AN ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION OF

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Title: A Literature Review and Qualitative Exploration of Adolescent School Counseling Groups.

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Deborah J. Rubel

The purpose of this dissertation was to increase understanding of adolescent school counseling groups including a literature review of the quantitative outcome research on group work with adolescents in the schools and a qualitative exploration of the adolescent experience of cohesion in rural school counseling groups. Outcome research on group work with adolescents in the schools points to the effectiveness of these groups across topics, group structures, diverse populations, and outcome areas, including academic, personal/social, and career development. In order to understand the adolescent experience of cohesion in school counseling groups, the researcher used a qualitative grounded theory methodology to give voice to the experiences of seven adolescent research participants who had been group members in middle or high school counseling groups. Participants were individually interviewed three times and all interviews were recorded, transcribed and analyzed. Analysis generated the central category of the cohesion process as "*sticking together,*" which describes a "tight bond" which includes both internal and relational contexts including *feeling close to the group* and *making friends. Feelings of belonging, positive feelings, open social interactions,*

and *lasting connections* further characterize the cohesion process as experienced by adolescent participants. This study provides a qualitative, descriptive view of how adolescents experience cohesion in school counseling groups in rural areas. These finding are applicable to school counselors and group workers who counsel adolescents along with counselor educators and supervisors.

A Literature Review and Qualitative Exploration of
Adolescent School Counseling Groups

by
Tara M. Gray

A DISSERTATION

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APPROVED:

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Major Professor, representing Counseling

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Dean of the College of Education

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Dean of the Graduate School

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Tara M. Gray, Author

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Chapter 1: General Introduction

Dissertation Overview

The purpose of this dissertation was to demonstrate scholarly work by using the *manuscript document dissertation format* as outlined by the Oregon State University Graduate School. In following this format, Chapter 1 provides an overview and background for the topic of group work with adolescents in the schools and describes the journal-formatted manuscripts found in chapters 2 and 3, which are thematically tied. Chapter 2 is an article titled *A Review of the Literature on Quantitative Outcome Research on Group Work with Adolescents in the Schools.* Chapter 3 is an article titled *"Sticking Together": The Adolescent Experience of Cohesion in Rural School Counseling Groups* and provides a detailed qualitative exploration of the adolescent experience of cohesion in school counseling groups in rural areas. Both of these manuscripts focus on group work with adolescents in the schools. Moreover, the manuscripts provide an integrative review of the literature related to group work with adolescents in the schools, including a review of quantitative outcome research on group work with adolescents in the schools and a grounded theory exploration of the adolescent experience of cohesion in school counseling groups.

The first scholarly manuscript of this dissertation (Chapter 2) is a literature review on the quantitative outcome research on group work with adolescents in the schools in the decade from 2003-2012. This manuscript provides a literature review on group work with adolescents in the schools which outlines the call for manuscripts focusing on research issues in group work, group work literature reviews, outcome research on group work with understudied groups, such as adolescents, and outcome research on school

counseling. While defining group work and adolescence, this manuscript discusses the efficacy of group work with adolescents and the efficacy of group work with adolescents in the schools, where group work is a natural part of the school system and an important part of the American School Counselor Association National Model and the New Vision for School Counselors as outlined by the Education Trust National Center for Transforming School Counseling. Additionally, this manuscript characterizes and summarizes the current quantitative outcome research on group work with adolescents in the schools in the areas of group type, group topic, group participants, group leadership, group size, number of group sessions, length of group sessions, research design, sample size, data measurement, and quantitative research outcomes.

The second manuscript (Chapter 3) presents a detailed description regarding how adolescents experience cohesion in school counseling groups. The purpose of this article is to give voice to the adolescent experience of group cohesion in school counseling groups and address the marginalization of adolescent voices in group process and school counseling research. Using a qualitative grounded theory methodology, twenty individual interviews with seven adolescent research participants, who had experienced group cohesion in middle school and high school counseling groups in rural areas, generated a grounded theory titled *"Sticking Together": The Adolescent Experience of Cohesion in Rural School Counseling Groups.* "Sticking together," the central category of the grounded theory, describes a "tight bond" which includes both internal and relational contexts including *feeling close to the group* and *making friends. Feelings of belonging, positive feelings, open social interactions* and *lasting connections* further characterize the cohesion process as experienced by adolescent participants. Participants

also highlighted the importance of group structure and group process as salient context in their experienced of group cohesion. This manuscript provides a qualitative, descriptive view of how adolescents experience cohesion in school counseling groups in rural areas. Implications for school counselors and counselor educators and future research are discussed.

Thematic Introduction

This dissertation resulted in the creation of two scholarly manuscripts which both explore the topic of adolescents in school counseling groups and address gaps in the literature in regards to group process and school counseling research with adolescents. The first manuscript is a literature review on the quantitative outcome research on group work with adolescents in the schools published in the last decade. The second manuscript includes qualitative, grounded theory research on the adolescent experience of cohesion in school counseling groups. In this study, adolescents are defined as ranging in chronological age from approximately 12 to 18 years old and adolescence refers to the period of human development from puberty to young adulthood, in which biological, cognitive, and psychosocial development differentiates adolescents from children and adults. The rationale for studying group counseling with adolescents in the schools is a direct response to calls for research on group work with understudied populations, calls for research on school counseling, and calls for research on adolescents' perspectives on group therapeutic process variables, such as cohesion.

Importance of Group Work with Adolescents in the Schools
to the Counseling Profession

The majority of group work with adolescents takes place in the schools (Hoag & Burlingame, 1997; Kulic, Horne, Dagley, 2004) and research demonstrates the effectiveness of these adolescent groups in supporting positive student development (Akos & Milsom 2007; Aronson & Scheidlinger, 2002; Coleman, 2011; Garrity & DeLucia-Waack, 2007; Gladding, 2012; Greenberg, 2003; Malekoff, 2004; Riva & Haub, 2004; Shechtman, 2004; Stewart & Christner, 2007; Whiston & Sexton, 1998; Whiston & Quinby, 2009). Additionally, group work with adolescents in the schools provides efficiency and effectiveness in serving both the prevention and intervention needs of adolescents (Akos, Hamm, Mack, & Dunaway, 2007; Akos & Milsom, 2007; Carrell, 2010; Gladding, 1999; Newsome & Gladding, 2007; Paisley & Milsom, 2007; Riva & Haub, 2004; Stewart & Christner, 2007; Whiston & Sexton, 1998) while delivering the American School Counselor Association National Model (2005; 2008) and the New Vision for School Counselors (Education Trust National Center for Transforming School Counseling, 2013). Counselors and other mental health professionals across disciplines serve adolescents through group work. Understanding the vast array of quantitative outcomes in group work with adolescents in the schools and describing the adolescent experience of cohesion in school counseling groups will facilitate the practice, supervision and training of school counselors leading school counseling groups with adolescents in middle schools and high schools.

Supervision and Training

More research on group work with adolescents will facilitate the supervision and training of counseling, school counseling and other mental health professionals and thus facilitate efficacious outcomes in working with the adolescent population. The

Association for Specialists in Group Work (ASGW) recommends a two semester course

sequence in the training of counselors for group work (ASGW, 2000). However, training

counselors for group work with adolescents (Riva & Haub, 2004) and training counselors

for group work in the schools has been limited (Akos, Goodnough, & Milsom, 2004;

Steen, Bauman, & Smith, 2008). Additionally, according to the American School

Counseling Association (ASCA, 2008) position statement on the Professional School

Counselor and Group Counseling, "group counseling should be offered to all students in

a PK-12 setting." Therefore, it is essential that counselors and school counselors in

particular, have the necessary training and supervision in group work with adolescents to

facilitate efficacious treatment with this population.

