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## Counseling Groups for High School Students

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## Counseling Groups for High School Students

### Abstract

Groups were first established in the public schools in the early 1900s. At this time, the group provided an environment in which to learn life skills and values rather than focusing on the group process (Gladding, 1995). There was a growth of groups in select schools during the 1910s, although the focus continued to be on individual counseling. In the 1930s, the focus of groups was on vocational and personal themes. They were often the responsibility of homeroom teachers. In these groups, the teacher was responsible for establishing friendly relationships and developing the right attitudes toward school, home, and the community in the students (Strange, 1935, as cited in Gladding, 1995). This group guidance approach to counseling was replaced with group counseling as a way to bring about behavioral changes in the late 1950s. More recently, group work has become more increasingly utilized in the school settings as a primary way to influence educational endeavors and social skills (Hudson, Doyle, & Venezia, 1991, as cited in Gladding, 1995). In addition, as professional associations continue to grow, more training and educational opportunities are being offered in group work.

# COUNSELING GROUPS FOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

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A Research Paper

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and Postsecondary Education

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In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts in Education

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Rachel E. Williams

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## Introduction

### Background Information

Groups were first established in the public schools in the early 1900s. At this time, the group provided an environment in which to learn life skills and values rather than focusing on the group process (Gladding, 1995). There was a growth of groups in select schools during the 1910s, although the focus continued to be on individual counseling. In the 1930s, the focus of groups was on vocational and personal themes. They were often the responsibility of homeroom teachers. In these groups, the teacher was responsible for establishing friendly relationships and developing the right attitudes toward school, home, and the community in the students (Strange, 1935, as cited in Gladding, 1995). This group guidance approach to counseling was replaced with group counseling as a way to bring about behavioral changes in the late 1950s. More recently, group work has become more increasingly utilized in the school settings as a primary way to influence educational endeavors and social skills (Hudson, Doyle, & Venezia, 1991, as cited in Gladding, 1995). In addition, as professional associations continue to grow, more training and educational opportunities are being offered in group work.

### Topic Description

Although groups have been offered in the public schools for almost a century, new groups are frequently developed to meet the continually changing needs of the student population. Groups organized for specific student populations, as well as specific topics and techniques, should be offered. This paper focuses on the different types of groups that have been developed for high school students. In discussing the different groups, the targeted population and

topic of the group, the objectives and topics of the sessions, and the results of the group experience will be addressed. All of this information will help answer the question, “What groups have been used with high school students and how effective are they?”

### Significance of Topic

It is important for high school counselors to be aware of the different types of groups that have been developed and tried in the past. By providing school counselors with this information, they will be more familiar with the different types of groups that they can offer to their students. As they are provided with new ideas and develop a better understanding of what works and does not work with high school groups, counselors will be more likely to start a new group or adapt the ideas to the groups they currently facilitate.

Providing groups for high school students is beneficial for several reasons. Groups can be helpful to adolescents in making a successful transition from childhood to adulthood (Gladding, 1995). They can provide an opportunity for the participants to practice communication skills with peers and adults. According to Erickson (1968, as cited in Gladding, 1995), adolescents may develop a greater sense of identity and intimacy by participating in a group. In addition to all the benefits of a group experience for high school students, groups allow a counselor to use his or her time more efficiently.

### Preview of Findings

The different types of groups for high school students described in the literature can be divided into three different categories. One of the categories is groups for specific populations (e.g., groups for at-risk, black female, special needs, gifted and talented students). The second category is for students who have

a similar experience in common. This would include students who have had someone close to them die, gone through a parental divorce, have experienced fatherhood, or are deciding their post high school plans. The final category includes groups that teach the members specific skills or techniques, such as anxiety management or meditation.

### Plan of Development

Each of the different types of groups will be described based on the information in the professional literature. For research articles, the results of the study will be described. For conceptual and application articles, the specific group intervention will be described. The author will then use the information from the various journal articles to develop suggestions for high school counselors.

