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Perceived Barriers of Urban African American Students: A Group Study

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Perceived Barriers of Urban African American Students:

A Group Study

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      To my family, thank you for reassuring me that everything would be alright…eventually. You've supported me in all of my dreams and helped me realize they were possible to achieve. To the Counselor Education staff at SUNY Brockport, without your knowledge I would not have been able to succeed, thank you. Special thanks to Dr. Leslie McCulloch, you   took the time to care and will continue to be a strong influence throughout my career in counseling. Dr. Jeff Cochran, your words will always stay with me, "I AM ENOUGH." Sherylanne Diodato, you've been there for me as a supervisor and a friend, I could not have gotten through my internship without you and I thank you for your wisdom.

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Abstract

Urban African American students are forced to deal with obstacles to success. Researchers have concluded that there are many barriers that urban students must overcome in order to achieve their educational and career goals. The following study provides a look at the effects of group therapy on the perceived barriers experienced by urban African American adolescents. An eight week group therapy intervention was implemented with a sample of 11 African American eighth grade students in an urban school district. The results reveal that group therapy has a positive effect on barriers to postsecondary education, anticipated barriers, and the belief that the individual will be able to overcome barriers that inhibit him or her to achieve career goals. Limitations and Implications for future research are discussed.

Problem

A majority of students in urban school districts face many barriers that hold them back from succeeding. The hardships that accompany these students include: (1)backgrounds made up of low socioeconomic status, (2) a lack of parental support and absence of caring adults, and (3) discrimination. These barriers instill a low motivation to do well and succeed (Kenny, Blustein, Chaves, Grossman, & Gallagher, 2003). The obstacles to goal achievement that African American students in urban areas perceive must be overcome for them to ultimately succeed.

Dropout Rates

The dropout rates during high school among urban African Americans are higher than those of Caucasians. According to Kaufman, Alt, and Chapman (2004) the national dropout rate for African Americans in 2001 was 6.3 % and an even higher 10.7% for low income families as compared to other races. The U.S. Census Bureau (2003) found that only 72.3% of African Americans graduated high school nationally. That is 8.1% lower than Asians and 13.2% below Caucasians (non Hispanic or Latino) who earned a diploma. While these numbers do not seem extremely high, there is a significant amount of urban African Americans who drop out of school.

Unemployment/Homicides

Out of those students who end high school early, 20% of African Americans ages 16-24, end up unemployed (see Appendix A). This number is the second highest only to American Indians. Some of these individuals who do not graduate turn to the streets,

hustling (selling drugs and stealing), and end up dead or incarcerated. In 2002, 53.3% of deaths by homicides among males ages 15-19 were African Americans (see Appendix B). The next highest percentage was Hispanics which was 27.8% lower than African Americans. Locally, in the past year five people under the age of 18 have been murdered in this Western New York City (Lamothe & Morrell, 2005). According to the Democrat and Chronicle (October 15, 2005), the alarming rates of homicides continued to rise to 46 in the past few months since these children have been murdered. Reaching the individuals who choose to turn to violence and commit these crimes through interventions such as therapy groups, individual counseling, or school/community programs is necessary in preventing violence. Another consequence of dropping out before graduating high school is ending up in jail.

Incarceration

According to the Survey of State Prison Inmates (1993), two-thirds of the men in prison were high school dropouts. As previously stated, turning to the streets is a viable option for individuals who decide to terminate their high school education. In doing so urban individuals tend to participate in illegal activities such as hustling, selling drugs, or stealing to make money (Brown & Enig, 1999) and place their lives in danger. To prevent the negative consequences of dropping out of high school, graduation rates must be addressed.

Jobs

In 2003 there were 1.3 million teenagers (ages 16-19) nationally who were not attending school or working. Of those 1.3 million teens, 1.1 million were not attending high school and had not graduated (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2003). If a teen does not

graduate from high school they tend to earn less money in a low skilled job (Boisjoly, Harris, & Duncan, 1998). Because of this, the individual may stay in a low paying job and live in poverty. It is very important that attention is paid to the students who are at risk of dropping out in urban schools so they do not end up turning to the streets or living in poverty.

When an individual decides to end high school before graduation there are significant negative consequences. Without a college degree or a high school diploma it becomes even harder for an individual to acquire a job that pays more than minimum wage (Wilson, 1996). One result of dropping out is that the chance of going to and completing college is greatly diminished. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2003), 14.3% of African Americans attained a bachelor's degree from a college. This number is quite low as compared to the 27% of Whites (not Hispanic or Latino) and 44.1% of Asians who obtained a bachelor's degree. The Bureau of Labor Statistics found that in 1996 the unemployment rate for individuals who did not graduate high school was 17.4 % (see Appendix C). Ending school early decreases the chances for employment. If the individual finds employment they will most likely end up in a low skill, low income job with few chances for advancement (see Appendix C).

Income Level

The level of educational achievement, whether it is a high school diploma or a Bachelor's degree, is thought to predict the level of income that an individual reaches. In 2004, if he or she did not complete high school the average salary for a male was found to be $21,760 and slightly lower for females. The national average earnings for a high school graduate were $31,183 and $52,242 for someone who completed college with a

Bachelor's degree (U.S. Census Bureau, 2005). The high school drop out falls short of

the average earnings by almost $10,000 and may work their entire life with little

opportunity for mobility. When an individual decides to drop out of high school he or she

will make roughly one-half to one-third less money than that of someone who graduates

and earns a Bachelor degree (U.S. Census Bureau, 2005). If an individual never attends

secondary education or even earns a high school diploma, the skills that are essential to

success in a career are never learned and the individual may lose their drive and focus to

reach his or her goals. Therefore, it can be concluded that African Americans who live in

urban areas will be hired for low paying jobs. To break this cycle the transition from

school to work must be brought up at an early age so the students know what to expect

and can prepare for the change.

The transition can be tough regardless of the individual's graduation status. If a

student does drop out of high school the school to work transition becomes even harder to

handle (Wilson, 1996). To prevent the individual from dropping out of school it is

recommended to start preparing students in early high school to make sure that the

student is ready for the transition   (Chaves et. al., 2004; Davis, Ajzen, Saunders, &

Williams, 2002). By disclosing beliefs about barriers that the students may encounter and

working with them on career development, an individual will better understand him or

herself and begin to form an identity. One of the main themes associated with perceived

barriers that African Americans encounter is their racial identity.

<div align="center">Racial Identity</div>

Racial identity plays an important role in the self-perception of African

Americans (Arroyo & Zigler, 1995; Fusick & Bordeau, 2004; Rowley, Sellers, Chavous,

& Smith, 1998; Steele, 1997: Taylor et. al., 1994). This form of identity is projected and

learned through societies views, the media, and one's family (Steele, 1997; Ward, 2004).

Therefore, urban youth's identity is largely based on what is the accepted portrayal of his

or her race, gender, socio-economic status, and family beliefs. Together, each of these

factors form the way a youth perceives him or herself.

Society's Portrayal

Identifying with one's own race is a way in which urban African Americans

perceive and develop their own identity. Being a part of a group where everyone has the

same values, beliefs, family structure, and socioeconomic status is comforting. If school

success is not part of the group's identity, then it will not be a part of the individual's

identity. In a study conducted by Arroyo and Ziegler (1995) it was found that African

American students who do take on the responsibility of school and who are

high-achieving tend to take on values and beliefs of more successful White students.

They further stated that this so called racelessness was associated with depression among

these students proving that African American's identity is based in their culture/race.

Media Portrayal

When the media portrays African Americans negatively it sends a strong message

to society. Ward (2004) found that African American people are portrayed more

frequently than White people as, "poor, jobless, lazy, unintelligent, and incompetent,"

and are represented as, "hustlers and criminals…living in ghettos and slums," (p. 285).

This is influential to an adolescent especially if he or she does live in a low

socioeconomic area. Just because an individual lives in a poor area does not mean there

are no jobs, or that the family or individual is lazy. African American adolescents are

susceptible to believing these stereotypes because they watch a greater amount of television, learn about the world through television, and enjoy the appearance of the shows that they watch (Ward, 2004). As urban African American youth watch television they will begin to identify with the stereotypical fashion in which they are being portrayed and characterize themselves in this manner. Greenberg and Atkin (1982) found that African American adolescents place greater emphasis on the reality of television than other races. In other words, they believe that what they are watching is real. This plays a crucial role in an African American's ability to form an identity.

It is important that urban adolescents perceive themselves and in a positive way. African American's self-esteem is linked with their identity.   Urban African American youth reported a higher level of self-esteem in areas where they were evaluated positively and lower levels in areas where they were negatively evaluated (Hare & Costenell, 1985). As compared to White students, African Americans had higher global self-esteem as well as self-esteem within their peer group. White students surpassed African American students in school and home life self-esteem (Steele, 1997). This leads one to believe that African Americans do not associate their identity with achievement in school and more so to a negative family life. They feel more positively about themselves in general and with their peers because when they are in groups they may not perceived in a stereotypical manner.

Family Portrayal

There are many ways that identity can explain the lack of school success in urban African American students. John Ogbu (1982) theorized that some people succeed in school more than others because their culture is similar to that of the school. As African

Americans become secure in their identity through the media and the societal cues, academics may not be a part of the scheme. Therefore, they will not succeed unless their family places high expectations in education.