Literature Review

The first manuscript, a literature review, characterizes and summarizes the current

quantitative outcome research on group work with adolescents in the schools published in

the decade from 2003-2012. The term group work refers to the "broad field of helping

people in groups" (Ward, 2010, p. 48) and is defined by the Association for Specialists in

Group Work (ASGW) as:

> a broad professional practice involving the application of knowledge and
> skill in group facilitation to assist an interdependent collection of people to
> reach their mutual goals which may be intrapersonal, interpersonal, or
> work-related. The goals of the group may include the accomplishment of
> tasks related to work, education, personal development, personal and
> interpersonal problem solving, or remediation of mental and emotional
> disorders. (ASGW, 2000, pp. 329-330)

This review serves to provide an answer to the following questions: (1) What

types of groups with adolescents in the schools are the subject of quantitative outcome

research? (2) In quantitative outcome research, what adolescent populations are being

served by group work in the schools? (3) What are the typical group structures, including the group leader, size of the group, and number of group sessions in outcome research with adolescent group work in the schools?   (4) What research designs have been used to evaluate quantitative outcomes of group work with adolescents in the schools? (5) What are the quantitative research outcomes of group work with adolescents in the schools? The themes and results that emerge from answering these research questions also reveal the gaps in the current literature. This review then concludes with recommendations for future research and practice in the area of adolescent group work in the schools.

Research

The developmental importance of peers for the adolescent developmental level supports the use of group work (Akos et al., 2007; Carrell, 2010; Gladding, 2012; Greenberg, 2003; Macklem, 2011). Research supports the use of group work in helping adolescents develop new personal, social, and academic skills (Akos & Milsom 2007; Aronson & Scheidlinger, 2002; Coleman, 2011; Garrity & DeLucia-Waack, 2007; Gladding, 2012; Greenberg, 2003; Malekoff, 2004; Riva & Haub, 2004; Shechtman, 2004; Stewart & Christner, 2007; Whiston & Sexton, 1998; Whiston & Quinby, 2009). While the majority of group work with adolescents takes place in the schools (Hoag & Burlingame, 1997; Kulic, Horne, & Dagley, 2004) and 87% of school counselors report conducting group work in the schools (Steen, Bauman, & Smith, 2007), more outcome research specifically on group work in the schools across populations is needed (Gerrity & DeLucia-Waack, 2007; Kalodner & Hanus, 2010; Paisley & Milsom, 2007). Researchers have specifically highlighted a need for manuscripts focusing on group work

research (McCarthy, 2012), group work literature reviews (Bauman, 2008), and group work outcome research with understudied groups (Barlow, 2010) such as adolescents.

Highlighting the Need for Exploration of How Cohesion Develops in Adolescent Counseling Groups

The second manuscript highlights the value in exploring how adolescents experience cohesion and how cohesion develops in school counseling groups. Counseling groups emphasize "personal and interpersonal problems of living and promote personal and interpersonal growth and development" among people at risk of personal or interpersonal problems (ASGW, 2000, p. 330). While group work with adolescents is highly prevalent in the schools, research on these groups is limited. Researchers have noted a lack of knowledge of adolescents' perspectives on group work therapeutic process variables, including cohesion (Chase & Kelly, 1993; Delucia-Waack, 2000; Diamond, Liddle, Hogue, & Dakof, 1999; Riva & Haub, 2004; Shechtman, 2004; Shirk & Karver, 2003). Group cohesion or "the value attached to one's sense of belongingness in group" (Chase & Kelly, 1993, p. 159) is a necessary precondition for effective group work (Yalom, 1995). Specifically, researchers have noted the importance of developing conceptualizations of how group therapeutic factors, such as cohesion, develop over time (Kivlighan, Miles, & Paquin, 2010) and highlight the need for collecting group member perceptions of cohesion (Marmarosh & Van Horn, 2010). Rubel & Okech (2010) recommend grounded theory research to investigate how adolescent groups develop. Therefore, the Chapter 3 qualitative grounded theory study, served to address the outlined research gaps and the marginalization of adolescents in group process research.

Rationale

The majority of group dynamics research has been based on adults and it is important to understand quantitative outcome research on adolescent group work in the schools and to understand group process with adolescents due to their unique developmental level (DeLucia-Waack, 2000). While researchers have called for sound research in school counseling with adolescent students (Whiston, Tai, Rahardja, & Eder, 2011), no one has responded by researching how adolescents experience group cohesion in school counseling groups. These manuscripts (Chapters 1 and 2) converge on the importance of addressing research gaps on group work and school counseling with adolescents. Through characterizing and summarizing the outcome research on group work with adolescents in the schools and then exploring the experiences of adolescents with group cohesion in school counseling groups, a deeper understanding of group work with adolescents in the schools will emerge and provide valuable voice from adolescents for use by counselors, supervisors and counselor educators to better serve our schools' adolescent populations.

Chapter 2

A Review of the Literature on
Quantitative Outcome Research on
Group Work with Adolescents in the Schools

Tara M. Gray
Oregon State University
Deborah J. Rubel, Ph.D.
Oregon State University

Abstract

The purpose of this review was to characterize and summarize the current quantitative outcome research on group work with adolescents in the schools. This review addressed both a call for group work literature reviews and outcome research on group work in the schools with understudied populations, such as adolescents. The review focused on 30 quantitative research outcome studies of group work with adolescents in the schools published in the decade from 2003-2012. Results include descriptions of the studied groups with information for each research study on the type of group, group topic, group participants, group leadership, size of the group, number of group sessions, and session length. Results also include descriptions of the research design, sample size, data measurement, and quantitative research outcomes for each research study. This review of the quantitative outcome research on group work with adolescents in the schools points to the effectiveness of group work with diverse populations of adolescents across group topics, structures and outcome areas. Implications for school counselors and future research are discussed.

Introduction

This review of the literature, consistent with the American Psychological Association's description of a literature review (APA, 2010, p. 10), intends to "inform the reader of the state of research" on quantitative outcome research on group work in the schools with a focus on the adolescent population. This review addresses calls for manuscripts focusing on research issues in group work (McCarthy, 2012), group work literature reviews (Bauman, 2008), outcome research on group work with understudied groups (Barlow, 2010) such as adolescents, and specifically outcome research on group work in the schools across populations (Gerrity & DeLucia-Waack, 2007). Group work has been shown to be very effective and appropriate for adolescents in general and specifically in schools, however, there has also been a call for more outcome research on group work with adolescents in the schools. This review includes 30 publications from the decade 2003-2012.

The term group work refers to the "broad field of helping people in groups" (Ward, 2010, p. 48) and is defined by the Association for Specialists in Group Work (ASGW) as:

> a broad professional practice involving the application of knowledge and skill in group facilitation to assist an interdependent collection of people to reach their mutual goals which may be intrapersonal, interpersonal, or work-related. The goals of the group may include the accomplishment of tasks related to work, education, personal development, personal and interpersonal problem solving, or remediation of mental and emotional disorders. (ASGW, 2000, pp. 329-330)

While groups are a natural part of life (Greenberg, 2003), from a developmental perspective, groups are particularly salient for the adolescent population, a population unique from adults and children (Erikson, 1968; Piaget & Inhelder, 1969; Shechtman,

2004; Yalom & Leszcz, 2005). Adolescence refers to the period of human development from puberty to young adulthood (Jackson & Goossens, 2006) and ranges in chronological age from approximately 10 to 18 years old. During adolescence, significant biological, cognitive, and psychosocial development occurs (Broderick & Blewitt, 2006; Lerner & Steinberg, 2009; Paus, 2009; Susman & Dorn, 2009). Additionally, the cognition of the adolescent is unique from that of children or adults (Kesek, Zelaro, & Lewis, 2009; Kuhn, 2009).

The search for identity is considered the primary developmental task for adolescents (Broderick & Blewitt, 2006; Erikson, 1968). While building social relationships is a normal and important part of adolescent development, peer relationships also become more salient and complex in this developmental stage of life (Brown & Larson, 2009). Helping adolescents to feel a part of a social group is important in facilitating adolescent development (Broderick & Blewitt, 2006). Empirical evidence indicates that the adolescent peer group serves a crucial role in the promotion of self-esteem, a sense of identity and psychosocial development (Aronson & Scheidlinger, 2002).