### Groups for Specific Populations

#### At-Risk Students

Students who are labeled as “at risk” of dropping out of school typically have poor motivation, low grades, excessive absenteeism, and engage in the destruction of property and fighting (Catterall, 1987). The groups designed for at-risk students have had mixed results. An experimental study described in one journal article investigated the effects of an intensive group counseling workshop on at-risk students (Catterall, 1987). The 155 subjects used in this study had each failed two or more classes in the fall term. The sample included 53% females and 47% males. The ethnic background composition of the group was 56% Hispanic, 18% Caucasian, 15% African American, 7% Asians, and 3% Native Americans.

The students were divided into three groups. There were 100 treatment subjects, 20 “select” controls (students who were interested in the group but on a waiting list), and 37 random controls. The 100 treatment subjects participated in a

4 day workshop conducted by 6 counseling professionals. The counselors used a collection of cognitive and behavioral approaches to address the problems of group members, such as their low academic performance and negative relations with peers and school personnel. To evaluate the effects of the workshop, both pre- and post-tests were used with all the subjects. These measures included teacher-reported grades, work habits, number of tardies and absences, and Wisconsin Youth Survey results.

The results were disappointing in that the treatment subjects earned a grade point average of halfway between a D and D- over the first ten weeks of the spring term, whereas the comparison group students were performing at a D+ level on average for the same grading period. In addition, proportionally more treatment subjects dropped out the following fall term. However, 88 of the 100 treatment subjects anticipated a “positive effect” of the workshop on their upcoming school work. Catterall (1987) concluded that the workshop may have succeeded by getting these individuals to interact with one another more effectively. However, by isolating all these “at-risk” students together, the students were encouraged to identify with a group that was oppressed and estranged from the other more successful students. This might explain the negative results.

Catterall (1987) suggested that a possible limitation of the study was that the treatment subjects missed four days of school while attending the workshops. As a result, this is a possible reason for the lower grades since the students may have fallen behind or missed out on important information. At the same time, these additional absences may have frustrated teachers, which may have resulted in negative interactions between teachers and students.



The results of this study indicate that isolating at-risk students in groups may be detrimental to their success in school. However, since the students seemed to enjoy it, perhaps a group that combined the at-risk and successful students in one group would be more successful. This concept of integrating at-risk and successful students was supported by Rose-Gold (1991) who works with at-risk students in rural settings. Due to the financial and resource limitations of rural schools, Rose-Gold (1991) proposed that counselors in small schools utilize a more generic “smorgasbord” approach by offering generic issue groups that include a combination of at-risk students and non-identified students. Integrated groups would expose the at-risk students to a more positive outlook on school. Another suggestion for high school counselors was to try an at-risk group that met outside of the school day or during a study hall so that the students would not be missing important classes.

While the results of Catterall’s study (1987) did not support the use of groups in raising academic performance of at-risk high school students, there are two anecdotal reports proposing that groups are effective in raising the self-esteem of at-risk students. The first one was an at-risk group facilitated by the school counselor and a consultant. The consultant was a non-school employee who had expertise working with at-risk students (Gilliland, 1987). There were two major goals for the group. The first was to encourage increased self-esteem in the members. A second was for members to improve their academic performance and social behaviors. The leaders led the group in an open manner, believing in the freedom of expression. At the same time, they enforced the group rules by removing a member for the remainder of the session what a rule was violated.

Laughter was viewed as a valuable aid in creating a non-threatening atmosphere. The consultant and counselor were able to meet after each session to discuss possible interventions for future meetings.

Even though the group experience had no statistical data to support it, the author suggested that there appears to be substantial potential for success in this environment. For a high school counselor working with at-risk students, an open, supportive atmosphere is encouraged. To create this atmosphere, the leaders need to demonstrate respect, genuineness, and empathy. In addition, Gilliland (1987) found that videotaping the sessions particularly heightens student motivation for successful solving of group-identified problems. For high school counselors who are having a hard time motivating their at-risk students, perhaps videotaping the sessions would be helpful.