Since familial values and views of the world influence the identity of an individual it is likely that an adolescent will frame his or her own identity around that of the family. Steinberg, Dornbusch, and Brown (1992) confirmed that parents are the most influential people in their child's long term school success and education plans. Parents play a crucial role in the development of their child's identity and educational achievement. Urban African American adolescents whose identity was directly influenced by their parents were more likely to have a positive attitude towards school and strive to further their education (Bowman & Howard, 1985). If the family does not believe that school is necessary to be successful in life, the adolescent will take on the same view. Urban African Americans who believe that they can succeed without achieving in school are more likely to put less effort into their studies (Steinberg, Dornbusch, & Brown, 1992). When the student believes that school is useless in the attainment of success in life, then there is no way that the he or she will be successful in school. As previously stated, urban African Americans form their identity from perceptions about their race and socioeconomic status conveyed through society and their family. These perceptions also encompass difficulties that may get in the way of their school achievement.

Perceived Barriers

The barriers that are perceived by African American youth who grow up in an urban neighborhood are numerous and much of the time real. There are plenty of

obstacles that African Americans must overcome in order to graduate high school, attend college, and eventually obtain success in a career (Kenny, Blustein, Chaves Grossman, & Gallagher, 2003). Ultimately, many of the youth feel that the odds are against them. Negative perceptions and barriers are reinforced through different avenues in their lives. Family members, teachers, the media, and society in general are to blame for conveying a message of failure to African American students (Ward, 2004).

Barriers can limit the achievement level of African American students in urban settings. McWhirter (1997) outlined four barriers: (1) racism, (2) gender discrimination, (3) lack of support, and (4) low socioeconomic status. While not all African Americans in urban school settings perceive these barriers as a hindrance, many of them often do. Perceived or real, barriers inhibit the ability of the urban student to achieve his or her goals.

Racism. It is reality that African Americans who grow up in urban America have to deal with racism, stereotypes, and different identities (Oyserman, Gant, & Ager, 1995). In a study conducted by Kessler, Mickelson, & Williams (1999), it was found that out of 3,032 people, over 60% experienced daily perceived discrimination. African American students who believed they were discriminated against in a school environment had lower grades than other African Americans (Brown & Bigler, 2004). This may have been caused by the negative connotation the students attributed to the discriminating behaviors and comments. When an individual is stereotyped or discriminated against continuously it will be expected to occur in school and all other aspects of life.   Thus, it becomes difficult for urban students to take academics seriously and achieve goals that will promise them a successful future when their teachers are the same type of people that

discriminate against them everyday.

Oyserman, Gant, & Ager (1995) stated that, "Racism involves a sense of being excluded or negatively judged and a sense that because of one's group membership his or her chances are limited," (p.1219). Growing up in urban surroundings attaches a label to an individual that he or she is poor, comes from a broken family, or is not smart enough to succeed.   This general negativity and stereotyping allows a student to believe that there is no hope for success whether it is academic or career oriented. According to Taylor et. al. (1994) the more discrimination effected the beliefs of career attainment in African Americans, the less importance they placed on school, therefore, becoming less engaged in their academic work. These findings contribute to the poor achievement and high dropout rate of African Americans. As a result these students are not reaching their full potential by attending postsecondary schools and attaining their goals in a chosen career.

Unfortunately, because African Americans are frequently subjected to racism and discrimination (Sellers & Shelton, 2003) their chances to graduate high school, complete a secondary education, and become successful in a career diminish. Consequently, experiencing racism a majority of the time has a negative effect on academic achievement. Believing that an individual's ability to succeed is limited or that one may not fit in because of racial identity, restricts his or her chances to succeed. This is something many African American students have to deal with and ultimately overcome if they want to achieve their goals while growing up in urban America.

Racism has a definitive effect on African American children's perceptions of the occupations they can attain. Bigler, Averhart, and Liben (2003) found jobs that were

traditionally held by European Americans were perceived by African American children as higher in status than those that were held only by African Americans. At the same time, African Americans represent a majority of the blue collar service profession. This elicits the fact that African American children may perceive that they can only hold low status jobs because of their race. As mentioned earlier, if this belief is accepted these students will fall behind in their school work and limit their opportunities later in life (Taylor et. al., 1994). The goal of being able to attain a good job is important in overcoming this racial barrier and is crucial in developing a sense of success and achievement especially in African American males (Oyserman, Gant, & Ager, 1995).

Gender discrimination. Gender discrimination is another barrier that affects many individuals of color. Children as young as Kindergarten experience gender discrimination. Coming from parents and peers (Brown & Bigler, 2004) whether it is at home or in school, discrimination is taught at an early age. Fairness between siblings and who does what chore is a way that parents teach this bias in the home (Killen, Lee-Kim, McGlothlin, & Stangor, 2002). For example, boys take out the garbage and girls clean the dishes and make beds. African American males and females are treated differently by their mothers in the home environment. Solorzano (1992) found that African American mothers tend to have higher educational goals for their daughters. This leaves the young males in the family believing the perception that they do not need an education to be successful. As the children grow older they may subconsciously discriminate against the opposite sex base on the way their parents have treated them.

In school African American children sometimes use what they learn from home and discriminate in the form of teasing. Powlishta (1995) found that nine year old boys

and girls held biased views in which each gender favored their own sex over the opposite sex. If these children are not discriminating by gender themselves, they may perceive it in the way that a teacher calls on boys more than girls or tells the class to line up girls first (Brown & Bigler, 2004). Perceiving gender discrimination as early as kindergarten and through elementary school plays a crucial role in the development of an individual's perception of discrimination. If it is expected at five years old, it will be expected at 25 years old.

McWhirter (1997) stated that African American girls are more likely to believe they will be discriminated against because of their sex than boys. African American males agree that there is a potential for gender discrimination to occur, but they are more likely to experience ethnic discrimination. This may be due to the awareness of a perceived lower social status that girls learn throughout life. Girls therefore tend to develop a higher sensitivity to gender discrimination than boys (Killen, Lee-Kim, McGlothlin, & Stangor, 2002). Along with potential discrimination, African American girls have been found to place greater negativity on exclusion from a peer group than boys (Killen & Stangor, 2001). In other words, they believe there is a negative reason behind the exclusion, such as gender discrimination or ethnic discrimination.

At the same time, African American boys feel as though they will be discriminated against on the basis of their gender in the future because they are viewed as lazy, dumb, and violent (Oyserman, Gant, & Ager, 1995). It seems to be engrained in the thinking of these boys from an early age that they will not be able to get the job they want because they will be looked down upon as compared to a White European male.

Whether it is gender discrimination aimed at males or females this type of

prejudice does exist. It is easy for an African American student to believe the perception

that they will be discriminated against because of their sex when they grow up

experiencing discrimination because of their color (Inman & Baron, 1996). In this way

racism and gender discrimination feed off of each other and make it harder for African

Americans to succeed in school and follow their aspirations.

  Relationship support. As reported by Taylor, Casten, and Flickering (1993)

"Children who do well have adults who care for them," (p. 215). In this respect, doing

well constitutes as achieving one's goals such as graduating, attending college, as well as

attaining a job that is desired. Relationships are a key to one's development and a very

important way for individuals to receive support in their lives (Phillips, Christopher-Sisk,

& Gravino, 2001). This support results from a caring relationship between parent and

child. The support can also come from other caring adults present in the adolescent's life

such as teachers, counselors, church leaders, and peers.

  Parental support is the most important type of support in an adolescent's life.

Parents are effective in helping their children achieve in school and develop a career

(Palmer & Cochran, 1988). Counselors and teachers are helpful but mostly to aid in the

process of support with their knowledge of theory. Counselors cannot take the place of

parental support. Urban African American youth who perceive support from their parents

and other adults were more likely to have positive attitudes toward school and career

advancement than those who did not have encouragement (Kenny et. al., 2003). This

general finding of the influence of adults in an adolescent's life supports the fact that it is

beneficial for the youth to have a caring adult in his or her life.

  Masten and Coatsworth (1998) found that when there is a caring adult present the

individual will be more likely reach positive outcomes in life. Specifically when a parent is involved in the children's schooling the student performs better. Being involved means that the parents make sure their child does his or her homework regularly, is in contact with the teachers, and knows what is going on at the school (Shumow, Vandell, & Kang, 1996). An adolescent's adjustment, including self-reliance, depends greatly on the amount of caring that he or she receives from a parent (Taylor, Casten, & Flickinger, 1993). Self-reliance can help a student achieve his or her goals easier because the individual does not feel the need to depend on others to be successful. The presence of a caring adult in a child's life is crucial for the child to succeed.

The presence of support from family has been proven to help the students perform better in school and stay out of trouble (Taylor, 1996). Furthermore, certain styles of parenting have been proven more effective in promoting academic success (Dornbusch et. al., 1987; Similes & Lee, 1991; Taylor, Casten, & Flickering, 1993). Authoritative parenting styles made up of high expectations, enforced rules and standards, independence, and open communication between the parent and adolescent has been proven to enhance academic success and career aspirations (Taylor, Casten, & Flickering, 1993). In other words, the parent-child relationship possesses warmth, control, and democracy (Steinberg, Dornbusch, & Brown, 1992). This style of parenting increases adolescent individuality and autonomy allowing the student to perform well in school. Both parents working together is more influential than broken homes.

As far as single parent families are concerned it has been found that authoritative parenting is also beneficial to the student but the single parent aspect is detrimental to success. Zimiles & Lee (1991) found that an adolescent living in a single parent home or

a stepfamily is almost three times as likely to drop out of high school than youth living in

an intact family. If the family unit is broken apart the importance of both parents playing

a role in the adolescent's life is extremely important. African American mothers place a

high importance on educational aspirations and cultural identity which transfers into a

positive attitude at school (Oyserman, Gant, & Ager, 1995). Therefore, it is important

that a female figure is present in the household to promote academic achievement. Family

support is critical for educational and career success. The authoritative style of parenting

is preferred over others in order to promote individual growth and responsibility.