Due to the developmental needs of adolescents, group work is an appropriate intervention format (Gladding, 2012, p. 272; Macklem, 2011). Group work emphasizes the social support of the group through member interactions, feedback, and participation to facilitate therapeutic factors, such as altruism, universality, cohesion, installation of hope, imitative behavior, imparting information and in stimulating social and interpersonal learning (Yalom, 1995). These "therapeutic or curative factors that promote positive change in groups parallel the developmental themes that appear in early

adolescence (Akos, Hamm, Mack, & Dunaway, 2007, p. 56). The developmental importance of peers for the adolescent developmental level supports the use of group work (Akos et al., 2007; Carrell, 2010; Gladding, 2012; Greenberg, 2003; Macklem, 2011). Through group work, adolescents can learn important ways of coping and dealing with life stressors (Akos, Goodnough, & Milsom, 2004; Akos & Milsom, 2007; Coleman, 2011; Gladding, 2012; Malekoff, 2004). Group work provides a context for sharing experiences, learning that others have similar problems, and universality (Gladding, 2012; Greenberg, 2003). Group work also provides an important avenue for adolescents to receive peer feedback and support (Akos & Milsom, 2007; Greenberg, 2003). Groups can provide an opportunity for adolescents to observe, learn and practice new skills in a safe environment, reduce isolation, marginalization, and give and receive help and feedback.

While groups are developmentally appropriate for facilitating positive changes in adolescents and research supports the effectiveness of group work with adolescents (Garrity & DeLucia-Waack, 2007; Gladding, 2012; Greenberg, 2003; Riva & Haub, 2004; Shechtman, 2004; Stewart & Christner, 2007) , the design and implementation of groups for adolescents must consider their developmental level (DeLucia-Waack, 2006; Yalom & Leszcz, 2005). Specifically, groups have been effective for helping adolescents develop new social and academic skills (DeLucia-Waack, 2006; Gladding, 2012). Shechtman (2007) and Aronson & Scheidlinger (2002) consider group work the preferred method of work with adolescents. Tillitski (1990) reported that group interventions have consistently better outcomes than individual interventions with adolescents.

Given these recommendations for group work with adolescents, schools are a common setting for providing group work with adolescents. Group work is a natural part of the school system (Akos & Milsom, 2007; Conyne & Mazza, 2007; Kalodner & Hanus, 2010). Group work aligns with the missions and goals of schools in regards to cooperative learning groups & practicing new social skills (Carrell, 2010; Greenberg, 2003), while also aligning with the ASCA National Model (2005) and the New Vision for School Counselors (Education Trust National Center for Transforming School Counseling, 2013). According to the ASCA (2008) position statement on the Professional School Counselor and Group Counseling, "group counseling should be offered to all students in a PK-12 setting." Schools provide a familiar environment for adolescents to participate in groups, thus reducing barriers to accessing and participating in services. Therefore, group work in the schools provides services to adolescents who may otherwise not receive services (Kalodner & Hanus, 2010).

Thus, it is not surprising that the majority of group work with adolescents takes place in the school setting. In an online survey of 802 American School Counseling Association members, 87% of the school counselors reported conducting groups in their schools (Steen, Bauman, & Smith, 2007). Also, almost 80% of studies in a review of prevention groups for children and adolescents occurred in the school setting (Kulic, Horne, & Dagley, 2004), while almost 74% of groups reviewed in a meta-analysis of group work efficacy studies took place in schools (Hoag & Burlingame, 1997). Reese et al., (2010) also reported that in a meta-analysis of 65 school-based counseling dissertations, most of the interventions were provided in a group format. Group work with adolescents provides the efficiency and effectiveness (Stewart & Christner, 2007)

necessary for school counseling (Akos et al., 2007; Akos & Milsom, 2007; Paisley &

Milsom, 2007; Riva & Haub, 2004; Whiston & Sexton, 1998). Group work helps school

counselors serve both the prevention and intervention (Carrell, 2010) needs of

adolescents (Paisley & Milsom, 2007), while delivering the ASCA (2005; 2008)

National Model.

While research demonstrates the effectiveness of school counseling services

(Reese, Prout, Zirkelback, & Anderson, 2010), especially services provided to adolescent

populations (Baskin, Slaten, Crosby, Pufahl, Schneller, & Ladell, 2010), more outcome

research specifically on group work in the schools is needed (Paisley & Milsom, 2007)

to aid school counselors in selecting and advocating for effective group work

interventions. While there is a strong need for empirical outcome research in the field of

school counseling (Falco, Bauman, Sumnicht, & Engelstad, 2011; McGannon, Carey, &

Dimmitt, 2005; Whiston & Sexton, 1998), in particular with interventions with

adolescents (Whiston, Tai, Rahardja, & Eder, 2011), it is necessary to assess the efficacy

of group interventions in the schools (Gerrity & DeLucia-Waack, 2007; Kalodner &

Hanus, 2010).   Additionally, the ASGW Best Practice Guidelines (2008, p. 117), also

call for group workers to evaluate outcomes for "ongoing program planning,

improvement and revision of current group and/or to contribute to professional research

literature." In a review of school counseling outcome research, Whiston and Quinby

(2009) concluded that group counseling can be effective with students who are

experiencing problems.

Specifically, while the efficacy of group work with adolescents in the schools has

been documented (Akos et al., 2007; Gerrity & DeLucia-Waack, 2007; Whiston &

Sexton, 1998), more empirical research is needed on the effectiveness of group work in

schools across populations (Gerrity & DeLucia-Waack, 2007). School counseling

research and empirical support for school counseling services, such as group work with

adolescents, is salient and needed in order to identify best practices and demonstrate the

impact of school counseling on student outcomes (Falco, Bauman, Sumnicht, &

Engelstad, 2011). Additionally, outcome research in schools is salient for the ASCA

national model (2005), the New Vision for School Counselors (Education Trust National

Center for Transforming School Counseling, 2013), and for advocating for group work in

schools with administrators, teachers, parents and students . Outcome research on group

work with adolescents in the schools will facilitate the professional school counselor in

designing and implementing effective groups for adolescents in the schools.

  Therefore, it is important to understand the current literature on quantitative

research outcomes on group work with adolescents in the schools to help guide and

inform future research and practice in this area. The purpose of this review is to

characterize and summarize the current quantitative outcome research on group work

with adolescents in the schools. The research questions for this review include: (1) What

types of groups with adolescents in the schools are the subject of quantitative outcome

research? (2) In quantitative outcome research, what adolescent populations are being

served by group work in the schools? (3) What are the typical group structures, including

the group leader, size of the group, number of group sessions, and length of group

sessions in outcome research with adolescent group work in the schools? (4) What

research designs have been used to evaluate quantitative outcomes of group work with

adolescents in the schools? (5) What are the quantitative research outcomes of group

work with adolescents in the schools?

Method and Literature Search

This review focuses on quantitative research outcomes of group work with

adolescents in the schools published in the decade from 2003-2012. In limiting the focus

to quantitative outcome research, the researcher included only studies that assessed or

evaluated the outcomes of the group. Also the study must have included quantitative

methodology and results or program evaluation and results. Thus studies that were

primarily group practice descriptions with exploratory and pilot data were excluded from

this review. Additionally, this review excluded group work studies that included both

children and adolescents and limited the research and group population to adolescents

from approximately ages 10-18 and approximately grades 5-12. Additionally the group

intervention must have taken place at school during the school day. In order to find all of

the articles for this review, searches were conducted in APA PsycNet and ERIC

databases for the years 2003-2012, using the following search terms: *group, group work,*

group psychoeducation, group intervention, group treatment, group counseling, group

therapy, group psychotherapy, adolescent, youth, teen, school children, school, school

based intervention, middle school, high school, school counseling, efficacy, outcome and

research. Additionally, extensive manual searches of the reference sections of books and

articles were also conducted.   This search resulted in 30 studies that met the stated

inclusion criteria.   These articles were then read and information was placed into two

tables related to the research questions. The first table included descriptions of the

studied groups with information for each article on the type of group, group topic, group

participants, group leadership, size of the group, number of group sessions, and session length. The second table included descriptions of the research design, sample size, data measurement, and quantitative research outcomes. If the information was not included in the research article, an "n/a" was placed in the table. After filling in the tables with the information from each research article, the researchers reviewed the information to identify trends and answer the research questions. The final step included writing a summary of current trends in quantitative outcome research on group work with adolescents in the schools.

