occurrences originate with adults. Mutual sharing creates affirming relationships with other group members, which may result in benefits outside of the group setting—another support network for students and peer accountability (Anderssen, & Wold, 1992; Scales, Benson, Leffert, & Blyth, 2000).

Importance of Rapport With Co-Counselor. Rapport between counselors and group members has been emphasized throughout. For the group management process to be effective, rapport also has to exist between the two co-counselors leading each group. A positive relationship between the co-counselors sets the tone for the group. The modeling of respect and investment between the adults can lay the foundation for

interaction among students. Role flexibility, whereby either can be the disciplinarian when necessary and both can reach out to offer support to the other when the occasion demands, also facilitates student comfort with both counselors. An additional benefit is that group sessions will not have to be cancelled if one counselor is not present.

Nine participants (90%) noted the beneficial aspects of the co-counselor model, such as: (a) the positive balance occurring when counselors come from different psychology perspectives and can incorporate diverse frameworks with students, (b) opportunities for students to bond with different types of counselors, (c) additional support for each of the counselors, and (d) the protective factor of having two adults in the room at all times. One participant referred to a drawback—students' responses to one counselor or the other may be so divergent as to create a power struggle between the counselors.

Open communication between counselors regarding behavioral management, incentives, reinforcement, and personal goals can contribute to the group structure. In order to help ensure clarity in the group and proactively prevent stressors arising from confusion, counselors should arrange a weekly meeting to (a) debrief the most recent session, (b) plan for the next week's meeting, and (c) discuss any additional concerns they may have about the students. Such counselor discussions will also facilitate the presentation of a "united front" to students, and model a collaborative relationship.

Participants stressed the importance of seating the counselors in different locations in the room so that more students would be in proximity to a counselor. Close counselor presence helps to reaffirm to students that the adults in the room are listening to them and can also assist with behavior management as the counselor in closest

proximity to the student can more readily address disruptions in the group or members' emotional distress.

Coordination Between School Resources and the Counseling Program. It is important for clinicians working in schools to exercise oversight that students' needs are being met. This involves identification of: (a) what services each student is receiving, (b) the key personnel involved with the student and main goals each hopes to accomplish with the student, and (c) any additional difficulties the student may be experiencing. For example, students may be receiving services related to emotional or behavioral concerns without school staff recognition of co-occurring educational concerns. Since these areas are interrelated, it is vital that professionals work in concert with one another to best serve students.

Participants in this study cited the availability of the school's guidance counselors, teachers, and other staff members for discussions about students. However, the case managers for students involved with the child study team worked through the district office and were not often on site. This arrangement may not be the same case for every school and/or district. Students classified by child study teams are disproportionately male and of ethnic minority backgrounds (Coutinho, Oswald, & Best, 2002; Finn & Rock, 1997; Skiba et al., 2002), characteristics that coincide with disciplinary referrals in schools. These are precisely the students who may benefit most from counseling services in the school setting. Without such help, they are more likely to eventually enter the prison system (Jones, 2013; Skiba et al., 2002). Students who are classified, as well as those who have a 504 classification should be identified in the school to ensure that each education professional is aware of the services that the student is receiving. The difficulty in contacting members of the child study team concerned

participants in the Program because the inability to coordinate with all service providers might have resulted in conflicting information given to students and families.

Importance of Training. Prior to working with at-risk youth, it is important for counselors to be knowledgeable about topics of concern for youth in general, such as adolescent development and relationships, in addition to areas with a particular relevance for treatment of the at-risk population, such as motivational interviewing, harassment, intimidation, bullying, and gang awareness. All of the participants acknowledged that the training they received regarding gangs was crucial to working with at-risk adolescent males. Gangs were discussed in every group and counselors stressed the following areas as being particularly important: (a) the negative peer influence and support; (b) the cultural aspects of gangs in communities; and (c) the benefits of support groups, such as the one that was the subject of the current study, for students who may targets of gang recruitment. Their training also addressed the sense of family that make gangs so attractive to many adolescents and, for some, an intergenerational history of gang involvement.

Processing was a skill that all of the participants stressed in their work with students. The group process was a model of how to work through a problem when it occurred and the benefits of discussing the breakdown of that concern with invested peers and adults. The acquisition of this skill is one of the most important reasons to recommend group counseling for adolescents.

Limitations of the Current Study

Although the participants constituted an accurate demographic representation of the counselors in the Program, findings should be interpreted with caution due to the small sample size (10). Precedence was given to those whose work with students was

most recent to counteract long-term biases in memory. The study was conducted with counselors from one program, therefore, the results may not be generalizable to other school settings and communities. Nevertheless, it is hoped that many of the results and findings of this study, embodied in the Manual (see Appendix D), will be helpful to others treating this population.

Due to the exploratory nature of this research, no comparison group was included. All of the participants were affiliated with the same counseling program, and a significant majority (80%) of the participants received their training at the same doctoral program. The semi-structured interview instrument (see Appendix C) used for each participant provided structure to better assess the areas of group structure, topics, and counselors' sense of success; however, such standardization decreased the ability of the participants to offer otherwise valuable perspectives on areas outside of the particular interview questions.

Another limitation is that the duration of the counseling relationships differed. Some counselors—those initially working with seventh graders—often led their group over a two-year period; others—those initially working with eighth graders—often only had a year; and the participant who led the group containing both seventh and eighth graders worked with some of the students for one year and others for two years. This disparity may have resulted in differences in the following areas: (a) relationships between the counselors and the students, (b) relationships between the group members; and (c) a more extensive school history for eighth graders than seventh graders.

Another limitation of this study is that the results may not be translatable to populations other than adolescents in middle school. While the activities recommended by the participants can be utilized with students at other ages, they may not be as

successful with younger or older students. Despite this limitation, many of the activities described in this study and in the Manual were derived from treatment interventions designed for high school students, including the Sankofa violence prevention program (Hines & Sutton, 1998) and conflict resolution (Springer, 2010), which indicates that the results of this study may be applicable to a larger population than middle school male adolescents.

The majority of the counselors were completing their doctorates in psychology while working with the groups. Their extensive preparation, combined with the peer support inherent in weekly group supervision with the Program Director, may have had a significant impact on the efficacy of their work with group members. Thus, the findings of the current study may not apply when other counselors working with at-risk male youth lack the academic background, training, and support of the counselors in this study.

Limitations may arise out of the demographic composition of the groups in this study. The students were from the same area in New Jersey; had been identified by the school prior to their inclusion; and shared similar risk factors, including behavior problems, fighting, other forms of aggression and violence in the school, and academic difficulties. Considerations such as location; socioeconomic status; demographic composition; differences in home language, school population, and students being counseled; and levels of the school involvement in addressing the needs of at-risk students could also influence the degree to which the results of the current study may be replicated. Additional research is recommended to ensure that these results are consistent in other school systems and with similar at-risk, ethnic minority male adolescents.

The researcher conducted each of the interviews, analyzed the data, and also worked as a counselor within the Program. Given the researcher's interest in, and

experience with, this Program, along with the subjective potential inherent in qualitative analyses, another limitation could arise from investigator bias. These factors should be considered when interpreting the findings of the study.

Implications of the Study

Implications for Future Research. Research studies have indicated that interventions should be different for adolescent males and females (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995; Spencer, 2009; Tomada & Schneider, 1997; Zimmer-Gembeck et al., 2005). All of the participants stressed the importance of rapport and skill building in the counseling process. A core part of the current study consisted of isolating the techniques effective in the development of rapport and skill building in counseling adolescent males and future research should continue to explore these issues and develop other strategies.

Implications for Future Program Development. Programs to work with at-risk youth are becoming increasingly important (Collins et al., 2002; Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003). The focus of many programs is preventing drug use, although recent research has supported a more general orientation towards positive character development overall (Collins et al., Griffin, Botvin, Nichols, & Doyle, 2003), and significant research has demonstrated that mentoring programs can create positive change (Grossman & Tierney, 1998; Collins et al., 2002). The school-based program described in this study, oriented towards students with a combination of risk factors, may not be limited to consisting of outside counselors, but may be conducted with staff members already present in the school.

Batista (2009) formulated a manual for working with female students in the Program. As a result of the current study, a companion manual (see Appendix D) was developed for work with adolescent males. Future research could expand on the content

of the Manual in the following manner: (a) offer more formulaic instruction; (b) further divide the middle school population to separate seventh and eighth grade students; (c) extend the student population to lower and/or higher grades; and (d) when appropriate, i.e., where resources and/or the student population is significantly more limited, create a manual for a mixed gender counseling group.