The other anecdotal report (Morrow-Kleindl, 1990) of an at-risk group similarly focused on raising the self-esteem of the members. The goal was for the members to develop the skills necessary to become more effective in their lives and thus raise their self-esteem. This was a significant goal since low self-esteem is repeatedly cited as a common characteristic among dropouts (Self, 1985, as cited in Morrow-Kleindl, 1990). Morrow-Kleindl (1990) suggested that low self-esteem, as well as the individual's ability to deal with his or her low self-esteem, may be the key to a student's problems. It was hoped that through this group experience, potential high school dropouts (at-risk) would develop new skills, enhance their self-esteem, and increase their potential for successfully completing their high school education. In order to achieve these goals, issues such as self-esteem, communication, goal setting, feelings, problem solving, and self-statements were addressed.

### Black Female Students

Sapphires-in-Transition (Young, 1994) was the name of the program that targeted black female adolescents. While this program targeted a population different from at-risk students, many of the students in this study displayed similar at-risk behaviors. The purpose of the study was to determine whether students could develop positive self-concepts and build self-esteem through the adoption of appropriate behaviors for effective societal functioning. There was a total of 60 black females in grades 7 through 12 involved in the study. The participants were referred by teachers as exhibiting inappropriate behaviors, projecting negative self-concepts, and showing potential to benefit from special attention.

Several interventions were used with these students. Each member participated in group counseling in which she met every day for two weeks. In the sessions, there was a focus on participants developing positive self-concepts and building self-esteem. This was achieved by making members cognizant of their individual and collective worth as beautiful people and motivating them to consider their personal as well as societal potential as young black women. In addition to the group experiences, they engaged in activities focused on helping participants learn and practice behaviors, attitudes, and skills deemed socially appropriate. Finally, the participants were surrounded by a network of teachers, counselors, parents, significant family members, and others who observed the student, while providing positive reinforcement and informal assessment.

The program was evaluated by using several assessments that included a self-awareness scale, a self-evaluation scale, and a parent survey. The self-report devices were designed and field tested before initiating the Sapphires-in-Transition program. The results indicated that participants learned, practiced, and adopted

specific behaviors deemed socially appropriate (Young, 1994). Moreover, participants, student peers, teachers, parents, and community volunteers all responded affirmatively regarding the positive impact and value of the program for the black female adolescent participants.

Written observations were another form of assessment used in this study. The observers narrowed their focus to three specific behaviors which they thought were appropriate behaviors for the effective societal functioning of the young ladies. The three behaviors were modulating voices, grooming properly, and developing assertive demeanor. Although the authors reported that all participants showed dramatic improvements in the use of the three behaviors on a daily basis, they did not provide any data to support their conclusions.

A second limitation of the study might be that there was no control group to use as a comparison with the Sapphires-in-Transition members. Also, there was no data collected a period of time after the conclusion of the group as a way to evaluate the program's long term effects. This is especially important since the positive feedback that the students received from their networkers may have affected their behavior during the study. A concern is whether that behavior continued even after the support and positive feedback ended.

For high school counselors who do not have enough female black adolescents to initiate this type of program, Young (1994) suggested that this program model is flexible enough to be easily adapted for use with other populations, such as at-risk adolescents. Another suggestion for high school counselors was to supplement a group experience with the development of a networking system. This would hold the members continually accountable outside of the group, while providing motivation through positive reinforcement.

An alternative approach to facilitating groups for black females and other culturally diverse students is to utilize an Adlerian perspective. Herring and Runion (1994) recommended the use of Adlerian techniques for several reasons. First, many Adlerian concepts are congruent with the values of many ethnic and cultural groups because Adlerians work cooperatively with students in ways that enable them to reach their self-defined goals without biased counselor projections. Next, the Adlerian emphasis on social interest lends itself well to group discussion. Third, Adler (1927, as cited in Herring and Runion, 1994) believed that people do not behave in isolation from others but in relation to others.