<div align="center">**Results and Themes**</div>

What types of groups with adolescents in the schools are the subject of quantitative outcome research?

This literature review of quantitative outcome research on group work with adolescents in the schools serves to provide an answer to the question of what types of groups and group topics are being researched (Table 1). The Association for Specialists in Group Work divides the types of groups into categories of task and work groups, psychoeducation groups, counseling groups, and psychotherapy groups (ASGW, 2000). Based on the ASGW definitions of group types and the research article's definition or descriptions of the type of group researched, the types of groups with adolescents in the schools that have been researched for quantitative outcomes in the last decade include primarily psychoeducation (4 studies) and counseling groups (25 studies). Only one outcome study in this review involved group psychotherapy, with Bosnian adolescents with war-related trauma and bereavement (Layne, Saltzman, Poppleton, Burlingame, Pasalic, Durakovic, Music, Campara, Dapo, Arslanagic, Steinberg, & Pynoos, 2008).

Given that group psychotherapy is designed for "people experiencing severe and/or chronic maladjustment" (ASGW, 2000, p.331), it makes sense that the majority of the outcome research studies on group work with adolescents in the schools were defined as psychoeducation groups designed for "people who may be at risk for the development of personal or interpersonal problems or who seek enhancement of personal qualities and abilities" (ASGW, 2000, p. 331) or counseling groups designed for people "who may be experiencing transitory maladjustment, who are at risk for the development of personal or interpersonal problems, or who seek enhancement of personal qualities and abilities" (ASGW, 2000, p. 331).

The topics of these groups is also important and Table 1 indicates that as described by the researcher and consistent with the division of the American School Counselor Association National Model and Standards (ASCA, 2005), this review of outcome research on adolescent group work in the schools indicates that the groups range in topic from academic to personal/social to career development. Personal/social topics were addressed in 29 of the 30 outcome research studies while academic topics were addressed in 10 studies and career topics were addressed in 3 of the studies. Personal/social development topics included coping and problem solving skills, conflict resolution, social skills, communication skills, self-concept and self-esteem, personal strengths and resiliency, self-management and anger management, responding to bullying, cognitive skills, school behavior, depression, social anxiety, posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), war-related trauma and bereavement, diversity sensitivity, moral reasoning, disordered eating prevention, and internet addiction. Academic development topics included school achievement and student success skills such as goal setting, study

skills and coping with learning disabilities. Only one study specifically focused on career development (Jokisaari & Vuori, 2011) while two other studies included the employment and career development topic in group sessions (Harris & Franklin, 2003; Harris & Franklin, 2009). Given the importance of the career development domain (ASCA, 2005; Education Trust National Center for Transforming School Counseling, 2013), more outcome research on group work with adolescents that include the career development topic is needed. Also, missing from this review was outcome research on group work with adolescents in the schools that included the topic of substance use.

In quantitative outcome research, what adolescent populations are being served by group work in the schools?

This literature review on the last decade of quantitative outcome research on group work with adolescents in the schools aims to characterize the adolescent populations (country, rural or urban areas, region of the United States, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, gender, and grade or age) that are being served by group work in the schools given the research articles' descriptions of the adolescent group participants (Table 1). It is interesting to note that only half or 15 of the 30 studies were conducted in the United States. This points to a significant gap in the quantitative outcome research literature on group work with adolescents in the schools in the United States in the last 10 years.

This review points to the increased research on the use and effectiveness of group work with adolescents in the schools internationally with 15 of the 30 studies reviewed outside the United States in countries such as the United Kingdom (Burton, 2006; Ruttledge & Petrides, 2011; Squires & Caddick, 2012), Canada (McVey, Lieberman,

Voorberg, Wardrope, & Blackmore, 2003a; McVey, Lieberman, Voorberg, Wardrope, &

Blackmore, 2003b; Mishna & Muskat, 2004), Israel (Leichtentritt & Shechtman, 2010;

Shechtman & Tanus, 2006), China (Du, Jiang, & Vance, 2010; Shen, 2007), Finland

(Jokisaari & Vuori, 2011), Turkey (Karatas & Gokcakan, 2009), Nigeria (Egbochuke &

Aihie, 2009), Bosnia (Layne et al., 2008), and Australia (Truneckova & Viney, 2007).

The increased research of group work with adolescents in the schools internationally

parallels the growing phenomenon of group counseling internationally (McWhirter,

McWhirter, McWhirter, & McWhirter, 2010).

  Within the United States, outcome research on group work with adolescents in the

schools revealed adolescent group participants were representative of both rural (Bruce,

Getch, & Ziomek-Daigle, 2009; Hall, 2006b) and urban areas (Cook & Kaffenberger,

2003; Harris & Franklin, 2003; Harris & Franklin, 2009; Paone, Packman, Maddux, &

Rothman, 2008; Shen & Armstrong, 2008; Stein, Jaycox, Kataoka, Wong, Tu, Elliott, &

Fink, 2003; Warner, Fisher, Shrout, Rathor, & Klein, 2007). Additionally, within the

United States, outcome research on group work with adolescents in the schools

represented adolescent populations from a variety of regions. These U.S. regions

included the East (Cook & Kaffenberger, 2003; Warner et al., 2007), South (Brigman &

Campbell, 2003; Bruce et al., 2009; Campbell & Brigman, 2005; Hall, 2006; Harris &

Franklin, 2003; Harris & Franklin, 2009), Southwest (Shen & Armstrong, 2008),

Midwest (Nikels, Mims, & Mims, 2007), West (Stein et al., 2003), and Northwest (Paone

et al., 2008). Thus, outcome research on group work with adolescents in the schools

included both rural and urban populations across all regions of the country.

In this review, group participants were characterized as at-risk due to academic concerns, personal/social concerns, socioeconomic status, and minority status. Only three of the thirty studies specifically described the socioeconomic status of the adolescent group participants, which coincides with criticisms of lacking information of the basic descriptions of group participants in group research (Burlingame, Fuhriman, & Johnson, 2004). Of these three studies, adolescent group participants were described as low socioeconomic status (Stein et al., 2003) or as a percentage of participants on free or reduced lunch (Campbell & Brigman, 2005; Webb, Brigman, & Campbell, 2005). Only two studies were targeted at all students in a school (Jokisaari & Vuori, 2011; Nickels et al., 2007) and thus were not conducted with at-risk populations specifically. This points to a gap in the quantitative outcome research on group work with adolescents in regards to research on group work with populations not considered at-risk.

Given the increasing diversity of school populations and the emphasis on issues of multiculturalism in group work (ASGW, 2012), it is important to understand the populations being studied in outcome research on group work with adolescents in the schools. In characterizing the race and ethnicity of the adolescent group participants in this literature review, researchers relied on the demographic descriptions provided in the studies reviewed. Several of the researched groups included a specific racial and ethnic population, such as African American (Bruce et al., 2009; Hall, 2006; Hall, 2009) and Latino (Harris & Franklin, 2003; Harris & Franklin, 2009). Within the 15 adolescent groups researched in United States schools, 8 studies were implemented and researched with primarily racial minority adolescent group members. Four studies were on group work with all African American adolescent members or a majority of African American

adolescent members (Bruce et al., 2009; Hall, 2006; Hall, 2009; Shen & Armstrong, 2008), four studies were on group work with all Latino/a adolescent members or a majority of Latino/a adolescent members (Harris & Franklin, 2003; Harris & Franklin, 2009; Paone et al., 2008; Stein et al., 2003), and one study failed to provide the racial demographic data of the group participants. Failure to provide basic information, such as ethnicity, on group participants has been previously noted in the literature (Burlingame et al., 2004). The other 6 studies on adolescent group work in the schools in the United States were on groups with a majority of Caucasian participants, ranging from 66%-87% Caucasian adolescent participants, and 13%-34% minority adolescent participants.