Additionally, other in-school counseling programs, such as those based on Individual Education Plan (IEP) and Response to Intervention (RTI) (Geltner & Leibforth, 2008; Milsom, Goodnough, & Akos, 2007; Ockerman, Mason, & Hollenbeck, 2012; Shepard, Shahidullah, & Carlson, 2013; Zambrano, Castro-Villarreal, & Sullivan, 2012) could incorporate the curriculum present in the Manual (see Appendix D). In this manner, school-based interventions may result in more positive outcomes for a population which many feel are unable to experience effective change (Boyd-Franklin, & Bry, 2000; Hanna et al., 1999).

Implications for Future Policy. Implications for future policy include acknowledgment of the benefits, behaviorally and academically, of students learning social emotional skills, particularly in group settings, in addition to academic work (Cohen, 2006; McClelland, Morrison, & Holmes, 2000). Setting aside time for social skills counseling and adolescent development during the school day could be considered: (a) as a form of RTI for students struggling with behavioral concerns, and (b) as a preventive technique that might forestall more serious issues arising in the school.

Creating a framework for students to learn how to help guide one another and reinforce positive decisions made by their peers can have a significant impact on success later in life (Ungar, 2000). Ethnic minority adolescents, particularly males, have a higher tendency for more negative later life outcomes. More programs in schools that provide

peer support and skill acquisition can result in social and academic improvement. Moreover, research has shown that at-risk youth demonstrate gains from group work when their peers reinforce their positive decisions and they are given the early opportunity to demonstrate leadership (Harris, 1995). This research was confirmed by the current study. The students expressed the views that they benefited from: (a) working with a group counselor and their peers; (b) having a safe space in school; and (c) working through their real-life concerns. While some high schools provide peer- and adult-led support groups, earlier interventions with middle school students may have significant results for adolescents as their skills, positive peer support, and an ability to interact with constructive adults can contribute to a life course that has not already been too compromised to allow for success.

Implications for Clinicians. Clinicians in this study emphasized the importance of working with professionals within the school, engaging the students' families so that they would reinforce the work done in group sessions, and referring students and those close to them to additional sources of support. Through individual research and peer exchanges during group supervision, clinicians are uniquely situated to educate students, families, and others involved with the adolescent regarding available resources. All of the clinicians in this study highlighted the importance of discussions with their peers to ascertain the best ideas for implementation with their groups, and to get their feedback when novel situations arose. Clinicians in other programs can create their own networks of support. A peer support network is also particularly beneficial for the prevention of clinician burnout.

Implications for Schools. A connection to one other adult formed by an adolescent can help to orient a student in the process of learning and can assist in the

formulation of resilience techniques that will last a lifetime (Boyd-Franklin & Bry, 2000; Murray, 2003). The Manual (see Appendix D) helps to create a framework to help to foster positive relationships between students and concerned adults, guide student learning, and assist counselors in rapport building. The individual counseling aspect of this framework underlines the concept of the concerned adult and reinforces that relationship, occurs in the course of the school day, and promotes sharing during a developmentally sensitive time in adolescent males' lives. The process recommended by the participants in this study to help to ensure the identification of the students who would most benefit from group counseling in conjunction with individual counseling utilized a combination of teacher recommendations, discipline records, and referrals by other school staff.

The importance of offering accessible support within the framework of a school should be apparent to the education hierarchy of a community, i.e., district officials and school boards, and those who work with youth (Boyd-Franklin & Bry, 2000). In order for these sources of support to be known by families and other community members, multiple methods of dispensing information may be required, such as notes sent home with the student, online contact, information sent by mail, meetings, and automatic voicemail messages to home telephones and/or cell phones. School officials should be mindful of the most effective methods to reach families and other community sources.

One of the current study's goals was to identify interventions that would be effective with adolescent males. The activities, topics, themes and examples used by the counselors, as well as the rapport building strategies, were all tailored to this age range, and are detailed in the Manual (see Appendix D). The Manual may be used by school professionals to inform interventions with other at-risk male middle school students.

Implications for Families. Hill and Tyson (2009) found that parental monitoring, expectations, and focus on student motivation during middle school can predict later achievement. Supporting families and assisting them in understanding adolescents, as well as helping them to monitor the student in and outside of school, can be crucial in bridging a difficult emotional time. Supporting families to promote positive coping strategies, and facilitating their role in the student's learning process, can make a substantial contribution to an adolescent's future academic endeavors (Reschley, Hueber, Appleton, & Antaramian, 2008).

Implications for Training. Although clinicians often work with youth in different age ranges, the middle school age range in early adolescence is a particularly difficult time for students, as well as the adults who work with them (Hanna et al., 1999). Hanna et al. (1999) highlighted the importance of different activities, peer supported strategies, and a structured framework for effective work with this age. In terms of training, this may indicate that clinicians working with adolescents should utilize a manualized program, at least initially (Hogue, Henderson, Dauber, Barajas, Fried, & Liddle, 2008), as this may assist in best practice, learning, and growth for the students and clinicians alike.

Additional clinician training could be beneficial in many areas when working with at-risk youth, such as (a) motivational interviewing; (b) sexual education topics, i.e., how it is addressed in schools and how clinicians can be prepared to discuss it effectively with adolescents; and (c) cultural competency. When at-risk youth are primarily from ethnic and racial minority groups, as was the case in the current study, training in cultural competency is crucial so that students and their families may best be helped. Without such training, issues may not be addressed appropriately and the effectiveness of

interventions may be limited (Constantine, Hage, Kindaichi, & Bryant, 2007; Pope-Davis & Coleman, 1996; Sue, 2003; Sue, Arredondo, & McDavis, 1992). In the present study, topics discussed in each of the groups, such as racism, targeting, micro aggressions and stereotypes, required prior cultural competency training (Boyd-Franklin, 2003; Hudley & Taylor, 2006). An overview of different racial and ethnic groups is beneficial for all clinicians prior to beginning practice (Boyd-Franklin, & Bry, 2000; Constantine et al., 2007). Graduate students should receive training in working with African American, Latino, Asian, and White families (Boyd-Franklin, 2003; Franklin, Carter, & Grace, 1993; Garcia-Preto, 2005; McGoldrick et al., 2005).

Many of these student may also have multiple systems incorporated into their lives and that of their families. Working in conjunction with the other systems, reaching out to family, and connecting with the community, may require further training in the multisystems model before beginning to work in a new systems component (Boyd-Franklin, & Bry, 2000).

Clinicians are advised to have additional training with regard to violence prevention and, when relevant, gangs. Violence prevention programs were originally directed at high school students, but the need for intervention begins at ever earlier ages, middle school and perhaps even younger, depending on the community. Clinicians need to be aware of the impact of violence on youth, particularly when violence is pervasive in a student's community, and thus a daily concern (Guerra & Smith, 2006).

The participants in this study stressed the helpfulness of a manual for the group treatment of ethnically diverse at-risk adolescents. The Manual (see Appendix D), comprising activities and best practices resulting from this current investigation, can also be used for training purposes for clinicians and counselors in schools who are starting

work with a similar population of at-risk male adolescents and need guidance to provide effective treatment. Flexibility is crucial with this age range; however, being responsive to subject matter the group members bring up for discussion may result in clinicians' discomfort, i.e., sexual topics. Having a framework for addressing such issues can be beneficial to clinicians working with adolescents. The Manual is divided into sequential sessions, but the order can be changed to reflect student needs, i.e., behavioral support, discipline concerns or basic social skills sessions, and may be used with short- or long-term groups (see Appendix D).

Conclusions

At-risk, ethnic minority adolescent males are more frequently referred for services within the school system. Effective service delivery at that age may ameliorate the greater risks they may face in later years—dropping out, prison, and violent deaths (Alexander, Entwisle, & Horsey, 1997; Chavez, & Oetting, 1994; Gregory et al., 2010; Jones, 2013). Schools, families, and communities often make efforts provide resources for these students, but may not be fully aware of how to best target support for them. The current study was designed to provide information regarding the most effective way to reach out to adolescent male students and provide counseling for them.

The participants in this study all worked within a school, but the findings can be generalized to other settings where clinicians treat at-risk adolescent males. The information provided by the participants—recommendations for group work, including techniques for referral, group formation, rapport building, flexibility, and follow up—and the activities they suggested, can be customized by other clinicians working with adolescent males and utilized in a variety of settings. While many of these areas may have been addressed in the literature, the research is often not specific to males.

This study creates a basic framework for how to work with at-risk adolescent males. Future research could explore: (a) the experience of clinicians who have worked with a group of male adolescents for varying amounts of time, in and out of the school setting; (b) longitudinal studies regarding the effects of group counseling on at-risk male students; (c) data comparing discipline and academic records of students treated in ongoing school-based counseling groups to a control group of similar students not receiving group treatment; and (d) additional activities that are helpful for this population in a group setting. Further empirical evidence confirming the long-term positive impact of school-based counseling group services could greatly influence the support for implementation of such programs within the school, as well as stimulate increased government funding for school-based counseling in high need areas. All of the participants noted the growth in the students they worked with, in addition to the growth and learning they experienced themselves. This current study aims to assist other clinicians, schools, treatment facilities, and clinical settings by providing a framework as well as a manual (see Appendix D) to guide effective interventions with at-risk ethnic minority youth.