Although, if there is caring adult present in a youth's life the possibility for success

increases.

Socioeconomic status. Growing up in an urban area where a majority of the

people live at or below the poverty line poses some problems for the youth of today.

Discrimination, poverty, violence, and unemployment are some of the environmental

stressors that these youth have to deal with on a daily basis. Adults in many of these poor

families deliver a message of failure to the adolescents. The youth tend to hold onto the

notion that they cannot break the cycle of poverty and get out of these neighborhoods

(Connell, Spencer, & Aber, 1994) sometimes giving up and not giving themselves a

chance.

Low income families have been found to use more authoritarian ways of

parenting including the use of spanking and negative perceptions of the children.

Pinderhughes et. al. (2000) concluded that low socioeconomic status families were more

apt to use harsh disciplining in raising their children. As mentioned earlier authoritative

parenting strategies have been found to elicit academic achievement in African American

adolescents (Taylor, Casten, & Flickering, 1993). Along with the general stress of being a low income minority today's urban youth are growing up listening to adults' negative views about them. This belief pushes the urban African American students away from achieving academically and they end up dropping out or on the streets, never reaching their full potential.

Occupational expectations for career attainment are also limited by lower socioeconomic conditions (Constantine, Erickson, Banks, & Timberlake, 1998). Because of urban youths' experiences with the types of jobs they perceive can be obtained as teens and the jobs that their parents hold (limited opportunities in their current environment) the urban youth of today quit before they realize they can succeed. This perception is detrimental to their achievement in school and a vocation.

The parents of these youth tend to struggle to make enough money to support their families, usually holding jobs because they are a source of income not because they are enjoyable (Chaves, Diemer, Blustein, Gallagher, DeVoy, Casares, & Perry, 2004). Therefore, urban African American youth may perceive work as a means of money, not something that they can enjoy and have a passion for. This idea limit's the choices that the adolescents have in terms of quality of jobs. If they could only understand that school is their way out of the cycle they were born into they would be more likely to succeed.

In a study conducted by Newcomb et. al. (2002) African American students from a low socioeconomic background were more likely to fail out or drop out of high school. Low socioeconomic status is related to general deviant behavior. In this case a low socioeconomic status contributed to a higher level of deviance among the adolescents resulting in more incidents of ending high school prematurely or failing.

Another perception that results from growing up with a low socioeconomic status has been researched. McWhirter (1997) found that a significant barrier for urban minorities was the lack of money to attend college. This is also a perceived barrier among much of America's youth but because urban youth perceive jobs just as a source of monetary income they would rather work and see immediate results than spend the time and money to go to college and enjoy what they are doing. Since financial aid to attend college is increasingly available for low income families this barrier can be easily overcome but is still significant in the eyes of urban youth today (S. Diodato, personal communication, April 13, 2005).

<center>Group Therapy</center>

Counselors can address the daily issues that urban African American students face in different ways. Group therapy is one way in which counseling can be conducted. In a school setting it is difficult for a counselor to see individual students on a regular basis for   therapy. For one, the student would miss a large amount of class time which does not benefit the student or the teacher. Also, the educational process could be disrupted as individuals leave and reenter classrooms. In effect, groups are convenient to the teachers, counselors, and students.

An individual session lasting 50 minutes will only allow a school counselor to see about eight students per day. If a counselor has a caseload of about 350 students, it would take about 44 days, seeing one student per hour, to get through the entire caseload. On top of all the paperwork, scheduling, administrative duties, and other responsibilities that a school counselor takes on the he or she might be able to see each student two times throughout the year. Group counseling is one way that the counselor can work with more

students and have a positive effect on the individuals.

In Irvin Yalom's book, *The Theory and Practice of Group Psychotherapy,* Yalom contended that the most effective size for a group is eight to ten members (Yalom, 1995 p. 276). By facilitating a group of this size the counselor is able to work with as many students in an hour that he or she could legitimately see in one to two days. Along with the benefit of seeing multiple students at once, research on group therapy has proven that groups are effective in goal setting and increased individual performance (Hinsz & Nickell, 2004). In this way, a therapy group could help   urban African American students overcome the barriers that they experience and succeed in the areas of educational and career attainment.

Setting goals is important in succeeding in educational settings as well as in a career. Lock and Latham (2002) found that when a leader supports an individual or group by supplying feedback and has a positive vision, goal commitment and attainment improved. This can be achieved in a group when the facilitator is supportive of educational goals that the members express. Giving feedback to the members about their experiences and expressing empathy that mimics the students thoughts and feelings about educational goals will likely improve the group's motivation to succeed. By participating in a therapy group the members will be able to own their individual goals and collectively support each other on their achievement and career goals.

Individual performance on the tasks that lead to achieving a goal can be increased through group therapy (Locke & Latham, 1990). As mentioned earlier the facilitator as well as the group members play an important role in this process. By receiving feedback from others the individual group member can gain confidence and realize his or her

ability to succeed, basically increasing self-efficacy (Hinsz & Nickell 2004). Hearing

stories from peers who have similar experiences growing up helps the individuals realize

that they are not alone. Understanding that others feel the same way and have the same

experiences can be comforting to an individual who has little or no hope in succeeding.

Group therapy provides an avenue for each member to express themselves as well as

connect to others therefore increasing their ability to reach their desired goals.

<div align="center">Goals and Objectives</div>

African Americans from a low income urban area can break out of the cycle of

living close to the poverty line. These individuals can be taught the skills to overcome the

barriers that hold them back from achieving in high school, college, and a career

(Solberg, Howard, Blustein, & Close, 2002). Although these barriers may not be

perceived by every individual, they strip the confidence away from students and hold

them back from achieving their goals (McWhirter, 1997). The presence of a school

counselor in a student's life may help the individual work toward his or her goals in high

school as well as with a career.

One way that these skills can be learned is through work with a school counselor.

Constantine, Erickson, Banks, and Timberlake (1998) made a list of 19 recommendations

to address when working with urban racial and ethnic minority youth. These

recommendations take into account the challenges that an urban African American

adolescent may encounter throughout their lives.

One recommendation was for the counselor to understand the stressors that

influence these individuals ability to succeed. The barriers that McWhirter (1997)

outlined: (1) racial discrimination, (2) gender discrimination, (3) lack of support, and (4)

low socioeconomic status are included in the environmental stressors that urban youth experience. A way to address these environmental stressors is by   addressing them in a group therapy session. Brainstorming strategies and ways to cope with the stressors would help the students realize how they can be overcome.

As a school counselor works with students, he or she can take on the role of supporting and encouraging individuals to form academic and career goals. The support of adults in a student's life has been proven to be beneficial. Masten and Coatsworth (1998) found that positive results occur when an adolescent has a caring and loving adult involved in his or her life. If the caring adult is not found at home, such as a parent or older sibling, a school counselor can help to fill this void in the student's life.

Attending to the student and his or her aspirations and goals in education and for a future career is important. Allowing the individual to realize his or her potential and aid in the process of seeking out realistic options to pursue can prove to be beneficial (Constantine, Erickson, Banks, & Timberlake, 1998). The counselor's job is to be available to the students and help them improve their outcomes whether it is graduating high school, getting into college, or realizing their potential in a future career. This may include meeting with a student on a regular basis and developing interventions to overcome any barriers (Kenny, Blustein, Chaves Grossman, & Gallagher, 2003). When doing so the counselor must hold the same expectations for every student and not lowering expectations for African Americans in an urban setting (Fusick & Charkow Bordeau, 2004). Thus, the counselor will potentially provide the relationship essential to facilitate the student's growth which in turn will allow the individual to overcome barriers that are holding him or her back.

The positive outcomes of working with a school counselor may include high resilience to life's various hardships such as performing well in school and staying away from problem behaviors. This study will look at the perceived barriers of students in an urban educational setting. The main goal is to help these students overcome the barriers they believe are restricting them from achieving their goals academically (secondary and postsecondary education) and in the future vocationally. The barriers include (1) racial discrimination (2) gender discrimination (3) family support or lack there of, including negative family attitudes, and   family problems that the youth may have to deal with along with school (4) low socioeconomic status, which translates into money problems. (McWhirter, 1997). The objective will be to facilitate urban adolescents in understanding that these barriers in their lives can be overcome and that they have the ability to achieve their goals specific to education and their career. Presumably, after the student participates in group counseling sessions with a caring adult the individual will be less likely to view the barriers as such and more likely to find his or her educational and career goals attainable and realistic.

These views will be assessed by measuring a decrease in the belief that the individual will be racially discriminated against in future jobs. As with racism, a decrease in the perception that the adolescents will be discriminated against by gender in future jobs will be sought. The student will see more clearly that socioeconomic status is not as detrimental as thought before counseling and it can be overcome. Specifically, a disagreement on items that deal with socioeconomic status will be observed. Finally, having a caring adult, meaning the counselor, in the individual's life will presumably increase the student's achievement and his or her perception that the individual is able to

overcome these barriers to education and career goals. If this study is successful the need

for the application of interventions in urban high schools to break down the perceptions

of barriers in relation to attainment of goals (ie: graduating high school, attending

college, and maximizing career potential) will be demonstrated.

Method

Participants

The therapeutic group was made up of 11 eighth-grade students from   an urban

high school in a large city in Western New York. The sample consisted of 5 males and 6

females who participated in an 8 week therapeutic group. Eighth graders were targeted

because it is important for them to realize that performing well for the rest of their high

school career is crucial for attending college and furthering their vocational goals.