Noticeably absent in this review of quantitative outcome research on group work with adolescents in the schools are the U.S. racial minority populations of Asian American/Pacific Islander, Native America, and Intercultural group adolescents, which is consistent with gaps in empirically supported group research for U.S. racial minority groups in general (Stark-Rose, Livingston-Sacin, Merchant, & Finley, 2012).   It is unclear if there is an actual gap in group work with these populations or a deficit in published quantitative outcome research on group work with these populations or a combination of both. Given the diversity of school populations and best practice guidelines (ACA, 2005; ASGW, 2008; ASGW 2012), more research on quantitative outcomes on group work with adolescents in the schools should include adolescents of minority populations, such as Asian American/Pacific Islander, Native American, and Intercultural group adolescents.

In terms of gender, the majority, 24 of the 30 studies' group participants included both males and females together. However, one study involved an all-male group (Hall,

Rushing, & Owens, 2009) focused on anger management and five studies involved all-female groups focused on parenting (Harris & Franklin, 2003; Harris & Franklin, 2009), disordered eating prevention (McVey et al., 2003a; McVey et al., 2003b), and self-esteem (Shen & Armstrong, 2008). In exploring group work outcomes with adolescents in the school, future researchers may consider the implications of gender differences with outcomes, as previous literature has pointed to this possibility (Witherspoon & Richardson, 2006).

Adolescent group participants varied in age by research study, but ranged from students in 5th grade through 12th grade (Table 1). Some studies provided the ages of group participants with a range and mean or median age along with the grade level of adolescent group participants but almost a third of the studies, or 9 of the 30 studies, failed to provide critical demographic information on the age of the group participants. Give that the chronological age of students varies within grade level, future research on the quantitative outcomes of adolescent group work in the schools should include specific data on the age of the adolescent group participants (Burlingame et al., 2004).

What are the typical group structures, including the group leader, size of the group, number of group sessions, and length of group sessions in outcome research with adolescent group work in the schools?

In characterizing the quantitative outcome research on group work with adolescents in the schools, detailed information on the basics of the group, such as the group leader, the size of the group, number of group sessions, and length of group sessions (Table 1) are all important in describing the typical group structures and making interpretations and replications of research and practice (Burlingame et al., 2004). In

terms of group leadership, professional school counselors facilitated almost half or 13 of the 30 groups in this review, with one of these 13 groups led by school counselors-in-training and one led by peer counselors with the school counselor monitoring. Also leading the groups were social workers (5), psychologists (3), counselors-in-training (2), researchers (2), nurses (2), licensed professional counselors (1), and a psychiatrist (1). Only one of the 30 studies did not describe the group leader's professional orientation. Given the variability of group work training of mental health professionals (Fuhriman & Burlingame, 2001) and the importance of the group facilitator or leader to the success of the group, future studies should include descriptions of the group leaders (Burlingame et al., 2004), beyond their professional orientation, including their racial background (Stark-Rose, Livingston-Sacin, Merchant, & Finley, 2012) and their training and experience in group work with adolescents to facilitate interpretation of results and replication of research and practice.

Group size is an important factor in planning and implementing group work (Corey, Corey, & Corey, 2010; DeLucia-Waack, 2006; Gladding, 2012). In characterizing the number of adolescent group members in the groups researched and reviewed, this reviewer relied on the information provided in the published articles (Table 1). Unfortunately, 6 of the 30 articles did not include information regarding the size of the groups researched, which is consistent with previous criticisms regarding the lack of detailed information on the basics of group treatment in published group research (Burlingame et al., 2004). Of the 24 studies that provided data on the size of the groups, the number of group members ranged between 3 to 4 adolescent group members and 25 adolescent group members. Only two studies evaluated the outcomes of groups that were

small in size with three or four group members. Fourteen studies evaluated the outcomes

of groups that were medium in size with five to ten group members. Seven studies

evaluated the outcomes of groups that were large in size with more than ten group

members. Therefore, the size of the adolescent groups studied varied from small to

medium to large in terms of group participant members. Future research on the

quantitative outcomes of group work with adolescents in the schools should include

detailed information on the basics of the group treatment (Burlingame et al., 2004),

including the number of adolescent group members. Additionally, future outcome

research on adolescent groups in schools may consider how group size affects outcomes.

In characterizing the typical group structures researched in this review, the

number of group sessions and the length of the group sessions (Table 1) are essential

aspects of the group structure. Only 25 of the 30 studies included both of these pieces of

information in the research article, which is consistent with previous criticisms regarding

the lack of detailed information on the basics of group treatment in published group

research (Burlingame et al., 2004). Five research articles gave the number of group

sessions but did not include the length of those sessions. The majority, 20 of the 30

groups reviewed, were brief with the number of group sessions ranging from 8 to 10

group sessions. However, three of the reviewed studies included research on groups that

met less than 8 times, including one group intervention that included only 2 sessions of

50 minutes and two groups that were only 6 sessions in length, one of unspecified length

and the other for 6 sessions of 50 to 60 minutes. Six of the research studies reviewed

included groups with more than 10 sessions, such as 10 to 14 sessions of 90 to 120

minutes, 12 sessions of 40 minutes, 13 sessions of 45 minutes, 15 hours over 4 or 5 days,

17 sessions of 60 to 90 minutes, and one group met for 1 period (unspecified duration) per day for 9 weeks. The groups typically met from 45 minutes to 1 hour per session (19 studies), but a few of the groups (5 studies) met for longer periods of time such as 1.5 to 2 hours per session. Future research on the quantitative outcomes of group work with adolescents in the schools should include descriptions of the number of group work sessions and the length of those sessions (Burlingame et al., 2004). Research on quantitative outcomes with adolescent group work in the schools tends to focus on brief groups that range from 8 to 10 sessions in length with sessions typically lasting from 45 minutes to 1 hour. Quantitative outcome research on group work with adolescents in the schools that compared brief groups of 8 to 10 sessions with groups that lasted 16 to 20 sessions would be an interesting addition to the group work literature with adolescents in the schools.

This review indicates that the typical group structures in outcome research with adolescent group work in the schools, include groups led by a school counselor or other mental health professional. This review indicates that the groups range in size from less than 10 group members to up to 25 group members. Additionally, the research on quantitative outcomes with adolescent group work in the schools tends to focus on brief groups that range from 8 to 10 sessions in length with sessions typically lasting from 45 minutes to 1 hour. However, detailed information on the basics of the group work with adolescents in the schools, has been lacking, which is consistent with previous criticisms regarding the lack of detailed information on the basics of group treatment in published group research (Burlingame et al., 2004), and should be addressed in future studies to enhance interpretation and replication of research and group work practice.