Appendix A

Informed Consent Agreement

Consent for Participation in a Research Study

Title of Study: Counseling Groups for At-Risk, Ethnic Minority Male Adolescents

Principal Investigator: Kaitlin G. Gonzales, Psy.M.

INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE:

You are invited to participate in research that is being conducted by Kaitlin G. Gonzales, Psy.M., an advanced doctoral candidate in the School Psychology Program at the Graduate School of Applied and Professional Psychology (GSAPP) at Rutgers University. This consent form contains information about the study that the Principal Investigator will go over with you. Before you agree to participate in this study, you should know enough about it to make an informed decision. If you have any questions about the study, please feel free to ask the investigator. These questions should be asked before you agree to participate in the study and the investigator will answer your questions to your satisfaction.

PURPOSE:

The purpose of this study is to amass information from the counselors who have worked with boys' groups in the Rutgers Somerset Counseling Program and use that data to create a manual of the program targeted towards boys' groups. This would consist of one set of interviews with group counselors (counselors, primarily from GSAPP) concerning their experiences in the training program and the topics covered throughout the groups. The information would be used qualitatively to orient the manual and facilitate the inclusion of appropriate information.

In the future, this information will provide knowledge that will help the program improve and will add further to the facilitations of these types of groups being run in a school setting.

SUBJECT SELECTION

The counselor must have worked with boys' groups in the Rutgers Somerset Counseling Program. He or she must give consent to participate in the study.

PROCEDURES

Your participation in the study will involve the following:

- One interview, which may take place in person, on the phone, on Skype, or through an alternate method, to discuss your experiences with the Rutgers Somerset Counseling Program.
- All sessions will either be audio-recorded or video-recorded to ensure information is accurate. Any tape recordings, transcripts of sessions or other data collected from you will be maintained in confidence by the investigator in a locked file cabinet and destroyed three years after the end of the study.

BENEFITS

By participating in this interview process, the participant will help to shape the manual for boys' groups that will be used in the Rutgers Somerset Counseling Program. The participant will have the opportunity to contribute to the training given to the counselors who work in this program, as well as ensure that his/her experiences are appropriately represented in the manual.

RISKS

Due to the nature of the supervision given during the time that the counselors worked with the Rutgers Somerset Counseling Program, this interview process should not be unduly stressful. There should be no risk to the participant.

COMPENSATION:

There is no compensation for your participation in this study.

COST:

There is no cost to you for participating in this study.

ALTERNATIVES:

The participant may choose not to participate in this study without penalty.

CONFIDENTIALITY:

This research is confidential. Confidential means that the research records will include some information about the participant. This information will be stored in such a manner that some linkage between your identity and the response in the research exists. Some of the information collected about you includes gender identity, ethnicity, and age. The investigator will keep this information confidential by limiting access to the research data and keeping it in a locked filing cabinet in a secure location. In addition, you will be given an identification code and a pseudonym in which only the researcher will have access to the code key. The research team and the Institutional Review Board at Rutgers University are the only parties that will be allowed to see the data, except as may be required by law. If a report of this study is published, or the results are presented at a professional conference, your information will be disguised so as to have no identifiable information. All study data will be kept for three years and then will be shredded and/or

destroyed. The dissertation, including results, as well as a summary of participant responses in the form of a policy brief, will be available upon request.

WITHDRAWAL:

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may withdraw from the study at any time. You may refuse to answer any questions that you are not comfortable with. If you decide not to participate or if you decide later to stop participating, all data collected will be destroyed and there will be no penalty in any way.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

If you have any questions about the study or study procedures, you may contact the principal investigator or the investigator's dissertation chairperson at any time at the addresses, telephone numbers or emails below:

Kaitlin G. Gonzales, Psy.M (Investigator)
Rutgers University
GSAPP
152 Frelinghuysen Rd
Piscataway, NJ 08854-8085
Telephone: (609)851-2676
Email: KaitlinGonzales@gmail.com

Nancy Boyd-Franklin, Ph.D. (Chairperson)
Rutgers University
GSAPP
152 Frelinghuysen Rd
Piscataway, NJ 08854 -8085
Telephone: (848) 445-3924
Email: boydfrank@aol.com

SUBJECT RIGHTS

If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you may contact the IRB Administrator at Rutgers University at:

Rutgers University, the State University of New Jersey
Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects
Office of Research and Sponsored Programs
3 Rutgers Plaza
New Brunswick, NJ 08901-8559
Tel: 848-932-0150
Email: humansubjects@orsp.rutgers.edu

Sign below if you agree to participate in this research study:

Name of Participant (Print) _____

Participant's Signature _____ Date _____

Principal Investigator Signature _____ Date _____

Appendix B

Consent to Audiotape and/or Videotape

You have already agreed to participate in a research study entitled: “Counseling Groups for At-Risk, Ethnic Minority Male Adolescents,” conducted by Kaitlin G. Gonzales, Psy.M. I am asking for your permission to allow me to audiotape/videotape the interview as part of that research study. You do not have to agree to be recorded in order to participate in the main part of the study.

The recordings will be transcribed to ensure the authenticity of your responses, which is important for data analysis. This analysis includes reviewing the transcripts to discover common themes, similarities, and differences across all subjects.

The recording(s) will include some information about you, such as your age, ethnicity, and gender identity. It will not include your name. Instead, you will be given an identification code and a pseudonym, in which only the researcher will have access to the code in a password-secured database. The investigator will keep this information confidential by limiting access to the research data. The recordings will be stored on a password-protected computer and the transcriptions will be stored in locked filing cabinet in a secure location. This information will be permanently erased and destroyed three years after the study ends.

Your signature on this form grants the investigator named above permission to record this interview as described above during participation in the above-referenced study. The investigator will not use the recording(s) for any other reason than that/those stated in the consent form without your written permission.

Name of Participant (Print) _____

Participant's Signature _____ Date _____

Principal Investigator Signature _____ Date _____

Appendix C

IRB Approved Interview Questions

1. Did you work with seventh or eighth graders (or combined)?
2. Do you think the referral process is effective?
3. What type of relationship did you have with other adults in the school?
 - a. Did you do any outreach to the teachers, counselors, etc?
4. How did you decide which leader should work with which boy?
 - a. How did your individual treatment of each of the boys impact your group work?
 - b. Did your individual relationship with the boys affect your ability to work with them in the group?
5. How did you and your partner decide on group composition?
 - a. What was it about certain kids that made you want to work with them (exclusion and inclusion criteria, characteristics, at risk traits)?
6. Is there anyone you would not have let in or whom you wish you had included (changed the group composition)?
 - a. Why? Tell me a little about him?
7. How did you handle disruptive behavior in group (group management)?
 - a. How did you focus on everyone in the group?
8. Did you use any type of reward system or incentive?
 - a. Did it work? What didn't work?
9. What were the core topics you discussed in your group? What did you feel your group was most focused on?
10. What were the group issues that seemed most prominent in your work?

11. What were the overall topics of conversation in your group?
12. What warm-up exercises or icebreakers did you feel worked the best in terms of orienting your group towards one another?
 - a. What methods did you use to develop rapport with them and to develop a relationship with each of the group members?
13. Is there anything that you feel you had a very different response to..(e.g. follow-up, etc)?
14. What activity did you most enjoy doing with your group?
 - a. What did it look like?
 - b. What activity did you feel was most beneficial to your group?
 - c. Where there any other activities you think could be adapted well in other groups?
15. After more years of training when looking back, what activity do you wish you had incorporated into one of your groups?
16. What do you feel was least beneficial?
17. What do you feel your members would retain from your group experience? What do you feel that your students came away with?
 - a. How do you feel they responded to the activities that you chose?
18. What did you feel you learned the most while in the Rutgers Somerset Counseling Program?
19. Is there anything else that you would do differently?
20. What do you wish you had known?
21. Were there any crises during the time you ran the group?
 - a. If so, how did you deal with them?

22. What was the most difficult event/situation you had running the group?
 - a. How did you deal with it?
23. Do you think your gender impacted your relationship with the boys and, if so, how did you handle that?
24. Did you do any conflict resolution?
 - a. Was the training beneficial?
25. Was there an area or an aspect that you felt unprepared for?
 - a. How did you get what you needed?
26. Is there anything I didn't ask you that you feel you'd like to tell me about this? Is there any additional training you would have benefited from?