Keeping students interested in their future may encourage them to graduate and stay in

school. The students ranged from the ages of 12 to 14 years old. Each student lived in an

urban environment in this city.

Setting

School district. The research was conducted in an urban school located in the city

of Rochester. It is a multicultural school with a majority of the student population made

up of African Americans. According to the New York State Education Department

(2005) the ethnic breakdown was 61% African American, less than 1% American Indian,

1% Asian/Pacific Islander, 25% Hispanic, and twelve percent white during the

2004-2005 school year. These percentages are very different from the New York State

Average. The high school over represented African Americans and Hispanics by 41%

and 8% respectively. The state average was also significantly higher by 41% for White

students. A majority of the students at the school were minorities.

The Gender composition of the urban school was roughly equal with the population of girls slightly higher than that of the boys.   Sixty-five percent of the students were eligible for free and reduced price lunch. This was 37% above the New York State average. The amount of students who take advantage of the free and reduced price lunch program indicated that a majority of the students attending the urban high school were at an economic disadvantage. The school had an 82% attendance rate.

Classroom. A typical classroom was used for the weekly therapy group.   It was a classroom on the second floor that overlooked the North side of the school property towards a football field and ropes course. The room consisted of 28 chairs connected to desks in rows of four. Five single chairs were scattered around the room. Sixteen of the desks were rearranged to form a circle in the middle of the room. The circle is where the students conducted the group.   A large desk was set up in front of the classroom by the whiteboard as well as an office desk along with a computer in the back of the room. Next to the doorway there was a wall phone with a clock hanging above it. During group activities the door was closed in order to maintain confidentiality and avoid interruptions in the form of individuals walking through the hallway.

Procedure

A consent form (see Appendix D) was sent home for a parent or guardian to sign and return with the students in order for the them to participate in the study. Since every group member was under the age of 18 parental consent was necessary. Eleven students were selected due to time and availability of the students during the day, specifically Fridays during eighth period. A pre-test was administered in order to assess the students'

perceptions of barriers to education and career development. The barriers included racial and gender discrimination, money problems, family problems, negative family attitudes, and not fitting in (McWhirter, 1997).

Intervention

Eight consecutive 45 minute sessions of group therapy were facilitated once a week until the end of the semester. The sessions consisted of group members forming ideas and building skills associated with overcoming hardships that may lead to dropping out of school and not achieving one's goals of attending postsecondary education and obtaining a career. The hope was to allow the students to connect with each other and share experiences about barriers that each individual has encountered that may have been hindering his or her ability to perform well in school. In order to understand if the student had formed the skills necessary to surpass the perceived barriers the same measure was administered as a post-test.

Week 1. The students formed a circle with desks and introductions were made with each student sharing something about him or herself. Confidentiality was discussed with the group. A consent form was given to the students in order for a parent or guardian to sign and allow each individual to participate in the group and research study. The students formed rules for the group such as one person speaks at a time and have respect for other members of the group. McWhirter's Perceived Barriers to Education and Career (1997) measure was administered as a pre-test (see Appendix E).

Week 2. McWhirter's Perceived Barriers to Education and Career assessment was talked about. One theme that emerged was common environmental stressors that

influenced the students ability to attend school. The members shared personal experiences many of them were common among the students including rough neighborhoods where violence, crime, and drugs were daily occurrences. Potential barriers to achievement, including graduating, attending college, and attaining a career were also spoken about. Themes such as money, family, violence, discrimination (racial and gender), and relationships with friends were discussed as well as ways that the members could overcome these obstacles. The counselor informed the group members that they would meet six more times.

Week 3. Discussion was generated in the group by brainstorming and conversing about: (1) Advantages of graduating high school and attending college (2) Skills, talents, and interests of each member (3) Role models who have succeeded in high school, college, and/or a chosen career (4) Does discrimination exist in a chosen field and ways to overcome it (5) Personal and parental expectations of accomplishments as well as teachers in the urban school. The counselor informed the group members that they would meet five more times.

Week 4. A discussion concerning questions the members had about college was facilitated. Topics included who can attend college, the expenses of college, college is not for everyone, and advantages of continuing education after high school. The counselor informed the group members that they would meet four more times

Week 5. The group attended an assembly on violence. Former gang members came to speak to the seventh and eighth grade students about the increased amount of violence that had been occurring in the large city in Western New York. The counselor informed the group members that they would meet three more times.

Week 6. The topic of discussion was the assembly on violence. Feelings were expressed about hearing the words murder, death, violence, respect, and fear. Reasons for choosing friends and belonging to gangs and cliques were elaborated on as well as the consequences of belonging to a gang or associating with the "wrong" crowd. The group members connected with each other and personally shared their own experiences of death and loss of friends and family members. The discussion then turned towards how violence could hold individuals back from reaching their goals.   Differences between how boys and girls in the group handled themselves when a violent situation arose were discussed as well as ways to avoid these situations. The counselor informed the group members that they would meet two more times.

Week 7. Significant relationships in the students lives were discussed. The influence of parents/guardians, siblings, friends, and boyfriends/girlfriends on the actions of individuals were evident in the group. Differences of opinion arose when the members spoke about familial support to attend college after high school. The counselor informed the group members that they would meet one more time.

Week 8. The counselor informed the group members that this would be the last time they would be meeting as a group in this setting. McWhirter's Perceived Barriers to Education and Career (1997) measure was administered as a post-test (see Appendix E). For the remainder of the hour the group decided to engage each other on the topic of bullies and relationships.

Measure

The instrument used for the research project was the Perception of Barriers Scale or POB (McWhirter, 1997). The POB was constructed of 24 items. Eight of the items

addressed anticipated ethnic and gender discrimination in the respondent's future career.

Items 1-4 assessed gender discrimination (Chronbach's Alpha = .86) and items 5-8

assessed racial discrimination (Chronbachs Alpha = .89), all of the items pertained to

future careers. Items 9-17 addressed barriers that might prevent the pursuit of

postsecondary education (Chronbach's Alpha = .79) and items 18-22 addressed barriers

anticipated if the respondent attended college (Chronbach's Alpha = .74). Barriers on

items 9-22 included socioeconomic Status and Family. The final two items, 23 & 24,

addressed the overall perceptions of barriers and general confidence in the individual's

ability to overcome barriers. An overall Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient of .87

was obtained for the POB Scale," (Luzon & McWhirter, 2001; McWhirter, 1997).

The POB assessed the amount that an individual perceived certain factors to affect

his or her success in school,   ability to go to college, and be successful in a future career.

The items rated whether the individual believed he or she would be a victim of

discrimination and the barriers that were hindering his or her performance in school.

Specifically, the barriers that were perceived included money issues, family

problems, negative family attitudes, fitting in, and lack of interest among others that may

affect his or her ability to graduate and attend college. The student responded to the

questions using a five point Leikert Scale that ranged from   A (Strongly Agree) to D

(Strongly Disagree). When scoring the test the letters A-D were converted to numbers 1-4

(A=4, B=3, C=2, and D=1). The higher the score on the assessment, the more likely an

individual was to believe his or her goals would be effected by the barriers described

(McWhirter, 1997). This tool   was used as the pre-test post-test in order to asses any

change in the students views of his or her ability to succeed.

Results

The results of the pre-test and post-test will be described for each item one through twenty four. Each item of the assessment will be described individually followed by the pre-test and post-test results.   The mean score will be given for the group as a whole and then for males and females separately. Table 1 presents the results of the pre-test Table 2 presents the results of the post-test. The mean, median, and mode are given for the group as a whole for each individual item as well as the mean for the boys and the mean for the girls. The only measure of central tendency analyzed was the mean due to the small sample size.

Table 1

Pre-test Results

	Item 1	Item 2	Item 3	Item 4	Item 5	Item 6	Item 7	Item 8	Item 9	Item 10	Item 11	Item 12	Item 13	Item 14	Item 15	Item 16	Item 17	Item 18	Item 19	Item 20	Item 21	Item 22	Item 23	Item 24	SUM
Student 1	2	2	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	2	2	1	2	2	1	1	2	1	1	2	2	2	2	36
Student2	2	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	3	4	32
Student 3	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	4	4	1	1	1	4	1	1	1	4	4	1	4	1	4	2	49
Student 4	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	4	2	1	1	1	3	2	4	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	42
Student 5	2	2	1	2	3	2	2	2	3	2	1	1	2	2	3	2	1	2	2	2	2	3	2	3	49
Student 6	4	4	1	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	1	1	1	1	4	4	1	4	4	4	4	81
Student 7	3	4	1	3	0	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	4	35
Student 8	2	2	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	3	2	2	2	2	2	1	1	1	2	3	45
Student 9	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	4	26
Student 10	1	2	1	2	3	2	2	2	3	2	2	2	2	3	2	2	2	2	3	2	2	2	2	3	51
Student 11	4	2	1	3	3	1	1	2	3	2	1	2	1	1	3	1	1	4	1	1	1	2	2	3	46
MEAN	2.09	2.00	1.00	1.91	1.91	1.73	1.55	1.64	2.45	2.00	1.82	1.64	1.45	2.36	1.73	1.55	1.27	2.27	2.00	1.27	1.91	1.82	2.27	3.09	
MEDIAN	2.00	2.00	1.00	2.00	2.00	2.00	1.00	1.00	3.00	2.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	2.00	2.00	1.00	1.00	2.00	2.00	1.00	2.00	2.00	2.00	3.00	
MODE	2.00	2.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	2.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	2.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	2.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	2.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	2.00	4.00	
MEAN Boys	1.83	1.67	1.00	1.80	2.20	2.00	1.80	1.80	2.60	2.40	2.40	1.80	1.80	2.80	1.60	1.20	1.00	2.60	2.40	1.20	2.60	2.20	3.00	3.00	48.70
MEAN Girls	2.00	2.00	1.00	2.00	1.67	1.50	1.33	1.50	2.33	1.67	1.33	1.50	1.17	2.00	1.83	1.83	1.50	2.00	1.67	1.33	1.33	1.50	1.67	3.17	40.83