### Special Education Students

Cognitively impaired. A variety of groups have been developed for students with special needs. One type of group has targeted the cognitively impaired student who sexually acts out. With an interest in reducing the number of times that cognitively impaired students acted out sexually, Butler and Fontenelle (1995) utilized a group approach. They placed thirty of these students into one of three groups: sexual intervention, behavioral intervention, or no intervention. All of the interventions used in the treatment groups were based on a cognitive behavioral model that incorporated behavioral rehearsal, practice, and modeling of socially appropriate behavior. However, the sexual intervention group was more direct in addressing the sexually inappropriate behaviors by defining them, discussing the reason for targeting the behaviors and encouraging the students to discuss their feelings about sexual matters. In addition, sexually appropriate behaviors were modeled and practiced.

The effectiveness of the groups were measured by using a pre- and post-test in which the treatment facility staff observed the students and recorded any sexually acting out behaviors. The group means for the pre and post test showed a difference score of 14.2 for the sexual intervention group, .7 for the behavioral group, and -4.3 for the non-treatment control group. The positive score represents a decrease in the number of sexually acting out behaviors, while the negative score represents an increase in the number of sexually acting out behaviors. The Newman-Keuls post-hoc test utilized the mean and standard deviation data for the pre- and post-test scores to compute any significant differences among the three different treatment groups. Analysis revealed that the sexual intervention group showed significant improvement when compared with the other two groups.

A limitation of the study is that the study did not measure the long term effects of the group by doing a follow-up observation six months to a year following the completion of the group experience. Another possible weakness of the study was the length of the observational periods. Two months of recording sexually inappropriate behaviors allowed for many inconsistencies in the observational records of the staff. Nevertheless, Butler and Fontenelle (1995) suggested that the improved behaviors of the sexual intervention group may be attributed to the direct emphasis placed on the specific target behavior to be modified. Regardless of the reason, counselors can take this direct approach and adapt it to those clients who demonstrate inappropriate behaviors.

Learning disabled students. Kish (1991) proposed that learning disabled students could benefit from group counseling for several reasons. Learning disabled students are more likely to have poor interpersonal skills and antisocial

behaviors because of their perceptual difficulties. Group counseling gives students the opportunity to practice relating to others. According to Foss and Needham (1989, as cited in Kish, 1991), high school students with learning disabilities often have goals that are in conflict with the students' motivation and skill level. Group counseling can help students develop more realistic goals using rational-emotive therapy. After setting their goals, group counseling can assist students in attaining their individual goals through the use of role playing and rehearsal. Finally, the social perceptual deficits of learning disabled students is a result of their failure to recognize the cause and effect relationship between their own behavior and the responses of others. Group counseling provides a safe and protective environment for adolescents to receive feedback from other members of the group as a way to "check out" their perceptions before testing them in the real world.

Socially ineffectual students. Some students with special needs are socially ineffectual. Group counseling has shown to be effective in working with socially ineffectual students. Shectman and Bar-El (1994) conducted a study in which 211 students received either group guidance, group guidance and group counseling, or no treatment. The small group counseling was based on the developmental model that incorporated the basic therapeutic elements of small group therapy, such as group cohesion, catharsis, interpersonal learning, and altruism.

A social acceptance scale and the Coppersmith Self-Concept Inventory were administered as a pre-test and post-test. The results indicated that students who received group guidance and group counseling demonstrated a greater increase in peer acceptability, social interaction, and self-esteem than students who

received solely group guidance or no treatment. The success of group counseling may be attributed to the strong group cohesiveness and intimate relationships that small groups facilitate.

Although the results of this study may motivate high school counselors to initiate groups with socially ineffectual students, several limitations of the study should be noted. The progress made by the control group on the self-concept measure suggests the presence of some uncontrolled variables in the study. Counselors should also recognize that this study was performed in Israel and therefore, students in U. S. schools may not respond in the same manner.