Appendix D
MANUAL FOR
COUNSELING GROUPS FOR AT-RISK, ETHNIC MINORITY
MALE ADOLESCENTS

This manual is based on the experiences of counselors who worked with seventh and eighth grade ethnic minority male students in the middle school-based Rutgers Somerset Counseling Program (the “Program”) who were identified as at risk. Students were referred to the Program by teachers, counselors, and other school staff members due to disciplinary difficulties, fighting, and academic problems in school, as well as problem behavior in their communities. The Counseling Groups for At-Risk, Ethnic Minority Male Adolescents Manual (the “Manual”) is the result of a school-based group counseling intervention. Group counseling sessions, each facilitated by two co-counselors, were approximately 45 minutes in length, once a week. This intervention was paired with individual counseling with one of the two counselors from the student’s group session, and held regularly, either weekly or twice a month. Batista (2009), a researcher involved with the Program, described the groups as follows:

Groups are student driven, focusing on significant concerns from students’ daily lives, in addition to tackling the issues of tolerance, conflict resolution, resolution of fighting and aggressive behavior, leadership development, communication skills, relationship difficulties, and the development of future goals and dreams. A strengths-based approach is utilized in which personal strengths are identified and concrete steps are taken to develop individual positive attributes. (p. 42)

The goal of the Manual is to provide guidelines for counselors when preparing to lead groups similar to the ones treated by the participants in the current study, and should

be used in a way that supports the ownership of the group by the students and the overall group process (Batista, 2009; Galinsky, Terzian, & Frazer, 2006; Lietz, 2007). As flexibility is crucial to the flow of the group; counselors should be prepared to engage in activities other than the ones planned for the session. In this manner, they can respond to the issues presented by group members during the session with a relevant activity. It is also beneficial to prepare additional activities for sessions in case the planned activity is completed earlier than scheduled. All of the Manual content is adaptable to the needs of the group.

Groups are oriented with the goal of members bringing outside concerns to the group, opening the space for them to discuss real-life concerns and to problem solve with a guided group of their peers (Batista, 2009). Thus, each group session is influenced by the attributes of the group members and the counselors, i.e., the conversational styles of the students, their investment in the topic, their attention level, and the planning of the group counselors.

Goals and Desired Outcomes

The goal for the use of the Manual is to provide a format for the amelioration of at-risk qualities. The Manual also provides a structure for addressing social-emotional skills and working to incorporate them for ethnic minority adolescent males in a culturally competent manner. It is intended to facilitate group members' increased use of conflict resolution and anger management skills, self-awareness, and the ability to problem solve, manifesting in a decrease in disciplinary action both in and outside of the school setting (Batista, 2009).

Confidentiality

Counselors need to address the issue of confidentiality very early in the group, and inform the students that, with the exception of harmful activity—students are hurting themselves or anyone else, which counselors have a duty to report to the proper authorities—confidentiality protects everyone in the room, students and counselors alike (Batista, 2009; Behnke, 2004; Sealander, Schwiebert, Oren, & Weekly, 1999; Stromberg, Lindberg, Mishkin, & Baker, 1993; Zellman & Fair, 2002). The discussion of confidentiality can wait until after group introductions have been made, but should occur prior to any significant sharing to facilitate trust within the group.

Koocher (2008) established guidelines for addressing confidentiality with minors within the school setting: (a) inform parents and adolescents that effective treatment is contingent on trust; (b) parents have a legal right to be informed about their children's treatment; (c) some topics may be easier for adolescents to discuss with someone outside of their home setting; and (d) topics that need to be disclosed should be fully discussed with both adolescents and their legal guardians to prevent confusion (Batista, 2009).

If the situation arises where there is a legal obligation to disclose otherwise confidential communication, i.e., in the case of harmful activity as discussed above, counselors should give the student the option of disclosing private information first when possible. However, as the matters are often required to be reported in a timely manner, it may be incumbent upon the counselor to disclose this information (Batista, 2009; Behnke & Warner, 2002; Koocher & Keith-Spiegel, 1990).

Counselors working within the school setting will need to inform students of the parameters of confidentiality, and that information disclosed in individual or group counseling may also need to be shared with school administrators; a student's case

manager, if the student is classified; a guidance counselor; and a school nurse, depending on the individual circumstances. The counselors will need to indicate that for everyone's protection, they will not be able to maintain confidentiality in situations where there is the possibility of self-harm or a danger to others. It is not necessary for counselors to specifically identify the individuals listed above, only that students are aware that information may need to be shared with school staff under certain conditions (McLaughlin, Chisholm, & Clark, 2014).

Group Selection

As counselors are outside of the school system in this program model, staff members in the school, such as teachers, guidance counselors and administrators, refer students as potential group members. Prior to the referral process commencing, Program counselors meet with school staff to inform them about the Program and the attributes of the students who will most benefit from the intervention and thus are candidates for referral. According to Batista (2009):

The message to convey during this meeting with school personnel is that these groups are aimed at the *prevention* of more serious risk taking behaviors. This intervention is aimed at students who are showing some problem behaviors and have several risk factors, such as [discipline referrals for insubordination or aggression, or histories of difficulty in the community], but who have not developed severe problems, such as delinquency, complete gang involvement, or school drop-out. The goal is to “reduce these risk factors, on the assumption that the probability of severe problems will likewise be reduced” (Boyd-Franklin & Bry, 2000, p. 132). Group members should have manageable difficulties in the aforementioned areas without being so disruptive, antisocial, or disrespectful to

authority that the group cannot function. Thus, the best candidates are those adolescents who are at risk, but not so entrenched in problem behaviors that they cannot be pulled back without intense therapeutic services. Students who are open to being helped and want to try to change some aspect of their behavior are particularly good group members. (p. 82).

Once staff members have completed the submission of referred students, the Program counselors can review the contents of the referral, which should include a profile of the student, delineating his strengths and weaknesses and a synopsis of his problem behavior. The Program counselors then analyze the potential candidates, sort them into compatible groups, i.e., those with similar problem behaviors will be placed in the same group, and set up interviews with each of the potential group members. Prior to the interview, each group should have 10-15 candidates, out of which eight students will be chosen to comprise the group subsequent to the interviews (Batista, 2009).

Interview Process

Each interview should take place with a referred student and both of the group counselors. Having both counselors present allows one to lead and the other to absorb the interview, and provides the student with the opportunity to connect with each. During the interview, the counselors should monitor how open the student is to conversation, how peers may perceive the student, and how the student initially feels about being a part of the group (Batista, 2009). It is important for counselors to discuss the purpose of the group as well as to frame it in a positive light, as a strengths-oriented program, when describing it to students (Batista, 2009).

Batista (2009) identified areas to be addressed during the interview, including: (a) the student's goals for the group; (b) his ability to share personal feelings; (c) his

perceptions of his personal strengths and goals; (d) whether there are any adults the student is comfortable with; (e) his personal family history; and (f) the persons he considers friends and enemies within the school, specifically identifying people he would be able to work with and those he would not. Batista (2009) also recommended that counselors “try to assess for insight and ability to reflect on own behaviors” (p. 85) by asking each student to describe an incident where he was angry and walk through the process from start to resolution. Similarly, Batista (2009) recommended asking each student about an experience when he was planning on fighting but decided not to, as this would reveal the extent of the student’s self-restraint, awareness, and already existing conflict resolution skills.

The reason why the student was identified as a potential candidate should be discussed with him during the interview. This should be framed in a positive manner, including relevant quotes from the school staff member who recommended him and the rationale for determining that he has potential, as well as an honest look at the difficulties he faces and an explanation of how they might be ameliorated through the group process. At the conclusion of the interview, the counselors need to inform the student of the date the decision about group participation will be made and the requirement of a signed consent form from his guardian.

The consent form, obtained from the school guidance counselors, notifies the guardian of the purpose of the group, contact information for the counselors and school personnel, explains that the guardian may decline this service, and provides the deadline for submission of the signed form. When consent has been obtained by the required date, the group can be set up. Teachers will need to be consulted so that the time of the

meetings can be arranged with as little disruption as possible to the student's other school commitments.

Group Structure

Meetings should be held on a weekly basis during the school year, at the same time each week so that the group members and their teachers can become accustomed to the routine. The group should be led by two counselors. According to Batista (2009):

The ideal size of a group is between seven and eight members. Eight members are ideal so that in the event that one member is absent or decides to leave the group, the group is still large enough to conduct activities and hold discussions with a variety of opinions. (p. 87)

Group members are also counseled individually regularly, either twice a month or in some cases weekly, by one of the group's co-counselors to facilitate personal growth and comfort within the group.

Rewards and Prizes

Rewards and prizes should be discussed when the group starts to set a positive tone for the students. Immediate reinforcers can be given to students directly after something positive occurs, such as their arriving at group on time or making positive statements to fellow group members. Rewards can also be deferred until the end of the session or until the end of a series of groups. Rewards and prizes need not be uniform among groups but rather fit the individual group. Counselors can determine the most beneficial methods for distribution, given group members' ages and maturity level, and counselor preference.