Table 2

Post-test Results

	Item 1	Item 2	Item 3	Item 4	Item 5	Item 6	Item 7	Item 8	Item 9	Item 10	Item 11	Item 12	Item 13	Item 14	Item 15	Item 16	Item 17	Item 18	Item 19	Item 20	Item 21	Item 22	Item 23	Item 24	SUM
Student 1	2	2	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	2	2	1	2	2	1	1	2	1	1	2	2	2	2	36
Student2	2	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	3	4	32
Student 3	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	4	4	4	1	1	4	1	1	1	4	4	1	4	1	4	2	49
Student 4	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	4	2	1	1	1	3	2	4	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	42
Student 5	2	2	1	2	3	2	2	2	3	2	1	1	2	2	3	2	1	2	2	2	2	3	2	3	49
Student 6	4	4	1	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	1	4	4	1	1	1	4	4	1	4	4	4	4	51
Student 7	3	4	1	3	0	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	4	35
Student 8	2	2	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	3	2	2	2	2	2	1	1	1	2	3	45
Student 9	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	4	25
Student 10	1	2	1	2	3	2	2	2	3	2	2	2	2	3	2	2	2	2	3	2	2	2	2	3	51
Student 11	4	2	1	3	3	1	1	2	3	2	1	2	1	1	3	1	1	4	1	1	1	2	2	3	46
MEAN	2.09	2.00	1.00	1.91	1.91	1.73	1.55	1.64	2.45	2.00	1.82	1.64	1.45	2.36	1.73	1.55	1.27	2.27	2.00	1.27	1.91	1.82	2.27	3.09	
MEDIAN	2.00	2.00	1.00	2.00	2.00	2.00	1.00	1.00	3.00	2.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	2.00	2.00	1.00	1.00	2.00	2.00	1.00	2.00	2.00	2.00	3.00	
MODE	2.00	2.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	2.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	2.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	2.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	2.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	2.00	4.00	
MEAN Boys	1.83	1.67	1.00	1.80	2.20	2.00	1.80	1.80	2.60	2.40	2.40	1.80	1.80	2.80	1.60	1.20	1.00	2.60	2.40	1.20	2.60	2.20	3.00	3.00	48.70
MEAN Girls	2.00	2.00	1.00	2.00	1.67	1.50	1.33	1.50	2.33	1.67	1.33	1.50	1.17	2.00	1.83	1.83	1.50	2.00	1.67	1.33	1.33	1.50	1.67	3.17	40.83

Pre-test and Post-test

Discrimination in a Future Career.

Questions one through eight obtained information on the individual's perceptions of racial and gender discrimination in a future career. The section started with the sentence fragment, "In my future job, I will probably…" and each item after that finished the sentence to form a statement.

Item 1. "Be treated differently because of my sex." This item measured how much the student thought he or she would be discriminated in the future because of their gender. The mean score for the group as a whole on the pre-test was x=2.09. There was no change on the post-test. The mean score for boys was x=1.83 on the pre-test and slightly lower by 0.03 for the post-test. For the girls the mean score on the pre-test was x=2.00 and 0.33 (x=2.33) higher on the post-test.

Item 2. "Experience negative comments about my sex (such as insults or rude jokes)," was a measure of how much discrimination an individual would encounter in the work place due to his or her sex. The mean score for the group was x=2.00 on the pre-test

and x=2.27 on the post-test. For the boys, x=1.67 for the pre-test and x=2.00 on the post test. The girls scored a mean of x= 2.00 on the pre-test and showed an increase of 0.50 (x=2.50) on the post-test

Item 3. "Have a harder time getting hired than people of the opposite sex." This item gauged to what degree the individual believed he or she would be discriminated against due to gender when searching for a job. The mean score for the group on the pre-test was x=1.00 and a increase of 1.00 for the post-test. The boys scored a mean of x=1.00 on the pre-test with an increase to x=1.80 on the post-test. The girls had a mean of x=1.00 on the pre-test and expressed a mean of x=2.17 on the post test.

Item 4. "Experience discrimination because of my sex." This statement was used as a general measure of whether the individual believed he or she would experience gender discrimination in the future. The mean for the group as a whole on the pre-test was x=1.91and somewhat higher for the post-test x=2.00. The boys mean for the pre-test and the post-test was x=1.80. There was no change. The girls mean was x=2.00 for the pre-test and slightly higher x=2.17 for the post-test.

Item 5. "Be treated differently because of my ethnic/racial background." This item was a general statement used to see how likely the individual believed he or she would experience racial discrimination based on the treatment by others in the future. The mean for the group on the pre-test was x=1.91 and x=2.45 on the post-test. The boys scored a mean of x=2.20 on the pre-test and somewhat higher on the post-test with a mean of x=2.40. The girls scored a mean of x=1.67 on the pre-test and significantly higher on the post-test with a mean of x=2.50.

Item 6. "Experience negative comments about my racial/ethnic background (such

as insults or rude jokes)." This statement measured the amount that the individual

perceived that he or she would encounter racism through comments made by others. A

mean of x=1.73 was scored on the pre-test for the group. The post-test mean increased by

0.45 (x=2.18). The pre-test mean for the boys was x=2.00 and increased to x=2.20 on the

post-test. The girls scored a mean of x=1.50 on the pre-test and the mean increased to

x=2.17 on the post-test.

Item 7. "Have a harder time getting hired than people of other racial/ethnic

backgrounds." This item assessed how much the individual believed he or she would

experience racial discrimination when being hired for a job. The pre-test mean for the

group as a whole was x=1.55. It increased to x=2.10 on the post-test. The boys scored a

mean of x=1.80 on both the pre-test and the post-test. The girls recorded a mean of

x=1.33 on the pre-test and a significantly higher x=2.40 on the post-test.

Item 8. "Experience discrimination because of my ethnic/racial background." This

statement measured if the individual believed he or she would experience a general racial

discrimination in the future. The group recorded a pre-test mean of x=1.64 and this rose

slightly on the post-test to x=1.73. The pre-test mean for the boys was x=1.80 and

decreased to x=1.60 on the post-test. The girls mean on the pre-test was x=1.50 and a

increase of 0.33 (x=1.88) was calculated for the post-test.

Barriers to postsecondary education

Items nine through seventeen obtained information about the individual's

perception of the barriers that would hinder the chances of the student attending college.

This group of items included barriers pertaining to socioeconomic Status, and family's

beliefs and attitudes. The individual was presented with the sentence fragment, "If I

didn't go to college, it would be because of…" and each proceeding item finished the

statement in a different way.

Item 9. "Money problems." This statement measured whether the individuals

believed he or she would not be able to attend college due to financial difficulties. The

group scored a mean of x=2.45 on the pre-test. The mean for the post-test decreased by

0.45 (x=2.00). For the boys the pre-test mean was x=2.60 and remained constant on the

post-test. The girls mean was 2.33 on the pre-test and significantly decreased to x=1.50

on the post-test.

Item 10. "Family problems." This item assessed whether the individuals perceived

family problems to get in the way of attending college. The group recorded a mean of

x=2.00 on the pre-test and this number decreased by 0.45 (x=1.55) on the post-test. The

boys mean on the pre-test was x=2.40 and x=1.60 for on the post-test. For the girls, the

mean was x=1.67 on the pre-test and a smaller x=1.50 on the post-test.

Item 11. "Not being smart enough." This statement measured whether the

individuals believed he or she had the ability and skills necessary to attend college. The

mean for the group was x=1.82 and decreased to 1.45 on the post-test. The boys scored a

mean of x=2.40 which significantly decreased on the post test to x=1.40. The mean on

the pre-test for the girls was x=1.33 but increased to x=1.50 on the post-test.

Item 12. "Family attitudes about college." This item assessed whether the

individuals believed his or her families attitudes and beliefs hindered their chances of

attending a postsecondary institution. The mean for the group on the pre-test was x=1.80

and the group recorded a mean of x=1.55 on the post-test. The pre-test mean for the boys

was x=1.80 and a lower x=1.60 on the post-test. The girls recorded a mean of x=1.50 on

both the pre-test and the post-test.

   Item 13. "I wouldn't fit in." This statement measured whether the students felt that he or she would be discriminated against in general by the other students. The group scored a mean of x=1.45 on the pre-test and x=1.55 on the post-test. The pre-test mean for the boys was x=1.80 and a slightly lower x=1.60 for the post-test. The mean for the girls on the pre-test was x=1.17 and increased by 0.33 (x=1.50) on the post-test.

   Item 14. "I couldn't get into college." This item assessed whether the individuals believed he or she would actually be accepted into college. The pre-test mean for the group was recorded as x=2.36. The post-test mean was significantly lower, x=1.82. The boys mean on the pre-test was x=2.80 and an even lower x=2.00 on the post-test. The girls scored a mean of x=2.00 on the pre-test and it was slightly lower on the pos-test, x=1.67.