General guidelines. The results of the literature indicates that group counseling is beneficial when working with special segments of the special education populations. To ensure that the group experience is productive for everyone involved, Hagborg (1991) offered a number of suggestions. First of all, group counseling should be voluntary. Second, groups should be composed of students from both the special education and regular education programs. Groups should be limited to four to six members. A final suggestion is to establish and discuss with group members the few group rules at the beginning of the first few sessions. The consequences of rule violations, such as being sent back to class for teasing other participants, should be explained and then enforced. Gifted Students

Gifted high school students represent a different part of the student body who also have special needs and can be served through group counseling. Humes and Clark (1989) conducted a study to determine if increases in self-acceptance, personal adjustment, and social adjustment among gifted adolescents were related to one of three group counseling and consultation programs. In one of the



programs, the gifted adolescents were in group counseling, the second program engaged their parents in consultation, and the third program combined the counseling and consultation.

The 89 participants were 9th and 10th grade gifted male and female students who had achieved IQ scores of at least 130. The participants were assigned randomly to one of four treatment groups, which included the three programs and a control group. For the control group, participants were placed in the traditional school guidance program. The topics covered in the weekly one hour sessions included: awareness of the self-awareness wheel, self-acceptance, awareness and acceptance of others, effective listening, "I count" messages, styles of communication, roadblocks to communication, small group communication, and large group communication. The students participated in twelve group sessions and parents met in parent consultation groups for six and a half hours. To evaluate the different programs, part of the California Psychological Inventory, parts of the Adjective Checklist, and a writing sample were used as both pre-tests and post-tests.

The results of the study indicate that group counseling of students or consultation with parents was more effective than both counseling and parent consultation. Humes and Clark (1989) suggested that a possible weakness of the study was the use of a custom-designed writing sample that lacked any index of interrater reliability. The implications of this study for high school counselors is that it may be advantageous to work directly with students or with parents, but not with both in simultaneous groups. By limiting oneself to either group counseling or parent consultation, more students can be positively affected in the same amount of time, resulting in a more efficient use of a counselor's valuable time.

The results of this study may also suggest to the high school counselor that a student can be served indirectly by working with his or her parents. This option is enhanced by the typically active involvement of the parents of gifted adolescents in the lives of their offspring (Dettman & Colangelo, 1980, as cited in Humes & Clark, 1989).

### Participants With a Common Experience

#### Death of a Loved One

While some students experience the love and support of parents who are interested in their lives, there are other high school students who have experienced the death of a parent. These students often lack the support they need for two reasons. First, their friends have difficulty understanding their pain because they lack a similar experience. Second, their parents, who are dealing with their own loss, are unable to give them the emotional support that they need. A group for these students provides the participants with support from peers with a similar experience.

Moore and Herlihy (1993) described a six-session grief group for students who have had a parent die. In the first session, each student is asked to share the facts of the parent death, telling who died, how it happened, and any other details of the events surrounding the death. The purpose of the second session is to help students become aware of their initial feelings after the death and their current feelings and to realize that they are progressing through the grieving process. This is accomplished with a mini-lesson on the work of Kubler-Ross (1969, as cited in Moore & Herlihy, 1993) and other theorists. Their parents' funerals, what happened upon return to school, and their dreams are the topics for discussion during the third session. Session four focuses on changes in the family structure,

such as parental dating. During the fifth session, the focus shifts to family rituals, such as going to the cemetery and holiday activities. The final session is a time for summing up and achieving closure.

Even though Moore and Herlihy (1993) facilitated these grief groups on an annual basis since 1985, they never gathered any statistical data to support the effectiveness of the group experience. However, based on their numerous observations and informal feedback from the students, they did suggest that the group experience was beneficial to the students involved. Moore and Herlihy (1993) also presented the following suggestions for high school counselors interested in facilitating a similar group: limit the group size to six to eight members, send permission letters home, and incorporate humor when possible.

While some high school students need help adjusting to the death of a parent, other students need help adjusting to the death of a friend. Saffer (1986) described a time-limited, specifically focused therapy group for students who were friends with a boy who committed suicide. Although the group only met three times, the participants went through some significant stages. To begin with, they discussed their shock and their discomfort of not having a cognitive grasp of what happened. During the next session, feelings of anger were expressed when discussing the reasons for the youngster's suicide. They also felt considerable guilt and were put at ease as they learned that they did not have the power to cause or prevent a suicide. Finally at the last session, they shifted from a cognitive perspective to an emotional perspective. Although there was no research component to support the positive effects this group had on others, the members were able to express and deal with their emotions while gaining support from fellow classmates.