Some ideas for specific reinforcers include food rewards, i.e., candy, pizza, cookies; time set aside for an activity that is considered a treat, i.e., . dance breaks, one

song, short video clip; scheduled positive reinforcement, i.e., counselors making encouraging phone calls to parents, writing letters that students can take home; activity breaks, i.e., puzzles, planned field trips, pizza parties; and traditional rewards, i.e., recognition by the school of positive behavior, a choice from a box of prizes.

Session Outlines

Session 1

| | |
|-----------------|--|
| Objective: | To introduce students to one another and to the group. |
| Introduce Group | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss structure of the group: Explain the purpose of the group: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ “As we discussed when we met individually, this group is a space for you to talk about things happening in your life, and for us to work on things that will help you later. Each of you was chosen to be a part of this group for a reason.” ➤ “Over the course of the next year we may talk about....” ➤ “The goals I have for this group include....” ➤ “In the past, other groups have....” <p>The counselors should provide an opportunity for the students to ask questions.</p> |
| Icebreakers: | Batista (2009) describes icebreakers as an opportunity to: “make self-disclosure and participation voluntary, comfortable, and unstressful, as well as begin the process of group cohesion” (p. 122). |
| The “Name Game” | Each student states his name and tells the group the meaning of his name or for whom they were named (Springer, 2006). |
| No One Knows | Write something down that no one knows about you and put it in the basket. Each group member has to guess who the fact is related to. This will help the students get to know one another in a new way. This also provides an easy way for students to share within the structure of the group. |
| Group Name: | Ask the group of students to generate a group name. Have each student provide at least one suggestion, let the group discuss the possibilities and then, as a unit, select an option. |

Summary and Follow Up: Discuss the process of the group, and notify students that in the following week's session there will be a discussion of the Group Rules.

Session 2

Objective: To continue to introduce students to one another and to the process of the group.

Activity One:

Highs and Lows

- Explain to the students that each group will begin with a quick description of the high and low of each group member. This means that each student should say one positive thing and one negative thing that occurred to him over the course of the week.
- The counselors should model this first and begin with something that is school appropriate that they would like to check in on for each of the students (e.g. a positive academic or social occurrence, and a negative disciplinary occurrence).

The counselors could also give examples of things that other students often share. For example, "other students sometimes say a class that they did well in, or tell the group about a conflict that he had with another student over the course of the week" (Batista, 2009).

Activity Two:

Beanbag Hello

Each person says his name while holding the beanbag. It is then tossed to the next person. That person must say the name of the person who threw it to him, his own, and the name of the person he throws it to while holding the beanbag. After that round, this can be done backwards.

Activity Three:

Group Rules

- Ask each student to mention a rule that they would like to have as a part of the group. Facilitate the discussion to ensure that rules are created that support the students in the group and provide a structure for both appropriate and inappropriate interactions.
- Some examples include only one person speaks at a time, and that each student has the option to stand in the hallway if he becomes too uncomfortable.

Activity Four:

Violation of Rules

Develop a hand signal with group members that will be used to indicate that a group rule has been broken (e.g., raising a hand, raising three fingers, etc.).

Follow Up:

Let the students know that the following week they will begin to discuss group topics. Each student will have an opportunity to say which topic(s) he would like to discuss in future group sessions.

Session 3

Objective:

To continue to introduce students to one another, to the process of the group, and to the structure of each group session.

Activity One:

Highs and Lows

- Explain to the students that each group will begin with a quick description of the high and low each group member experienced that week.
- The counselors should again model this first by providing examples from their own lives:
 - **Highs:** a good test score received by the counselor, a compliment received, or a positive interaction with another person appropriate to share with the group.

- **Lows:** a time that the counselor was frustrated during the week or an event where the counselor felt that he or she could have interacted better.

Activity Two:

Group Topics

Invite the students to offer topics they would like to discuss in future group sessions. The counselors should have some topics available to suggest to the students. They may want to mention topics discussed in prior groups, i.e., girls, teachers, cops, gangs, etc., and ascertain the students' degree of interest in them.

Activity Three:

Movie of Your Life

Have each student choose a movie that is closest to his life, then name the actor who would play him the movie, as well as any other celebrities who would portray key figures in his life.

Follow Up:

Recap what was covered during the group session and ask students what they would like to address in the following week.

Session 4

Objective:

Continue to work on creating a norm for group structure and help the students to get to know one another.

Activity One:

Highs and Lows

Prior to beginning, allow the students to personalize this activity by renaming it. Mention previous groups' names, such as Touch Downs and Fumbles, Roses and Thorns, and Cookies and Spinach, if suggestions would help them identify their start of the group activity. Then discuss each student's highs and lows for the week. Again, the counselors can model this activity to begin.

Activity Two:

Questions about
Themselves

- Format a list of questions to place in the middle of the group. Allow group members to select a question and pick the person to whom to pose the question
- Some suggestions include:
 - Who do you live with?
 - Who is your best friend?
 - What is your favorite thing to do?
 - Who do you go to when you need to talk?
 - How do you calm yourself down when you get upset?
 - How do you celebrate when something goes well?
 - What is your favorite part about school?
 - How do you feel about this school?
 - What is your favorite food?
 - What is your favorite sport?
 - What is your favorite team?
 - Where would you go if you could go anywhere?
 - If you could have any superpower, what would it be?
 - If you could have one wish, what would it be?
 - If you could change anything in the world, what would it be?

Activity Three:

Group Topics

- Discuss group topics and give students an opportunity to add anything else they have thought of to the list.
- Counselors can also suggest ideas and allow the students to vote on their inclusion in the list. Some suggestions include conversations regarding cops, cultural differences, school, teachers, and families.

Follow Up:

At the end, reaffirm group rules and the hand signal. Also, give students an opportunity to recap the group discussion and suggest topics that they would like to address in the future.

Session 5

Objective: Getting to know the students and helping them to identify their dreams.

Activity One:

Highs and Lows Referred to by the term chosen by the group. Again, this may need to be modeled repeatedly by the counselors.

Activity Two:

Get to Know You Jenga Use a brightly colored Jenga set (or paint each block or side a different color). The counselor can write on the board what each color corresponds to, i.e., red is “I don’t like,” yellow is “something you hope in the future,” blue is “something that no one knows about you.” The students then pull a piece from the puzzle and answer the question associated with the color. Once the question is answered, the puzzle piece is put back onto the Jenga tower, and the activity is continued.

Activity Three:

Sankofa Dream

- Show the timeline on the board of very prominent figures, i.e., President Obama or Michael Jordan, widely known among group members, preferably with the same ethnic and racial background of group members.
- Allow each student to guess the name of the person looking at only 75% of the timeline.
- Allow the students to discuss the identities of other celebrities on the board. These should be people they would be interested in who share their racial and ethnic background, i.e., Rihanna, LeBron James, Michael Vick, Aaron Hernandez, Kobe Bryant, Beyonce, JayZ, Kanye West, etc.

Module 4 (Hines & Sutton, 1998)

Activity Four:

Personal Timeline

- Allow each student to draw his own timeline, including at least two significant life events that had occurred in the past and at least one future goal.
- Examples can include a line with a birth date at one end and suggestions for significant life events, including family births, graduations, marriages, deaths, or anything else that may be important to the group members. At this point, the counselor may suggest events that may have been instrumental in shaping the students in the room.
- Next, give each student space to read their timeline aloud and explain it to the group. The counselor can keep a copy of this timeline to extend the discussion into the following week.

Follow Up:

The importance of the impact of events on celebrities, and the impact of personal events on the students in the group can be discussed with them. They can be reminded that the discussion can continue in the following week, if they have concerns that were not addressed during the group.

Session 6

Objective:

Continue to learn about one another and discuss potential obstacles to the students' dreams and goals.

Activity One:

Highs and Lows

Referred to by the term chosen by the group. Again, this may need to be modeled repeatedly by the counselors.

Activity Two:

Two Truths and a Lie (Batista, 2009)

- Have each student state two things that are true about him and one that is a lie. Then have the other students guess which one was the lie and which are true.
- Allow the students to discuss how they could differentiate

between the truth and the lie and which facts surprised each of them about the others in the group.

Activity Three:

- Personal Timeline
- Review the personal goals that each student stated the week prior (the counselor may have kept a copy of this).
 - Discuss their future dreams and goals. Ask each student to write a goal at the top of a sheet of paper, then pass the pages around the room so that each of the other students can write a suggestion for achieving that goal. After the task is complete, have the students read the list of the other group members' ideas of achieving their future goal and choose one the student can start on before the next session.

Follow Up:

Potential obstacles can be discussed, and the importance of identifying them so that they can be addressed in order for the students to achieve their individual goals.

Session 7

Objective: Discussion of violence.