   Item 15. "Having a good job already." This statement measured whether the individuals believed college would be necessary if he or she possessed a job. The mean on the pre-test for the group was x=1.73 and decreased to x=1.45 on the post-test. The boys recorded a mean of x=1.60 on the pre-test and a lower x=1.40 on the post-test. The pre-test mean for the girls was x=1.83. On the post-test the girls recorded a mean of 1.50.

   Item 16. "Lack of Interest." This item assessed whether the student were motivated to attend college or continue education after high school. The mean for the group on the pre-test and the post-test was constant at x=1.55. The boys mean (x=1.20) and the girls mean (x=1.83) did not change on the pre-test and the post-test.

   Item 17. "It wouldn't help my future." This statement measured whether the individuals perceived college as a stepping stone for their to improve their life. The

group's mean on the pre-test was x=1.27 and slightly increased to x=1.36 on the post-test. The mean for the boys on the pre-test was x=1.00 and rose to x=1.20 on the post test. For, the girls, the pre-test mean was x=1.50 and remained constant on the post-test.

Anticipated Barriers

Items eighteen through twenty two were intended to gather information about the student's perception of barriers that may be present once that individual entered college. S.E.S., family attitudes, and discrimination were the barriers being measured in this section. The individual was presented with the sentence fragment, "If I do go to college, I will probably experience…"

Item 18. "Money problems." This item measured the amount that the student agreed with the idea that he or she would experience financial difficulties if attending college. The group recorded a mean of x=2.27 on the pre-test and was 0.54 less on the post-test (x=1.73). The boys scored a mean of x=2.60 on the pre-test and this score decreased significantly by 0.60 on the post-test (x=2.00). The mean on the pre-test for the girls was x=2.00 and an even lower x=1.50 on the post test.

Item 19. "Family problems." This statement measured the amount that the individual agreed with the idea that his or her family would experience problems if the student attended college. The group's mean on the pre-test was recorded as x=2.00. On the post-test the group scored a mean of x=1.55. The mean for the boys on the pre-test was x=2.40 and an significantly lower x=1.60 on the post test. The girls scored a mean of x=1.67 on the pre-test and 1.50 on the post-test.

Item 20. "Negative family attitudes." This item measured the amount that the student believed that his or her family would have negative attitudes towards college or

the individual attending college. The mean on the pre-test for the group was x=1.27 and a

higher mean of x=1.64 was scored on the post-test. On the pre-test and the post-test the

boy scored a mean of x=1.20. The mean on the pre-test for the girls was x=1.33 and

increased significantly by 0.67   (x=2.00) on the post-test.

Item 21. "Not being smart enough." This statement assessed the amount that the

individual perceived him or herself to be intelligent enough to stay in college. A mean of

x=1.91 was calculated for the group on the pre-test. A decrease of 0.36 (x=1.55) was

recorded on the post-test. The boys mean on the pre-test was x=2.60 and a significantly

lower mean of x=1.80 on the post-test. The mean on the pre-test and the post-test went

unchanged (x=1.33) for the girls.

Item 22. "Not fitting in with others." This item measured the amount that the

student perceived he or she would be discriminated against in a college setting. The

group's mean on the pre-test for the group was x=1.82 and x=1.55 on the post-test. For

the boys, the mean on the pre-test was x=2.20 and decreased by 0.60 on the post-test

(x=1.60). The girls scored a mean of x=1.50 on the pre-test and the post-test.

Overall Perceptions of Barriers

Items twenty three and twenty four obtained information on the individual's

general belief that he or she would encounter barriers to achievement of career goals and

his or her ability to surpass the barriers and succeed.

Item 23. "There are many barriers that will make it difficult for me to achieve my

career goals." The mean for the group on the pre-test was x=2.27 and slightly increased

on the post-test to x=2.45. The boys recorded a mean of x=3.00 on the pre-test which

significantly decreased to x=2.40 on the post-test. For the girls, the mean of the pre-test

was x=1.67 and increased to x=2.50   on the post-test.

Item 24. "I will be able to overcome any barriers that stand in the way of achieving my career goals." On the pre-test the group recorded a mean of 3.08 and it increased by 0.37 (x=3.45) on the post-test. The boys mean on the pre-test was x=3.00 and increased to 3.60 on the post-test. The girls scored a mean of 3.17 on the pre-test and a mean of 3.33 on the post-test.

Discussion

A comparison of the pre-test and post-test results pertaining to the perceived barriers of educational and career attainment of the sample of 14 urban African American students will be assessed. Discussion of the findings between the group members as well as between gender will follow. The limitations of the group sessions along with implications for future counseling will be addressed.

Comparison of Pre-test and Post-test

The overall findings of the present study compliment previous research on the perception of barriers to education and career. Urban students believe there are many barriers present that will make it difficult to achieve academic and career goals throughout their lives (Fusick & Charkow Bordeau, 2004; Kenny, Blustein, Chaves, Grossman, & Gallagher, 2003; Luzon & McWhirter, 2001; McWhirter, 1997). The comparison of the means between the pre-test and post-test will be discussed in the four areas of the assessment (1) Discrimination in a Future Career (2) Barriers to postsecondary Education (3) Anticipated Barriers (4) Overall Perceptions of Barriers.

Items one through four addressed gender discrimination that an individual might experience in a future career. Generally there was an increase in means for the group. This suggests that during the eight week therapy group the individuals' perceptions that they will experience negative comments about their gender and have a harder time getting a job than a person of the opposite sex increased. A significant increase occurred on items 1, 2, and 3 for the girls which is consistent with the current literature. According to McWhirter (1997) ethnic girls more so than boys are likely to believe they will experience gender discrimination in the future. The boys means did increase significantly on items 2 and 3 but were still lower than the girls means. This result seems credible because girls are brought up to believe they will be discriminated against because of their sex from an early age (Killen, Lee-Kim, McGlothlin, & Stangor, 2002).

Items five through eight addressed the issue of racism in a career. The findings suggested that there was a general awareness of racial discrimination. The group's mean consistently increased on all items. These results are understandable because urban African Americans grow up experiencing stereotypes and racism from an early age (Oyserman, Gant, & Ager, 1995). They may also be attributed to the general perceptions of discrimination that urban African American students undergo (Sellers & Shelton, 2003; Taylor, et al., 1994). There was a significant increase for the girls on items 5, 6, and 7 by the end of the therapy group. The means for the girls on these items were higher than those of the boys on the post-test but not on the pre-test. These findings are inconsistent with the literature (McWhirter, 1997). She found that boys were more likely to believe they would experience racism. The result may be a cause of the girls becoming more aware of racial discrimination during the group.   As previously reported the girls

already experience or believe they will experience gender discrimination in the future. With this embedded in their daily thoughts the idea that they will be discriminated against (including racially) might become a routine occurrence

Items nine through seventeen addressed barriers to postsecondary education. Overall, the mean in the group decreased for these items. This suggests that group therapy had a significant effect on the perceptions of barriers to education that the members experienced. According to Phillips, Christopher-Sisk, & Gravino (2001) having a caring adult in one's life is important to the development of adolescents. Matsen and Coatsworth (1998) also pointed out that students with a caring adult present in their lives are more likely to have positive outcomes. This can be seen in the results of the postsecondary education section because the counselor facilitating the group took the role on of the caring adult.

Consistent with the literature, gender did not play a role in the belief that money problems or family issues would result in individuals not attending college (McWhirter, 1997).   At the end of the group therapy sessions both the boys' and girls' means were equal. Although this was the case there were significant decreases in the means on different items.   For instance, the girls' belief that socioeconomic status played a role in getting into college decreased throughout therapy. Also, the boys' perception that family issues would get in the way of a secondary education significantly declined. These results suggest that individuals participating in group therapy experienced a positive change which supports Yalom's (1995) findings.

A significant decrease worth noting was on item 14 which dealt with identity. Both boys' and girls' means decreased throughout the group sessions. The idea that he or

she would not go to college because the individual could not get in was reduced. This may have been the result of the students framing their identity around succeeding in school. As the group shared how success was key to doing well in life they took on the identity of a successful student. Consistent with Bowman & Howard1(985) those students who have formed a positive identity will be more likely to succeed in school.

Items 18-22 addressed anticipated barriers. As with the previous section these items dealt with the same barriers to education and career. The results were equivalent to those in the previous section having to do with money problems and family issues significantly decreasing throughout therapy. An increase worth noting that was skewed from the rest of the results was on item 20. The girls mean escalated by 0.67. This increase suggested that the girls believed more than the boys that if they went to college their family would react negatively to it. The literature does point out that African American mothers tend to push their children towards educational attainment, but they tend to aim the attention towards their daughters (Solorzano, 1992). This inconsistency with the rest of the results may be due to external factors such as lack of family involvement or parental figures.

It is notable to mention that although the results indicated that the mean scores varied from the beginning of the therapy group until the end the overall fluctuation in scores was minute. For instance, when a score increased from 1.50 to 2.00, a significant increase, the response changed from "Strongly Disagree" to "Disagree". There was a definite change in response worth noting, due to the small sample size more research is recommended.

Limitations

The sample of African American students who attend an urban school was somewhat biased because the students who were chosen for the study were not randomly selected. To achieve a totally random sample the students should have been screened and chosen based on willingness to participate in a group, level of socioeconomic status, and ethnicity.   Although the group members were African American and based on the free and reduced lunch program came from a low socioeconomic background, they were placed in the group based on availability in their schedule. Moreover, the group members were selected to participate in the group therapy sessions because they had eighth period free every week on Friday. This was convenient for attendance purposes and made a mandatory time for the group to conduct sessions but not all of the members were willing to participate on a regular basis. If the group met after school, the individuals who did not want to be there would have dropped out, opening a space for an individual who may have benefited more from the experience. This may have made the results of the pre and post test more consistent.