## Divorce

Just as students express anger over the suicide of a friend, students who experience a parental divorce or a change in family structure express anger. Wallerstein and Kelly (1974, as cited in Coffman & Roark, 1992) identified intense anger as the predominant emotional response of the adolescent to marital rupture. To determine if the expression of anger of students of divorced parents in grades 10, 11, and 12 could be modified through the intervention of group counseling session, Coffman and Roark (1992) conducted a study. From a list of students interested in group counseling, 28 students were randomly assigned to one of four groups. Three of the groups received the same treatment but under different leadership and met two times per week for six weeks. The fourth group was the control group who did not receive treatment.

The Spielberger Anger Expression Scale was administered to all members of the support groups both before and after treatment. The results indicate that there were no significant differences in the expression of anger among the three treatment groups. In addition, upon completion of the group experience, there were no significant changes in how often anger was aroused or expressed in the participants. However, group attendance was nearly perfect, indicating the enthusiasm of the participants. Coffman and Roark (1992) suggested that counseling groups with students ideally should last longer than 12 weeks to ensure any significant changes.

The Coffman questionnaire was administered to all the participants prior to treatment. It elicited responses concerning gender, school records, individual behaviors, family information, and family structure. The results revealed

significant differences between children of intact families and reconstituted families regarding children's grade point averages and involvement in extra-curricular activities.

With the results of this study in mind, high school counselors are encouraged to develop and facilitate groups that last longer than twelve weeks to ensure significant change. In addition, counselors should be aware of students from reconstituted families and provide them with academic support and help them integrate successfully with peers in extracurricular activities.

While groups for divorced children may be unsuccessful in modifying the participants' expression of anger, they can be beneficial in other ways. Omizo and Omizo (cited in Gladding, 1991) found that young adolescents who participate in divorce groups have higher self-esteem and possess a more internally-based locus of control than those who do not. Students involved in three Rainbow groups reported that they were comforted by realizing that they were not the only ones with feelings like anger, frustration, sadness, and anxiety (Berube & Berube, 1997). The Rainbow groups used in this study were structured, seven week programs consisting of coping skills training activities that included the following topics: getting in touch with feelings and thoughts, developing trust, owning problems, expressing feelings with drawing, and addressing problems with weekend visits.

#### Girls Living in Father-Custody Families

While divorce groups may be adequate for the majority of the adolescents with divorced parents, Moore and Herlihy (1994) suggested that adolescent girls living in father-custody families may need additional services. These girls face the additional adjustments of living with a parent of the opposite sex (Fry & Leahey,

1983, as cited in Moore & Herlihy, 1994) and the separation anxiety of living apart from their mothers (Warshak & Santrock, 1983, as cited in Moore & Herlihy, 1994). To address their needs, Moore and Herlihy (1994) suggested a six to eight session group that addresses a variety of related topics. The girls share their stories and explore how they fit into their families during the beginning sessions. The remaining sessions focus on their relationship with their mothers, fathers, siblings, and other adults in the family, as well as the power of bargaining. The informal feedback received from the 30 students who participated in these groups was positive. The girls felt that the group process helped them learn communication and coping skills while providing them with a safe place to express their “unique” concerns.

### Teenage Fathers

In addition to groups for high school students who have experienced the death of a loved one or a parental divorce, there are groups for teenage fathers. While teenage pregnancy is not new, the plight of the unwed teenage father has begun to gain attention (Meredith, 1985, as cited in Huey, 1987). Some of this attention is negative with teenage fathers commonly castigated by adults for their “irresponsible” behavior (Kiselica, Rotzien, & Doms, 1994). As a way to provide support and assistance for unwed teenage fathers in the school, a number of group counseling programs have been developed. The Maximizing a Life Experience (MALE) program was developed to focus on rights, responsibilities, and resources. The general goals were to help the young men understand their emotional rights and responsibilities, as well as their legal rights and responsibilities, and to learn about available resources.