Activity One:

- Highs and Lows
- Referred to by the term chosen by the group. Again, this may need to be modeled repeatedly by the counselors.

Activity Two:

- Sankofa from
Module 8, Patterns
of Violence (Hines
& Sutton, 1998)
- “What do you know about violence?”
- Divide the group into two teams. Each team has a true and a false note card. For each question, the team can discuss and hold up one of the note cards.
 1. true or false*
wealthy people and poor people are at equal risk for violence
 2. true or false*

people who have been victims of violence in the past
are less likely to be victims again

3. true* or false

young males are more at risk for violence than young
females

4. which of the following contributes to the occurrence of
violent acts?

a. alcohol and drug use, b. gang activity, c. none of the
above, d. all of the above*

5. myth or fact*

violence is most likely to occur in urban areas

6. violence occurs most often between people who:

a. know each other*, b. do not know each other

7. myth or fact*

violence often occurs when other crimes such as
robbery and drug deals are taking place

8. true* or false

people are more likely to be seriously injured by
handguns than by knives

9. Violence between youth is more likely to occur:

a. on a street corner, b. on school grounds or close
proximity to a school*, c. in a parking lot or areas
close to a mall

10. the leading cause of death for teens in America is:

a. car accidents, b. drug overdose, c. gunshot wounds*,
d. suicide

11. how many murders are caused by handguns:

a. more than one half*, b. one fourth, c. one third

12. the reason teens report that they carry a gun is:

a. self protection, b. to show off, c. to get respect, d.
power, e. all of the above

13. true* or false

if you carry a handgun, you are more likely to be
killed by someone you know than by a police officer

14. true* or false

most violence is committed by men

15. true or false*

young adolescents tend to report their involvement in
violence crimes

16. true or false*

rape happens more often between strangers

17. myth or fact*

in most murders, the killer and the victim are of the
same race

18. most violent altercations occur

(a) when a weapon is present, (b) when an argument
escalates, (c) a. and b*, (d) none of the above"

Activity Three:

Survey Perceptions

- Discuss the students' perceptions of the survey.
- Ask them how much information they felt that they knew prior to the questions, and how much they knew afterwards.
- Ask the students which answers surprised them the most, and which made the most sense.
- Ask if anyone would like to share his thoughts on why some of the information was a surprise, or why it made sense.

Follow Up:

Let students know that you will be discussing potential obstacles that could get in the way of their dreams in the next session, and for them to think about those impediments.

Session 8

Objective: Continue a discussion of dreams and obstacles.

Activity One:

Highs and Lows Referred to by the term chosen by the group. Again, this may need to be modeled repeatedly by the counselors.

Activity Two:

Obstacles to Dreams Discuss the obstacles that would keep them from achieving the dreams each student wrote on his timeline in the previous session, utilizing Sankofa (Hines & Sutton, 1998)

- Draw a circle on the board with the word DREAM in the middle and allow students to decide what could get in the way of their dreams:
 - Death (yes/no)
 - Jail*
 - Fighting or Violence
 - Police
 - Money*
 - Weed/drugs*
 - Fear*
 - Gangs (yes/no)
 - ?

Activity Three:

- Obstacles Avoidance
- Ask students which of the above listed items are in their control (see * next to the words that may be circled).
 - Allow students to add further obstacles on the board of things that could get in their way.
 - Once this is completed, allow them to generate a list of what they could do to help avoid these obstacles.

Follow Up:

Discuss similarities among students' identified potential obstacles, and ask students to brainstorm how these obstacles can impact each of them.

Session 9

| | |
|--------------------|---|
| Objective: | Learn the Anatomy of a Fight (Sankofa, Module 9)(Hines & Sutton, 1998) |
| Activity One: | |
| Highs and Lows | Referred to by the term chosen by the group. Again, this may need to be modeled repeatedly by the counselors. |
| Activity Two: | |
| Anatomy of a Fight | <p>Show a video clip of a fight scene from a movie such as <i>Boys in the hood</i> or <i>Straight out of Compton</i>. Play the part leading up to the fight, the actual fight and the outcome.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• When you end the movie clip, ask the following questions: 1) Who is the victim?; 2) Who is the perpetrator? 3) Who are the bystanders?• Do you think that it needed to end in the way that it did?• Encourage discussion.• Now, replay the movie clip and ask the group to call out “stop” whenever they see a point where the fight could have been prevented or ended.• At the end have the group members make a list on the board or on a large sheet of paper to summarize all of the things that could have been done to prevent or to end the fight. |
| Activity Three: | |
| Roles in Fights | Discuss the different roles of victim, perpetrator, and bystander and have the group members describe a fight in which they held one of these roles. |
| Follow Up: | Discuss with the students their reaction to this exercise and what they have learned. |

Session 10

Objective: Discuss alternatives for dealing with conflict or aggression
Sankofa, Module 9) (Hines & Sutton, 1998)

Activity One:

Highs and Lows Referred to by the term chosen by the group. Again, this may need to be modeled repeatedly by the counselors.

Activity Two:

Alternatives to Fighting Ask the group to come up with alternatives for dealing with conflict to avoid fighting.

- Write their answers on the board or on a large piece of paper.
- Introduce the following alternatives for dealing with conflict:
 - Walk away
 - Negotiate
 - Agree to disagree
 - Ask for help
 - Refuse to get involved
- Ask for two volunteers to role play a scene. Have one counselor take the two students outside the room and help them develop a scenario where a conflict is building. Ask which one of the alternatives to dealing with conflict they would like to role play.
- Have the two boys come back in and role play the conflict and the alternative to fighting that they chose.
- Applaud their efforts and have the group discuss the scenario.

Activity Three:

Alternatives to Fighting 2 Repeat the steps with two new boys and ask them to choose another example of an alternative to conflict to role play.

Follow Up: Discuss with the students these alternatives for dealing with conflict and the ways to avoid fighting. Ask for their reactions and what they have learned.

Session 11

Objective: Discuss who to ask for help to end a conflict and avoid a fight

Activity One:

Highs and Lows Referred to by the term chosen by the group. Again, this may need to be modeled repeatedly by the counselors.

Activity Two:

Conflict Resolution Support

- Make a list with the group of who they would go to if they wanted to end a conflict in the school and avoid a fight.
- As the students list possible people, have one of the students write their names on the board or on a large piece of paper.

Activity Three:

Role Play Conflict Resolution

- Have two students role play the steps leading up to a conflict.
- Have one of the students decide to ask for help from one person on the list.

Activity Four:

Role Play Conflict Resolution 2

- Replay the scene again with the rest of the group serving as bystanders.
- Ask which one would like to pretend to go for help.

Follow Up: Ask the group to discuss the list of people that they identified in the school. Are there other adults in the school that they might go to for help? (Note: some groups have invited a trusted adult identified by the boys to participate in one group session to discuss ways in which the boys might reach out to them when a conflict has occurred or is developing).

Session 12

Objective: Discussion regarding gangs and the students' awareness/perception of how they interact.

Activity One:

Highs and Lows Referred to by the term chosen by the group. Again, this may need to be modeled repeatedly by the counselors.

Activity Two:

The Similarities and Differences Between a Family and a Gang This can be done in a ven diagram or on two completely separate lists:

- Write the word "Family" (or another word for a "group" which can be altered with student input) in a circle and a word the group verbally identifies as a gang, i.e., MS13, Bloods, in another circle.
- Ask the group to distinguish the difference between the two and then to write out the qualities in each. Ask them to say these aloud while a student writes them on the board. An example follows below:
 - MS13 or Bloods
 - Gang
 - Guns
 - Drugs
 - Family
 - Protection
 - Tell each other about their problems
 - Friends
 - Loyalty

Activity Three:

Gangs Pros and Cons Ask the students to write down the pros and cons of gang involvement in their community.

Follow Up: Discuss the importance of identifying the pros and cons of systems and what is most important for each of them, i.e., family, respect, financial success, etc.

Session 13

Objective: Continue to get to know the students within the group.

Activity One:

Highs and Lows Referred to by the term chosen by the group. Again, this may need to be modeled repeatedly by the counselors.

Activity Two:

Person You Care Discussion: Who do you care about most in the world?

- Most About
- What do you think/hope that person would say about you?
 - Briefly describe another person you care a lot about.

Activity Three:

Group Partner Divide the group into pairs. Have each student interview his partner, and describe the positive aspects of the partner to the group. This can be done with a structured interview, with a list of questions from the counselors on the board, or with the students generating the list of questions and choosing which aspects of their partner to highlight to the group.

Exercise

Follow Up: Discuss why each fact chosen was interesting to each student in the pair.

Session 14

Objective: Discuss how to achieve the goal of becoming a professional athlete. (Note: some of the groups had a number of students who had this goal. This should only be used if at least half of the group members share this objective.)