Along with adequately screening members who were willing to participate on their own time, not time allotted in the school day, the screening process could have been more thorough in regards to the students' background. Specifically family history such as with whom the student lived with (ie: mom and dad, aunts and uncles, grandparents…) would have been valuable information. Determining the amount of parental involvement in the student's academics would have been beneficial to know. Also knowing whether the group member had siblings who had graduated high school and/or attended college would have been valuable information to have access to. This information may have allowed the group to be more uniform in the experiences that each member had been

through.   Allowing the group to achieve a higher level of cohesiveness.

Another limitation was set forth by the general confides of the school setting. The classroom in which the therapy group was held was not optimal for a group environment. Although the room was large enough, the desk arrangement was not conducive to a therapy group. Every time before the group met the members along with the facilitator moved desks into a circle. This took time away from an already short 50 minute session every week. The desks proved somewhat of a barrier to participation because they had immobile tables connected to each one. Although the desks were perceived as a hindrance they were more comfortable than sitting on the tile floor.

Implications for Future Counseling

Implementing a group therapy session in a school setting requires time and planning on the part of the counselor. A strict screening process could be applied to ensure the most effective group atmosphere. Setting aside a time after school when the students were willing to participate in the sessions without being forced to attend may increase group participation.   The optimal time allotted for a group is 90 minutes (Yalom, 1995). The shortened 50 minute sessions did not allow time for processing the group's interactions and experiences with each other. In effect the students were not given the time needed in order to process the interactions and experiences they had. Implementing these basic yet hard to meet standards for a therapy group may have produced different results.

The urban high school in which this study was conducted was 61% African American. The remaining one-third of the students were Asian/Pacific Islander, White, and Hispanic (NYSED, 2005). Although this study was concerned with the barriers that

urban African Americans perceive to be holding them back, the rest of the students in the school could benefit from this type of group intervention. McWhirter (1997) found the differences between Mexican American and Euro American high school juniors and seniors to be quite significant on the topic of perceived barriers. Further research could be conducted to include other ethnicities that were present in the school such as Asian/Pacific Islander, White, and Hispanic.

In order to facilitate a more conducive group setting, a separate room where no interruptions could occur would be preferred. A room where the students had the freedom to move around without being confined to a desk would be adequate. This may allow the students to devote all of their attention and energy to the group.

Overall, more research in the area of perceived barriers to educational and career attainment is warranted. Adolescents who live in urban areas need special attention paid to the issues that they face. No matter what race or ethnicity the students are, in urban school districts barriers are present and more attention ought to be paid to this issue.

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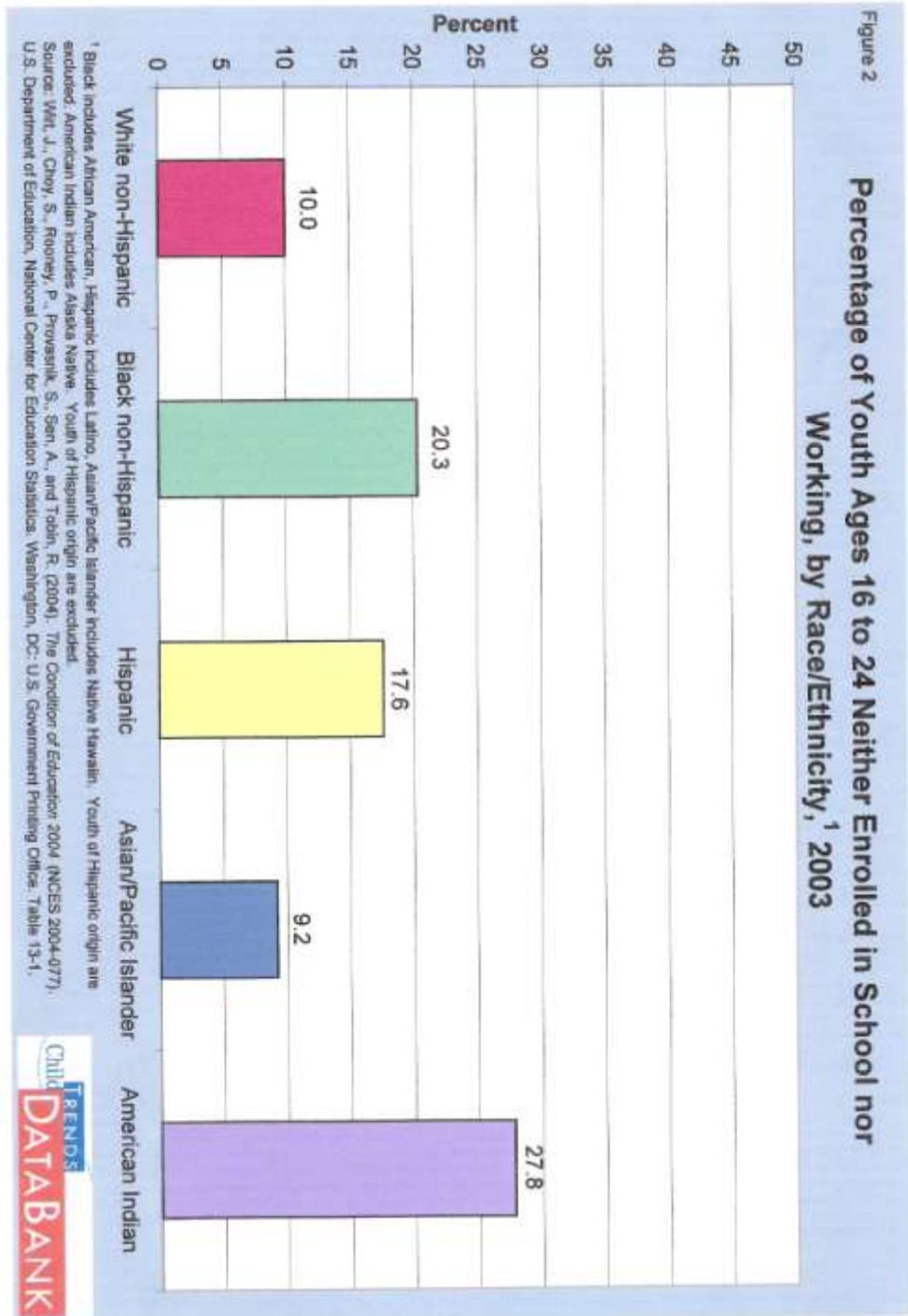
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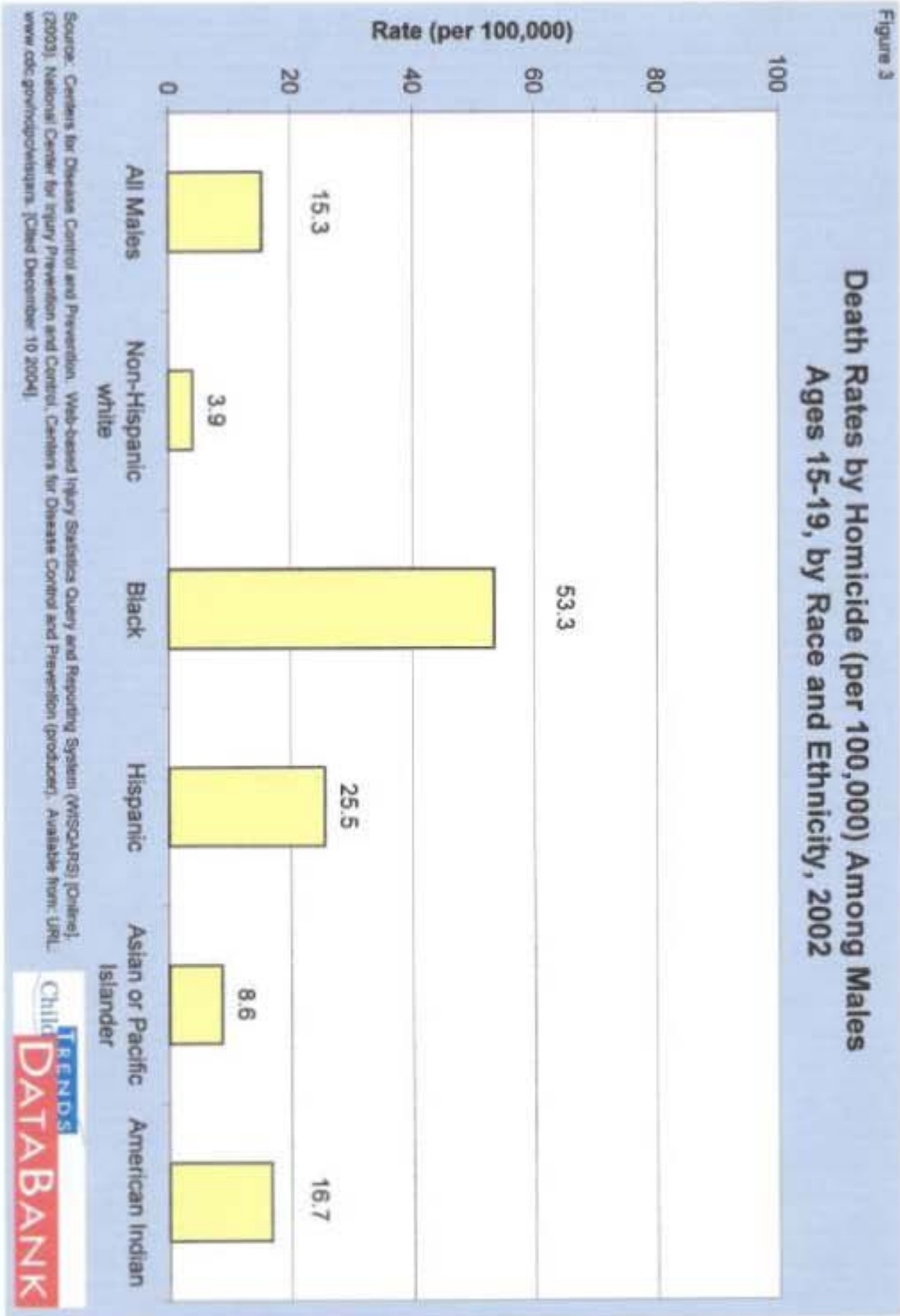
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Appendix A
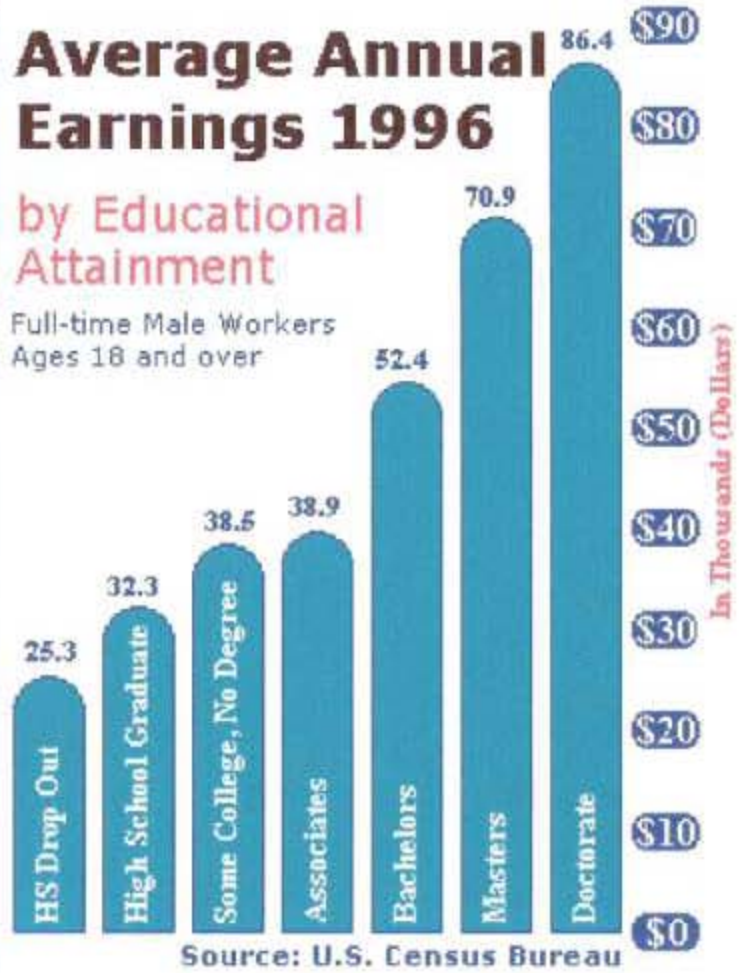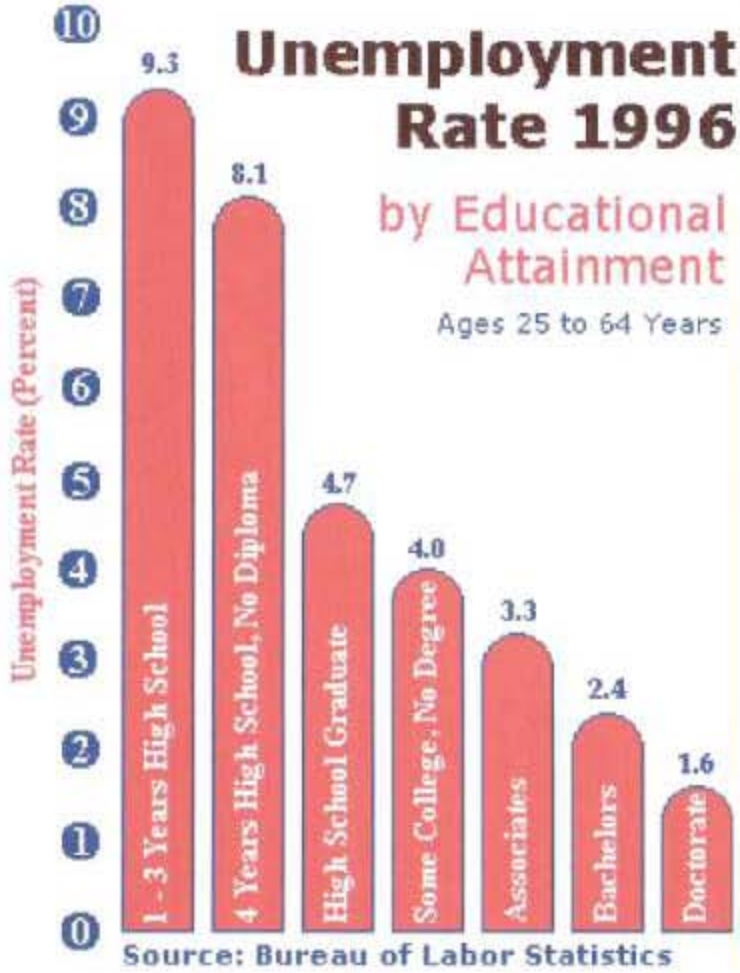
Youth Not Enrolled in High School Nor Working