The group of 8 members was facilitated by the school counselor and principal. The MALE group met once a week for 8 weeks for 1 hour sessions. Each session involved activities to meet specific objectives. An activity to focus on rights involved the presence of an attorney from the Legal Aid Society to answer the participants' questions. Responsibility was addressed when they took a field trip to Planned Parenthood to hear information on reproduction, contraception, and sexually transmitted diseases. Showing group members the beginnings of a special library section that contained books and other printed materials to teenage fathers, child rearing, and sex education introduced them to some of the resources that were available. Teaching responsible behavior through education was supported by Moyse-Steinberg (1990) who believed that educating adolescents through the use of small groups is a key component in preventing teenage pregnancies.

At the beginning and end of the program, the young men completed a test to evaluate their attitudes, values, and knowledge about human sexuality. On several of the post-test items, there was an increase in the number of positive responses. For example, there was an increase in the number of members planning to consider the possibility of pregnancy before having sexual relations. There was also a significant increase in the number of participants agreeing that the man should share the contraceptive responsibility.

Upon completion of the group, the young men completed an evaluation of the experience. The members gave the group experience an overall rating of 9.5 out of a possible 10. In a follow up study, one year later, none were married or had a second child and all were continuing to contribute toward the support of their first child. Although these results are impressive, they are limited by the

absence of a comparison group. For without a comparison group, it is hard to know whether being without a second child at a one year follow up is a result of group participation or just a normal pattern for teenage fathers.

For high school counselors interested in working with teenage fathers, this program provides three simple areas to focus on: rights, responsibilities, and resources. In addition, the success of this group experience and the increasing need to help teenage fathers should encourage school counselors to initiate the development of similar programs at their schools. For Huey (1987, p. 46) stated, “School counselors must become more active in responding to the silent cries of the forgotten half of the teenage pregnancy problem.”

#### Career/ College Planning

As seniors complete their high school experience, they begin for the first time to contemplate vast changes in their lives. This transition often breeds confusion and anxiety. Goodnough and Ripley (1997) suggested that group counseling is an excellent service modality as it provides seniors with an opportunity to process their concerns as well as learn effective strategies for coping with change. Group counseling has also proven to be more effective than individual counseling when working with freshman and sophomore university students in their career development (Smith & Evans, 1973, as cited in Bradley & Mims, 1992).

Bradley & Mims (1992) used small group counseling to facilitate the career development of students. Family systems and Adlerian ideas were used to encourage the students to make tentative college and career decisions. By



developing a genogram and looking at their birth order and the sibling dynamic, the students developed an awareness and understanding of how their family may influence their career development.

For many students, their career development plans involve some level of postsecondary training. To help students prepare for this new experience, Goodnough and Ripley (1997) implemented a program for seniors who were planning to continue their education. The seniors were placed in groups with other students who had similar post-secondary educational plans. The four group sessions include a general introduction to developmental group counseling, separation and individuation, parental expectations, dealing with the loss of “the known,” and future planning. Students involved in these groups reported that the groups helped them deal with their complex set of emotions, while providing information that assisted them in gaining a helpful, cognitive perspective.

### Specific Techniques

#### Anxiety Management Training

While groups for specific populations and for specific events are more common, there are also groups in which participants learn specific techniques. One of these techniques is anxiety management training (AMT). In this training, students are trained to relax in response to imaginary scenes which had previously been anxiety evoking. The theoretical basis for AMT is similar in principal to systematic desensitization in that anxiety is reduced through reciprocal inhibition.

A study by Streim and O'Brien (1981) investigated the relative effectiveness of group negative practice and group anxiety management training in the reduction of mathematics anxiety. Students in the negative practice group were involved in the repeated evocation of anxiety responses through the use of

imagined stimuli. Students practiced exaggerating their anxiety responses to aversive imaginal stimuli. The students in the other group received anxiety management training. Both groups met for six 45 minute sessions.