Table 1 *Descriptions of Studied Groups (Type, Topic, Participants, Leader, Number of Members, & Session Information)*

Article	Group type	Group topic	Group participants	Group leader	No. of members	No. of sessions (length)
Brigman & Campbell (2003)	GC	A & PS	Students in grades 5-9	School counselor	n/a	12 sessions (45 min)
Bruce et al. (2009)	GC	A & PS	Students in grade 11	School counselor	15	8 sessions (60 min)
Burton (2006)	GC	A & PS	Students in grade 8 in UK	Psychologist	5	6 sessions (50-60 min)
Campbell & Brigman (2005)	GC	A & PS	Students in grades 5 & 6	School counselor	12	8 sessions (45 min)
Cook & Kaffenberger (2003)	GC	A & PS	Students in grades 7 & 8	School counselor	10	1 period/day for 9 weeks (n/a)
Du et al. (2010)	GC	Internet addiction	Students age 13-17 in China	Psychiatrist	6 to 10	8 sessions (90-120 min)
Egbochuke & Aihie (2009)	GC	Self-concept	Students age 17 in Nigeria	School counselor & peer counselors	n/a	10 sessions (60 min)
Hall (2006)	GC	Bullying	Students in grade 7 (ages 13-14)	School counselor	5	6 sessions (n/a)
Hall et al. (2009)	GC	Anger management	Students ages 12-15	School counselor	5	8 sessions (n/a)
Harris & Franklin (2003)	GC	A, PS, & C	Students ages 14-19	Social worker	n/a	8 sessions (60 min)
Harris & Franklin (2009)	GC	A, PS, & C	Students ages 15-19	Social worker	12	8 sessions (60-90 min)
Jokisaari & Vuori (2011)	PG	Career development	Students age15 in Finland	School counselor	18-25	15 hours over 4 or 5 days (n/a)
Karatas & Gokcakan (2009)	GC	Anger management	Students in grade 9 in Turkey	n/a	12	10 to 14 sessions (90-120 min)
Layne et al. (2008)	GP	War-related trauma	Students ages 13-18 in Bosnia	School counselor	6 to 10	17 sessions (60-90 min)
Leichtentritt & Shechtman (2010)	GC	Learning disabilities	Students ages 10-18 in Israel	School counselor	6 to 7	13 sessions (45 min)
McVey et al. (2003a)	PG	Disordered eating prevention	Students grades 7 & 8 in Canada	Nurse	10 to 14	10 sessions (60 min)
McVey et al. (2003b)	PG	Disordered eating prevention	Students grades 7 & 8 in Canada	Nurse	10 to 14	10 sessions (60 min)
Mishna & Muskat (2004)	GC	Learning disabilities	Students ages 10-17 in Canada	Social worker	4 to 6	8-15 sessions (n/a)
Nikels et al. (2007)	PG	Diversity sensitivity	Students in high school	Counselor-in-training	5 to 12	2 sessions (50 min)
Paone et al. (2008)	GC	Moral reasoning	Students in grade 9 (ages 13-16)	Counselor-in-training	3 to 4	10 sessions (50 min)
Ruffolo & Fischer (2009)	GC	Depression	Students ages 11-18	Social worker	5 to 7	9 sessions (45 min)
Ruttledge & Petrides (2011)	GC	Behavior	Students ages 13-14 in UK	Researcher	n/a	6 sessions (60 min)
Shechtman & Tanus (2006)	GC	Ethnic intergroup conflict	Students ages 12-17 in Israel	School counselor-in-training	n/a	10 sessions (45 min)
Shen (2007)	GC	A & PS	Students grades 7- 8 in China	School counselor	7 to 10	10 sessions (40 min)
Shen & Armstrong (2008)	GC	Self-esteem	Students in grade 7	LPC	4	9 sessions (50 min)
Squires & Caddick (2012)	GC	Behavior	Students ages 12-13 in UK	Psychologist	5	8 sessions (60 min)
Stein et al. (2003)	GC	PTSD	Students in grade 6	Social workers	5 to 8	10 sessions (n/a)
Truneckova & Viney (2007)	GC	PS	Students ages 12-15 in Australia	Researcher	4 to 8	10 sessions (90 min)
Warner et al. (2007)	GC	Social anxiety	Students ages 14-16	Psychologist	17 & 19	12 sessions (40 min)
Webb et al. (2005)	GC	A & PS	Students in grades 5-6	School counselor	n/a	12 sessions (45 min)

Note. GC=group counseling; PG=psychoeducation group; GP=group psychotherapy; A=academic development; PS=personal/social development; C=career development; LPC=Licensed professional counselor

What research designs have been used to evaluate quantitative outcomes of group work with adolescents in the schools?

In characterizing the quantitative outcome research on adolescent group work in the schools, it is important to look at the research designs, sample sizes, and data measurements (Table 2) that have been used to evaluate outcomes. Gerrity and DeLucia-Waack (2007) specifically called for improvements to address methodological limitations

in group work research in the schools, such as single group designs, small sample sizes, lack of a control group, no follow-up data, and outcomes assessed with mostly self-report measures. This review uses the research articles' descriptions of the research design and their descriptions of whether a control group was used and whether this control group was randomized. Therefore, of the 30 quantitative outcome research studies reviewed, 27 of the studies were described as using a pretest/posttest design, 2 studies used a randomized controlled trial research design, and one study used an AB single-subject design. Only one study was described as a replication study. Of the 27 research designs described as pretest/posttest designs, 9 studies were described as pretest/posttest designs, 10 studies were described as pretest/posttest designs with a randomized control group, and 8 studies were described as pretest/posttest designs with a control group. Additionally, of the pretest/posttest designs, one study used a repeated measures design with two pretests, posttest, and a follow-up data point.

Assessment of long term outcomes of group work with adolescents in the schools, has been facilitated by an increased use in follow-up data points, as called for by group researchers (Gerrity & DeLucia-Waack, 2007). In terms of follow-up data points, 13 of the 30 research designs reviewed used a follow-up data point after the posttest to assess long term outcomes of the group work. Follow-up data points ranged from one month (1 study), to 1.5 months (1 study), to 3 months (3 studies), to 4 months (2 studies), to 6 months (5 studies), to 7 months (1 study), to 12 months (1 study) after the posttest data point. While this review indicates attention to research on long term outcomes of group work with adolescents in the schools, future research should continue to utilize follow-up data points and assess long term outcomes.

In sum, the research designs utilized in this review of quantitative outcome research on group work with adolescents in the schools, include primarily pretest/posttest designs, with about a third of these designs using no control group, a third using a control group, and a third using a randomized control group. Of the 30 studies reviewed, 20 studies did use a control group in the research design. Replication studies and randomized controlled trial research designs have been underutilized in research on this topic and future research should consider these areas.

Gerrity and DeLucia-Waack (2007) noted that group work research in the schools often included small sample sizes. According to the data provided in the articles reviewed, samples sizes (Table 2) ranged from 5 research participants (3 studies) to 9,000 research participants (1 study). Approximately two thirds or 19 of the 30 studies reviewed had less than 100 in sample size (ranging from 5-81) and approximately one third or 11 of the 30 studies reviewed had sample sizes of more than 100 (ranging from 126-9000). While previous recommendations have called for larger sample sizes (Gerrity & DeLucia-Waack, 2007), this review indicates that the sample sizes of group work quantitative outcome research with adolescents in schools are not necessarily small, but range from small to quite large.

In regards to outcome research with adolescent group work, Gerrity and DeLucia-Waack (2007), recommended an increased use of data measures other than adolescent self-ratings, such as group leader, teacher, parent, and peer ratings. In characterizing the types of data measurements (Table 2) in this review, based on article descriptions of the data collected, only 12 of the 30 articles reviewed relied solely on adolescent self-rating data measurements. Teacher-ratings were used in 14 of the studies, parent ratings were

used in 7 of the studies, student scores on state achievement tests were used in 3 studies, student GPA was evaluated in 5 studies, administrator ratings were used in 2 studies, the school counselor/group leader ratings were used in one study, disciplinary referrals were used in one study, student attendance was used in 3 studies, peer ratings were used in one study, and one study relied on the ratings of trained independent evaluators. In sum, the majority of the thirty research studies reviewed used multiple data measurements and only 5 of the studies relied on a single data measurement. While 18 studies used data measurements that were not student self-ratings exclusively, future research on the effectiveness of group work with adolescents in the schools should include more data measurement that includes parent ratings, peer ratings, group leader ratings, and commonly used school data points such as attendance, disciplinary referrals, GPA, and student scores on state achievement tests.

What are the quantitative research outcomes of group work with adolescents in the schools?