Activity One:

Highs and Lows Referred to by the term chosen by the group. Again, this may need to be modeled repeatedly by the counselors.

Activity Two:

Sports Dream Job Identify your favorite sports team (esp. football). Then ask each student to write down his dream job..

Activity Three:

Achieving This How do you think you become a professional athlete? This
Dream can be done aloud or as a writing assignment.

- Ask each student to describe how he thinks professional athletes achieve their goals in life.
- The counselors should then discuss the reality underlying a career as a professional athlete, i.e., the requirements to get a scholarship for college; the requirements to transition from college athletics to becoming a professional athlete; and the breakdown of how many professionals athletes did not complete high school, were drafted from high school, and went to college in each major sport category.
- Counselor should tailor information so that it is most relevant to the group members concerning current pro athletes and how they got there, i.e., success of Michael Vick, the GPA needed for college scholarships is 2.5, NJ is highest state for recruiting pro athletes, etc.

Follow Up:

Discuss requirements for them to achieve their goals, i.e., practice, good grades, high school graduation, college attendance, performing well in competitions.

Session 15

Objective:

Discuss frustration, coping skills, and ways to avoid a fight.

Activity One:

Highs and Lows Referred to by the term chosen by the group. Again, this may need to be modeled repeatedly by the counselors.

Activity Two:

Ways to Calm Down Review with the group ways to calm themselves down and to avoid a fight.

- Highlight that they may have a harder time walking away when something happens in school that makes them mad.

Activity Three:

Me, Others, No One,
Everyone

- Give each student 4 sheets of paper. On the first sheet, ask each student to write something that bothers them in school, after which the venue can be changed to address concerns in other settings. On the next sheet, have each student write something that he feels bothers other people. On the third sheet, ask each student to write something that he feels does not bother anyone. The fourth sheet is for something that the student feels bothers everyone (themselves included).
- Each student is then given a sheet of paper with 4 columns titled me, others, no one, and everyone.
- The students then put the sheets of paper in the middle of the table. Students take turns reading each of the sheets of paper aloud. Each student then writes it down under one of the four columns depending on whether the one read aloud applies to himself, others, he doesn't think it should apply to anyone, or he thinks it applies to others with himself included.
- The students then discuss with each other and the counselors which columns the options were put in and their significance. Discussions can be conducted concerning why these things bother different people, and how to address them, in addition to empathy for students who are bothered by things that do not bother others, as well as empathy for things that are seen to bother others in

the group but not himself.

Follow Up:

Discuss any coping skills that worked for the majority of the group and the importance of finding ones that work for each of the students, highlighting that different things work for different people.

Session 16

Objective:

Discussions of who students can rely on and their experiences with crisis.

Activity One:

Highs and Lows

Referred to by the term chosen by the group. Again, this may need to be modeled repeatedly by the counselors.

Activity Two:

Boat-Storm-

Lighthouse

(Kenney-Noziska &
Lowenstein, 2014)

Each member draws a picture of their family in a crisis, specifically they are in a boat during a storm. The group can then discuss:

- What do you think it would have been like to be in the boat with your family during the storm?
- Who would have been most helpful to you during the storm?
- Can you name three feelings you might have had during the worst part of the storm?
- If you believed that a rescue would occur, how did you think it would happen?
- In what ways could you have asked for help?

Then the group could answer similar questions about a crisis more likely to occur in their lives, i.e., how could they help one another in a crisis?; who can help pull them back?; who can speak up?

- In the case of time limitations, students can also draw a picture.

Activity Three:

| | |
|----------------|---|
| Support System | Students discuss who to turn to in a crisis and how they can support one another. |
| Follow Up: | Students can discuss their perception of the activity and the differences in their descriptions of help-seeking behaviors from their peers. |

Session 17

Objective: Discussion of stereotypes.

Activity One:

| | |
|----------------|---|
| Highs and Lows | Referred to by the term chosen by the group. Again, this may need to be modeled repeatedly by the counselors. |
|----------------|---|

Activity Two:

| | |
|---------------------|---|
| Stereotype Exercise | <p>Discussion of stereotypes with identities suggested by counselors (e.g. Black, Gay, White, Mexican, Latino, Indian, etc.)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group counselors take the number of sheets of paper representing the total number of people in the room, counselors as well as students, and write one identity lending itself to stereotyping on the top of each. It also may be helpful to choose two stereotypes for the identity: one that may be true and one that may be false. • A sheet of paper is placed in front of each student and counselor who then have a set amount of time, i.e., 30 seconds, to write the first thing about the identity listed that comes to mind. It is then passed to the next person who adds his thoughts. The cycle continues until each person has made a contribution to each identity. • The last person to make an entry reads aloud the list of group contributions relating to the identity on the paper he is holding. |
|---------------------|---|

- The group members raise their hands when they agree with the items on the list, and when they disagree they offer their reasoning verbally.
- The counselors should help the students to discuss and understand the problems with stereotypes.

Activity Three:

| | |
|---------------------|---|
| Stereotype Exercise | New round of identities lending themselves to stereotypes suggested by students that have not been the subject of Activity Two, i.e., Teacher, Gang Member, Black, White, Cop, Male, Female |
| 2 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Each student and counselor is given a blank sheet of paper, upon which they can indicate the identity of the group that lends itself to stereotyping. • The sheets of paper are passed around and the remainder of the activity progresses in the same manner as Activity Two. |
| Follow Up: | The group can then discuss which was most difficult for each person to write and which was the easiest. Students may end group saying that not all of these things were true about all people. Once again, the counselors should help the students to understand the harm that stereotypes may cause. |

Session 18

Objective: Discussion of romantic relationships.

Activity One:

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| Highs and Lows | Referred to by the term chosen by the group. Again, this may need to be modeled repeatedly by the counselors. |
|----------------|---|

Activity Two:

| | |
|----------------------------|--|
| Real Men and Relationships | Have the students generate a list of what makes a “real man” (the “real man” terminology was often introduced by students in the group): |
|----------------------------|--|

- Some topic areas may include a discussion of women, dating/being with women (may include who each had dated and whether real men dated more or fewer women).
- Then have each student explain past relationships:
 - Tell each group member to make a list of the individuals he has dated from his first date to the present.
 - Then ask students to indicate the best relationship with an asterisk (*).

Activity Three:

The “Best”
Relationship

Ask the students to discuss the reason(s) for considering one relationship “the best.”

Follow Up:

Discuss what students thought were the most important qualities in the relationship.

Session 19

Objective:

Continued discussion of stereotypes and relationships.

Activity One:

Highs and Lows

Referred to by the term chosen by the group. Again, this may need to be modeled repeatedly by the counselors.

Activity Two:

Stereotype Exercise

3

Discussion of stereotypes again by counselors. Additional suggestions include Male, Female, Boyfriend, Girlfriend, Hookup Partner, etc., if the counselors would like to continue the previous session’s discussions with relationships.

- Group counselors take the number of sheets of paper equal to the total number of people in the room and write one identity lending itself to stereotyping on the top of each. It also may be helpful to choose two stereotypes for the identity: one that may be true and one that may be false.
- A sheet of paper is placed in front of each person. The

students and counselors then have a set amount of time, i.e., 30 seconds, to write the first thing about the identity listed that comes to mind. It is then passed to the next person who adds his thoughts. The cycle continues until each person has made a contribution to each identity.

- The last person to make an entry reads aloud the list of group contributions relating to the identity on the paper he is holding.
- The group members raise their hands when they agree with the items, and when they disagree they offer their reasoning verbally.

Activity Three:

Review
Relationships and
Ways to Discuss
Them

- Explore stereotypical differences and actual differences between males and females.
- Provide an open space for the group members to discuss their feelings regarding the opposite sex.
- Ask the group members if anyone would like to share that he is currently in a romantic relationship.
- Explore what makes a good relationship.

Follow Up:

Future Questions

Allow group members to create questions that counselors will choose to discuss during the following session. The counselors will review and select the questions prior to the next session and discuss the input they will offer in the conversation with group members on the topic.

Session 20

Objective:

Discussion of sexism.

Activity One:

Highs and Lows

Referred to by the term chosen by the group. Again, this may need to be modeled repeatedly by the counselors.

Activity Two:

- Relationships cont'd Continue discussions of relationships in more depth:
- Explore what makes a good relationship
 - Discuss the qualities that the students look for in a romantic partner (e.g. attraction, respect, lack of drama), and the qualities that they hope others see in them (e.g., attraction, respect, ability to provide).