Figure 2. Percentage of Youth Ages 16 to 24 Neither Enrolled in School nor Working, by Race/Ethnicity,[1] 2003

Appendix B

Homicide Rates

Figure 3

Death Rates by Homicide (per 100,000) Among Males
Ages 15-19, by Race and Ethnicity, 2002

Rate (per 100,000)

All Males — 15.3
Non-Hispanic white — 3.9
Black — 53.3
Hispanic — 25.5
Asian or Pacific Islander — 8.6
American Indian — 16.7

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Web-based Injury Statistics Query and Reporting System (WISQARS) [Online]. (2003). National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (producer). Available from: URL: www.cdc.gov/ncipc/wisqars. [Cited December 10 2004].

Appendix C

Unemployment Rate/Average Annual Earnings By Educational Attainment

EAST HIGH SCHOOL
1801 East Main Street, Rochester, New York 14609-7495   Phone 585-288-3130 FAX 585-654-1066

Dear Parent or Guardian:

My name is Mr. Heilmann and I am working as Ms. Diodato's counseling intern. I am currently finishing my final year at SUNY Brockport in their Counselor Education Masters Program and will be working at East High School until December 2005. I look forward to working with and getting to know your child.

During my internship I am required to write a thesis to help improve the counseling program at East High. My objective is to help students develop the skills necessary to deal with perceived barriers that may be holding them back from achieving their educational and career goals. I will work with your child in a group setting one day a week for the next 9 weeks. The sessions will be kept private and confidential. My ultimate goal is to facilitate growth in your child and overcome perceived barriers that may be hindering his/her potential. Your child's participation is greatly appreciated and will contribute to improving educational and vocational development at East High School. Please sign this form and have your child return it to me by September 30, 2005. If you have any questions please contact me at 288-3130, ext: 4263.

Sincerely,

Mr. Heilmann,
Counselor Education Intern

Parent/Guardian Signature_____

Date:_____

Appendix E

McWhirter's Perception of Barriers Assessment

✳ Please circle the letter that best describes the way you feel about each of the following

statements.

A=Strongly agree, B=Agree, C=Disagree, D=Strongly Disagree

In my future job, I will probably...

1. Be treated differently because of my sex.   A--B--C--D

2. Experience negative comments about my sex (such as insults or rude jokes).   A--B--C--D

3. Have a harder time getting hired than people of the opposite sex.   A--B--C--D

4. Experience discrimination because of my sex.   A--B--C--D

5. Be treated differently because of my ethnic/ racial background.   A--B--C--D

6. Experience negative comments about my racial/ethnic background

(such as insults or rude jokes).   A--B--C--D

7. Have a harder time getting hired than people of other racial/ethnic backgrounds.

A--B--C--D

8. Experience discrimination because of my ethnic/racial background.   A--B--C--D

If I didn't go to college, it would be because of...

9. Money problems.   A--B--C--D

10. Family problems.   A--B--C--D

11. Not being smart enough.   A--B--C--D

12. Family attitudes about college. A--B--C--D

13. I wouldn't fit in.   A--B--C--D

14. I couldn't get into college.   A--B--C--D

15. Having a good job already.   A--B--C--D

16. Lack of interest.   A--B--C--D

A=Strongly agree, B=Agree, C=Unsure, D=Disagree, E=Strongly Disagree

If I didn't go to college, it would be because of...

17. It wouldn't help my future.   A--B--C--D

If I do go to college, I will probably experience...

18. Money problems.   A--B--C--D

19. Family problems.   A--B--C--D

20. Negative family attitudes.   A--B--C--D

21. Not being smart enough.   A--B--C--D

22. Not fitting in with others.   A--B--C--D

In general I think that...

23. There are many barriers that will make it difficult for me to achieve my career goals.

A--B--C--D

24. I will be able to overcome any barriers that stand in the way of achieving my career goals.

A--B--C--D

Comments about any of the statements...

Name _____

Day _____

Period_____

Adapted from McWhirter, E. H. (1997). Perceived barriers to education and career: Ethnic and gender differences. *Journal of Vocational Behavior, 50*, 124-140.