The quantitative research outcomes of group work with adolescents in the schools, as described in the research articles reviewed (Table 2), include improvements in the ASCA National Model (ASCA, 2005) areas of academic development, personal/social development, and career development. Ten of the thirty studies reviewed reported quantitative research outcomes in group work with adolescents in the area of academic development. Significantly higher scores on state reading and math achievement tests were reported in 4 studies. Significant improvements in GPA and academic achievement were reported as an outcome of group work with adolescents in 5 studies. School attendance improvements were reported as an outcome of group work in

3 studies. One study reported increases in class participation and homework as a result of group work with three other studies reporting improvements in school success behaviors (academic, social, and self-management skills). One study specifically reported the result of improved time-management from participation in group work. Given the emphasis on academic achievement for all students, it is noteworthy that only one third of the articles reviewed assessed outcomes of group work in the area of academic development. While it is encouraging to find 10 research articles reporting significant academic outcomes as a result of adolescent group work in the schools over the last decade, this indicates a dearth of outcome research in this area and thus the need for future research on academic outcomes and adolescent group work in the schools.

In the area of personal/social development outcomes (Table 2), as reported in the research articles, 27 of the 30 studies in this review reported outcomes in this area. Specifically, the research outcomes of group work with adolescents in the schools included significant improvements in behaviors, responses to bullying, social skills and peer relationships, self-esteem, and symptoms of anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Outcomes specifically included improvements in attention and behavior (Du et al., 2010), improved responses to bullying (Hall, 2006), significant decreases in violent behavior and disciplinary referrals related to anger (Hall et al., 2009), decreased aggression (Karatas & Gokcakan, 2009; Leichtentritt & Shechtman, 2010), significantly less externalizing behaviors and total problem behaviors (Mishna & Muskat, 2004), significant decreases in disruptive behavior, conduct problems, hyperactivity, and anger (Ruttledge & Petrides, 2011), decreases in attitudes endorsing aggression (Shechtman & Tanus, 2006), decreases in school problems and inattention/hyperactivity

(Squires & Caddick, 2012), and decreased disruptive behavior in school and at home (Truneckova & Viney, 2007).

Outcomes also included improved social skills and peer relationships (Burton, 2006; Campbell & Brigman, 2005; Cook & Kaffenberger, 2003; Du et al., 2010; Harris & Franklin, 2003; Leichtentritt & Shechtman, 2010; Ruttledge & Petrides, 2011; Stein et al., 2003; Truneckova & Viney, 2007; Webb et al., 2005). Outcomes also included significantly higher self-concept and self-esteem (Egbochuke & Aihie, 2009; McVey et al., 2003b; Ruffolo & Fischer, 2009; Ruttledge & Petrides, 2011; Shen & Armstrong, 2008; Truneckova & Viney, 2007), including body esteem (McVey et al., 2003a; McVey et al., 2003b), and significant increases in personal sense of agency (Mishna & Muskat, 2004).

Additionally, outcomes of group work with adolescents in the schools, included significant decreases in symptoms of mood (Ruffolo & Fischer, 2009; Truneckova & Viney, 2007), depression (Layne et al., 2008; Leichtentritt & Shechtman, 2010; Stein et al., 2003), anxiety (Du et al., 2010; Leichtentritt & Shechtman, 2010; Warner et al., 2007), PTSD (Layne et al., 2008; Stein et al., 2003), and maladaptive grief reactions (Layne et al., 2008).

Other noteworthy outcomes found in this review include increased sensitivity toward multicultural and diversity issues (Nikels et al., 2007; Shechtman & Tanus, 2006), enhanced moral reasoning (Paone et al., 2008), increases in trait emotional intelligence (Ruttledge & Petrides, 2011), emotional and affective strengths (Shen, 2007), family involvement (Shen, 2007), and decreases in dieting behaviors (McVey et al., 2003a; McVey et al., 2003b). This wide range of impressive outcomes underscores the

importance of continued research in this area to enhance group work with adolescents in the schools.

In the area of career development outcomes (Table 2), only one study was found in this review. Jokisaari and Vuori (2011) reported group work led to an increased number of school counselors in the career-related network ties of group participants. The second outcome of their research, included less interconnected career network ties, which they report should increase the likelihood of a well-informed career choice for students. Given the importance of the career development domain (ASCA, 2005; Education Trust National Center for Transforming School Counseling, 2013), more outcome research on group work with adolescents that include the career development topic is needed.

TABLE 2 *Quantitative Outcome Research on Group Work with Adolescents in the Schools*

Article	Research design	n	Data measurement	Outcomes
Brigman & Campbell (2003)	Pretest/posttest with randomized control group	180	Student scores on state achievement tests & teacher ratings	Significant reading & math achievement score differences between treatment & comparison group, improved behaviors
Bruce et al. (2009)	Pretest/posttest	15	Student self-ratings	Improved pass rates on academic achievement tests
Burton (2006)	Pretest/posttest & 7 month follow up	5	Student self-ratings & teacher ratings	Improved social skills
Campbell & Brigman (2005)	Pretest/posttest with randomized control group	240	Student scores on state achievement tests & teacher ratings	Significantly higher state achievement test scores in math & reading, 69% of students improved in school success behaviors (academic, social & self-management skills)
Cook & Kaffenberger (2003)	Pretest/posttest	35	Student GPA & school counselor, teacher & administrator ratings	Students improved their GPAs & 75% of the students made some or significant academic & personal/social development
Du et al. (2010)	Pretest/posttest & 6 month follow-up with randomized control group	56	5 Student self-ratings	Decreased internet use, improved time management skills, & improved anxiety, attention, behavior, & peer relationships
Egbochuke & Aihie (2009)	Pretest/posttest with randomized control group	68	Student self-ratings	Self-concept scores of group participants were significantly higher than those of the control group
Hall (2006)	A-B single-subject design	5	Teacher-ratings	Students improved responses to bullying
Hall et al. (2009)	Pretest/posttest	5	Disciplinary referrals	Disciplinary referrals related to anger & violent behavior decreased significantly & all students identified at least 4 strategies for managing anger
Harris & Franklin (2003)	Pretest/posttest & 1 month follow-up with randomized control group	73	3 Student self-ratings, GPA, & school attendance	Improved GPA & attendance, statistically significant improvements on problem-focused coping behaviors & social problem –solving skills
Harris & Franklin (2009)	Pretest/posttest with control group	19	GPA & school attendance	Significantly better GPA & attendance
Jokisaari & Vuori (2011)	Pretest/posttest & 6 month follow-up with randomized control group	1034	Student self-ratings	Increased number of school counselors in the career-related network ties of participants & career network ties were less interconnected
Karatas & Gokcakan (2009)	Pretest/posttest & 4 month follow-up with control group	36	Student self-ratings	Decreased aggression (with the CBT group more effective in decreasing total aggression, physical aggression, & anger than the psychodrama group)
Layne et al. (2008)	Randomized controlled trial with 4 month follow-up	127	3 Students self-ratings	Significant reductions in PTSD & depression symptoms & maladaptive grief reactions
Leichtentritt & Shechtman (2010)	Pretest/Posttest	266	GPA, student self-ratings, & teacher ratings	All students improved in anxiety/depression behaviors, aggression, social competence, & academic achievement
McVey et al. (2003a)	Pretest/posttest & 3 month follow-up with control group	214	4 Student self-ratings	Improvements in body esteem & decreases in dieting behaviors
McVey et al. (2003b)	Pretest/posttest & 3 month follow-up with control group	282	4 Students self-ratings	Improvements in global self-esteem & body esteem & decreases in dieting behavior

TABLE 2 *Quantitative Outcome Research on Group Work with Adolescents in the Schools*