The results of the study indicate that students in the two treatment groups exhibited significantly lower self-reported anxiety on the Math Anxiety Rating Scale (Richardson & Suinn, as cited in Streim & O'Brien, 1981) than those students in the control group. The students in the treatment group also performed significantly better on the numerical abilities section of the Differential Aptitude Test (Bennett, Seashore, & Wesman, as cited in Streim & O'Brien, 1981) than the control group. The difference in scores between the two treatment groups was not statistically significant.

Math tends to be a class at the high school level that results in a great deal of math anxiety. High school counselors are encouraged to use either anxiety management training or negative training in assisting students to become more successful math students. Although the results of this study seem quite impressive, they may suggest that it was the attention received through the treatment that resulted in the changes.

### Relaxation and Meditation Techniques

Similar to anxiety management training, research results have also indicated that meditation and relaxation techniques are effective in reducing anxiety. Reynolds and Coats (cited in Laselle & Russell, 1993) found that the symptoms of anxiety and low self-esteem, often associated with depression, were successfully reduced through relaxation training. In addition, Grundy (cited in Laselle, 1993) asserted that relaxation training is one of the most effective techniques for treating anger or other severe behavior problems in adolescents.

While the research supports efficacy with adolescents, especially those with behavioral problems, Laselle and Russell (1993) conducted a survey to determine the extent in which meditation and relaxation techniques are being used by secondary school counselors as a group counseling component. Examples of meditation and relaxation techniques include biofeedback, imagery, progressive relaxation, visualization, self-hypnosis, and yoga. According to the counselors' responses to the survey, 74 percent did not incorporate relaxation and meditation techniques into their counseling sessions dealing with adolescent behavior problems. In addition, 63 percent of the counselors did not practice relaxation and meditations techniques on their own. These results suggested that meditation and relaxation techniques were not widely used by school counselors.

Since every high school has students with some degree of behavioral problems, counselors need to reconsider the use of relaxation and meditation techniques in working with these students. Rather than continually using the "lack of time" excuse, Laselle (1993) recommended that counselors continue to change their roles, enhance their counseling skills, and keep abreast of counseling research to provide for the emotional and psychological needs of their students.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, there are a wide variety of groups that have been developed and offered to high school students. The described groups fell into one of three categories. Groups formed for specific populations was the first category discussed. This included groups for at-risk students, black female adolescents, students with special needs, and gifted students. The second category included groups for students that had experienced or were experiencing a common event. Death, divorce, unique living arrangements, fatherhood, and post high school

transitions represent the events for which these groups were formed. The final category included groups in which the special techniques of anxiety management training and meditation and relaxation were taught.

The results from the formal research studies presented in this paper suggest that there are groups that are effective and others that are not effective. The research results indicate that anxiety management training, as well as groups for gifted and black female students and socially ineffectual are effective. Groups for at-risk students and children of divorced parents have shown mixed results. While an “isolated” at-risk group was ineffective, groups that are facilitated by both a counselor and consultant, focus on self-esteem, and integrate at-risk students and non-identified students seemed to have more promising outcomes. The divorce groups that aimed at reducing student anger were unsuccessful in achieving this goal. On the other hand, selected young adolescents who participated in divorce groups had higher self-esteem and possessed a more internally-based locus of control.

There are other groups that lack statistical data to support them, but authors have reported developing them and using them successfully with high school students. While special education students can benefit from a group experience, these groups need to be limited in size, very structured, and include both regular and special education students. Established groups for cognitively impaired students that sexually act out and learning disabled students have reported positive outcomes for the participants. Groups for teenage fathers can help participants understand their emotional and legal rights and responsibilities and learn about available resources. For students who have lost a parent or a friend to death or for girls living in father custody families, groups can provide a

source of support as students process the event and their feelings. Groups for high school seniors give the participants an opportunity to cope with the mixed emotions associated with the upcoming change and assist in their decision making process. When working with groups of adolescents who have behavior problems, an increased use of relaxation and meditation techniques may be helpful. All of these group experiences provide ideas and suggestions for counselors to use and adapt in their work with high school students.

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