Activity Three:

Issues Related to Sexism

Sexism Questions

Song related to girls and boys playing as group enters:

1. Discuss the ground rules of the exercise.
2. Ask group members to indicate their opinions—Agree, Disagree, Not Sure—on the following attributes:
 - a. Girls have a more difficult lifestyle than boys.
 - b. Guys get treated nicer than girls.
 - c. I believe guys get more privileges than girls.
 - d. Women get treated better than men.
 - e. Teachers at the middle school treat girls better than guys.
 - f. Guys are smarter than girls.
 - g. Girls are more likely than boys to be concerned about their physical appearance.
 - h. Double standards still exist between guys and girls.
 - i. Girls are supposed to be ladylike.
 - j. Guys are stronger.
 - k. Guys are better at sports.
 - l. Girls are always moody.
 - m. Girls try to work out problems while guys take immediate action.
 - n. Girls are discreet about intimacy.
 - o. Girls never take chances while guys take too many chances.

- p. Girls always talk too much on the phone.
- q. Guys always lose arguments against girls.
- r. Men don't cry.

Follow Up:

Review

How do the students feel about these questions? Discuss any reasons why the questions made them uncomfortable or seemed too obvious. Discuss the meaning of sexism in the above stereotypes about men and women. Also, allow the students to add to any questions they would like to be discussed in the following week's session.

Session 21

Objective:

Discuss stereotypes.

Activity One:

Highs and Lows

Referred to by the term chosen by the group. Again, this may need to be modeled repeatedly by the counselors.

Activity Two:

Reviewed Questions

Go over the questions that the students suggested for discussion. Once the questions are read aloud, students can be given an opportunity to answer. The counselors can provide their input if the group members do not offer appropriate answers.

Activity Three:

Corners (sex role stereotypes):

- Generate a list of statements that are traditionally associated with males or females.
- Have students go to a corner of the room for a statement they think applies to males, and another corner if they think it applies to females.
- Ask why they chose which side and whether any of those group members did something that did not fit what is traditionally considered a male attribute. Again, discuss

the issue of sexism and gender-related stereotypes.

- Questions could include:
 - Do you love to go shopping?
 - Do you know how to change a light bulb?
 - Do you know how to cook?
 - Do you ever take care of a younger sibling?

Follow Up: Discuss perceptions of stereotypes and whether they allow room for individual differences.

Session 22

Objective: Discuss perceptions of Violent Interactions.

Activity One:

Highs and Lows Referred to by the term chosen by the group. Again, this may need to be modeled repeatedly by the counselors.

Activity Two:

Predetermined Perceptions Ask each of the students to discuss what he thinks people may assume about him before meeting him. Show clips related to violence from the movies such as *Boys in the hood* or *Menace II society* or *Straight Out of Compton* and discuss media influences on how group members are perceived by others. Review with the boys the ways in which violence could have been avoided.

Activity Three:

“Real Man”

- Discuss the concept of what a “real man” is, including examples from students’ lives, school, and media.
- Then ask students what characteristics they associate with “real men.”

Follow Up:

- Discuss how these perceptions can influence others’ perspectives.
- Allow each student to choose one aspect of the stereotype they would like to exemplify (e.g. respect, or financial

success), and one that they hope to distance themselves from (e.g. rude behavior).

Session 23

Objective: Discuss goals and how to achieve them.

Activity One:

Highs and Lows Referred to by the term chosen by the group. Again, this may need to be modeled repeatedly by the counselors.

Activity Two:

- Achieving Goals
- Discuss goals, how to achieve them, and generate useful suggestions from the students to help other group members achieve their goals.
 - Each student writes one of his own life goals on a sheet of paper.
 - The paper is then passed around the room, and each student writes a suggestion as to how to achieve it.

Activity Three:

Achieving Goals cont'd Each person reads the goal he wrote down and chooses one suggestion as the most helpful. This can be organized into a game where the person whose suggestions are chosen most wins.

Follow Up: Give each student an opportunity to choose a suggestion to follow up on for himself to help achieve his own goal (e.g., practice more for basketball, find a study partner, spend some time alone to work on frustration, etc).

Session 24

Objective: Discuss stereotypes and how they influence the way that the students are perceived by others.

Activity One:

Highs and Lows Referred to by the term chosen by the group. Again, this may need to be modeled repeatedly by the counselors.

Activity Two:

How Do People See You? • Ask students to list the characteristics they think others identify with them. Have them make a separate list on the board for teachers, community members, students, family, and law enforcement officers.

• Discuss these perceptions.

• The counselors can invite one of these people, i.e., a teacher, dean of students, to step in to discuss the discrepancies between the listed attributes and reality.

Activity Three:

Truth or Stereotype? • Have students identify whether the characteristics they thought others associated with them are true or whether they are stereotypes.

• Ask the students to explain why they think others may have an initial negative impression of them, or why they feel that others notice those aspects of themselves that are associated with negative stereotypes.

Follow Up:

Discuss whether this is new information for them; if they want to continue to be perceived in a certain way; and if there are any ways that they can change others' negative perceptions of them (e.g., monitor their language, say hello when they walk into a room, etc).

Session 25

Objective:

Continue the discussion of perceptions of others and the students' perceptions of themselves.

Activity One:

Highs and Lows

Referred to by the term chosen by the group. Again, this may need to be modeled repeatedly by the counselors.

Activity Two:

What job would you want?

- Write different jobs, i.e., custodian, teacher, NBA player, lawyer, police officer, etc., on the backs of index cards. Pass the cards around the table, so that each student has a card.
- On the board, write a timeline with “Most Successful” on one end, and “Least Successful” at the other end.
 - Ask the students to go up to the board and put their card on the continuum where that student feels the job on his card ranks, from having the least appeal to having the greatest appeal.
- The counselors should encourage the students to have their own goals but to not judge a person’s worth based on their job or title. It is important to emphasize that they should respect everyone.

Activity Three:

Discussion

- How does society see certain people?
- How does society see you?
- How do you view yourself? Worthy or worthless?
- Can you change people’s perception of you?

Follow Up:

Create another line with “Successful” on one side and “Unsuccessful” on the other and allow the group members to write their full names or an initial where they would place themselves along the continuum. Additionally, they can also indicate how they feel that others in society would judge their self-worth at this point in their lives.

Session 26

Objective: Continue to discuss perceptions.

Activity One:

Highs and Lows Referred to by the term chosen by the group. Again, this may need to be modeled repeatedly by the counselors.

Activity Two:

Which jobs would you want in the future? Have the group members review where they placed the cards indicating the levels of societal value of different jobs from the prior week and ask whether they have a different opinion now.

Follow Up: Once again, it is important to help the group members to have high aspirations for themselves. At the same time, it is very important that the counselors discuss with them the importance of respecting everyone, irrespective of their job or role in society.

Session 27

Objective: Discussion of racial profiling.

Activity One:

Highs and Lows Referred to by the term chosen by the group. Again, this may need to be modeled repeatedly by the counselors.

Activity Two:

Discussion of Trayvon Martin (or another more recent case chosen by the counselor) In 2012, a 17-year-old black male was shot and killed by a man on neighborhood watch. There was significant concern that it was a case of racial profiling as the student was unknown to the older man and was wearing a hoodie. Trayvon Martin had earphones on and didn't hear the older man questioning him, and thus was verbally unresponsive.

- Ask each student, "Have you ever felt unfairly judged?"
- Respond to the experiences related by the group members.
- Discuss ways in which they might have responded if they

had been in Trayvon Martin's situation.

Follow Up: Discuss the emotions the incident brings up for group members and their reactions to the discussion.

Session 28

Objective: Discuss respect, and how to interact with teachers and law enforcement.

Activity One:

Highs and Lows Referred to by the term chosen by the group. Again, this may need to be modeled repeatedly by the counselors.

Activity Two:

Respect (Boyd-Franklin, Franklin, & Toussaint, 2001). How to demonstrate respect for peers, teachers and police, and inform students of what to do when a police officer pulls them over or asks them to stop.

Activity Three:

Response to Police Role play how to respond when an officer pulls a student over because he is out for a walk past the town curfew time.

- Ask a student to respond suspiciously, positively, and angrily to the officer, and give other students the opportunity to play the police officer.
- Discuss with the students the differences in each scenario.
- Discuss why certain scenes were easier to play, and which will be easiest to do in real life.
- Discuss the consequences of the different reactions.

Follow Up:

Session 29

Objective: Recap the group.

Activity One:

Highs and Lows Referred to by the term chosen by the group. Again, this may need to be modeled repeatedly by the counselors.

Activity Two:

Group Learning
Assessment

Ask students what they have learned so far in group. Some examples follow:

- respect for adults and girls, always use protection
- just because a girl looks okay, doesn't mean that she is, be careful anyway
- how you see others may not be how they see you, value for teachers
- self-respect, respect for others, no touching in group
- don't fight, there's always something else you can do

Activity Three:

Learning Retention

- What do you think you will remember next year that you learned in this group?
- How can you help yourself/each other to remember what you learned?

Follow Up:

Discuss positive things students can do during their summer break, and the counselors' hopes for each of them in the next school year.

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