Article	Research design	n	Data measurement	Outcomes
Mishna & Muskat (2004)	Pretest/posttest	21	Student self-ratings & parent & teacher ratings	Significantly less externalizing behaviors & total problem behaviors, significant increases in personal sense of agency
Nikels et al. (2007)	Pretest/posttest	9000	Student self-ratings	Students obtained a greater understanding of multicultural issues & increased sensitivity towards issues of diversity
Paone et al. (2008)	Pretest/posttest with randomized control group	61	Student self-ratings	Positive effects in enhancing moral reasoning, group activity therapy more effective than group talk therapy in enhancing moral reasoning.
Ruffolo & Fischer (2009)	Pretest/posttest & 1.5 month follow-up	60	Student self-ratings, parent & teacher ratings, attendance, & GPA	Significant decreases in depressive symptoms & increased mood scores, self-esteem, attendance, class participation, homework, & grades
Ruttledge & Petrides (2011)	Pretest/Pretest/Posttest & 6 month follow-up	22	Student self-ratings & parent & teacher ratings	Significant improvements in disruptive behavior, conduct problems, anger, hyperactivity, self-concept, prosocial behavior, & trait emotional intelligence
Shechtman & Tanus (2006)	Pretest/posttest with control group	474	4 Student self-ratings	Increased empathy & national identity, decreased attitudes endorsing aggression, & reduced ethnic intergroup anxiety & religious identity (differential changes by ethnicity)
Shen (2007)	Pretest/posttest with control group	81	Teacher, parent, & peer ratings	Significant improvements in behavioral & emotional strengths, family involvement, & affective strength. Parents reported no significant changes.
Shen & Armstrong (2008)	Pretest/posttest with control group	40	Student self-ratings	Statistically significant improvements in self-esteem
Squires & Caddick (2012)	Pretest/posttest with control group	16	Teacher & administrator ratings	Improved behavior (school problems & inattention/hyperactivity)
Stein et al. (2003)	Randomized controlled trial with 3 month & 6 month follow-ups	126	Student self-ratings & parent & teacher ratings	Significantly lower scores on symptoms of PTSD, depression, & psychosocial dysfunction, teachers did not report significant differences in behavior
Truneckova & Viney (2007)	Pretest/posttest & 12 month follow-up with randomized control group	76	2 Student self-ratings & parent & teacher ratings	Decreased disruptive behavior in school & at home, decreased personal & concrete construing, increased interpersonal construing & more abstract construing, , improved interpersonal behavior, positively changed self-descriptions & increased feelings of well-being
Warner et al. (2007)	Pretest/posttest & 6 month follow-up trained with randomized control group	36	Self-ratings & parent & trained independent evaluator ratings	Significant decreases in social anxiety
Webb et al. (2005)	Replication pretest/posttest with randomized control group	418	Student scores on state achievement tests & teacher ratings	Students scored significantly higher in math than control group, reading scores improved, 72% of students improved in school success behaviors (academic, social, & self-management skills)

Discussion

First and foremost, while only 30 quantitative outcome research studies on group

work with adolescents in the schools have been published in the last 10 years, this leads

to a real gap and a real need for more outcome research in this area (Burlingame et al.,

2004; Gerrity & DeLucia-Waack, 2007; Paisley & Milsom, 2007). This is especially

concerning given that 87% of school counselors report leading groups in schools (Steen

et al., 2007). Given that only 15 of these 30 studies were conducted in the United States,

there is a significant gap and need for more quantitative outcome research literature on

group work with adolescents in the schools in the United States. However, it is

promising to see that 15 of the 30 studies were conducted in other countries, thus

supporting the use of group work with adolescents in the schools internationally and across diverse populations.

This review also reveals that the main types of groups being researched with adolescents in the schools include psychoeducation and counseling groups. The focus of the majority of these groups was personal/social development but approximately one third of the groups also included academic development. However few groups reviewed included the area of career development and none of the groups reviewed included the topic of substance use. Future research should include assessment of group work including the topics of career development and substance use, along with the topics of academic and personal/social development.

In characterizing the adolescent populations being served by group work in the schools, it is interesting to note that in the last decade, only 15 research studies were conducted in the United States. Group participants were representative of both rural and urban areas across different regions of the U. S. However, it is encouraging to see the publication of 15 international studies from 9 different countries within this time frame. However, only eight studies included primarily minority adolescents and none of the studies reviewed focused on Asian American/Pacific Islander, Native American, and Intercultural group adolescents. This calls for more research on group work in the schools with minority adolescent populations (Gerrity & DeLucia-Waack, 2007).

Both males and females and a variety of adolescent ages were adequately represented in this research review. Socioeconomically disadvantaged students were also underrepresented in this review of group work with adolescents in the schools. In general, more descriptive data (gender, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, grade and

age) on the group participants (Burlingame et al., 2004) should be included in all future research on group work with adolescent in the schools to enhance interpretation of results and replication of research and practice. Additionally, the impacts of these variables (gender, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, grade, and age) on outcomes would be helpful in advancing research and practice of group work with adolescents in the schools.

According to the ASCA (2008) position statement on the Professional School Counselor and Group Counseling, "group counseling should be offered to all students in a PK-12 setting." Providing school counseling to all students is also a mandate of the ASCA National Model (2005) and the New Vision for School Counselors (Education Trust National Center for Transforming School Counseling, 2013). Therefore, it is concerning that only two studies were targeted at group work with all students in a school (Jokisaari & Vuori, 2011; Nickels et al., 2007). This points to a gap in the quantitative outcome research on group work with adolescents in the schools in regards to research on group work that includes all students in a school. While the size of the adolescent groups studied in this review varied, future research should include more research on large groups, such as classroom guidance, with adolescents in the schools.

In further characterizing the typical group structures researched in this review, the majority of the groups were brief ranging from 8 to 10 group sessions with sessions typically lasting from 45 minutes to 60 minutes to best accommodate the school schedule. Future research on group work with adolescents in the schools should include detailed descriptions (Burlingame et al., 2004) of the number of group work sessions and the length of those sessions.

In characterizing the types of research designs, sample sizes and data measurements in this review, calls for more rigorous experimental methods (Gerrity & DeLucia-Waack, 2007) seemed to have been addressed with regards to quantitative outcome research with adolescent group work in the schools. Research designs included primarily pretest/posttest designs, with about a third of these designs using no control group, a third using a control group, and a third using a randomized control group. Replication studies and randomized controlled trial research designs have been underutilized in research on this topic and future research should consider these areas of more rigorous methodology ((Burlingame et al., 2004; Conyne, 2010; Gerrity & DeLucia-Waack, 2007; Gladding, 2012).   While previous recommendations have called for larger sample sizes (Gerrity & DeLucia-Waack, 2007), this review indicates that the sample sizes of group work quantitative outcome research with adolescents in schools are not necessarily small, but range from small to quite large. Additionally, while the he majority of the studies reviewed used multiple data measurements, future research on the effectiveness of group work with adolescents in the schools should include more data measurement that includes parent ratings, peer ratings, group leader ratings, and commonly used school data points such as attendance, disciplinary referrals, GPA, and student scores on state achievement tests.

Group work outcomes with adolescents in the schools have been impressive and include outcomes in the domains of academic development, personal/social development, and career development. Academic outcomes included significant improvements in achievement test scores, grades, and attendance. Personal/social development outcomes ranged from significant improvements in behaviors, responses to bullying, social skills

and peer relationships, self-esteem, and symptoms of anxiety and depression. Only one study reviewed assessed the area of career development outcomes and reported increase in career-related network ties and the likelihood of well-informed career choices for students. In terms of outcomes, this review reveals the overwhelmingly positive impacts of group work with adolescents in the schools ranging from academic to personal/social and career development. Future research should include more emphasis on academic and career development outcomes of group work with adolescents in the schools.

Implications for Future Research and Practice

As group work continues to play a major role in the schools (Steen et al., 2007), research on the outcomes of these groups with adolescents over the last 10 years has evolved and points to the effectiveness of these groups across group topics, structures and outcome areas. Given the diversity of significant outcomes in this literature review, group work with adolescents in the schools (ASCA, 2008) should continue across populations and topics. However, more research on the effectiveness of these groups needs to be published to facilitate funding and support for group work with adolescents in the schools (ASCA, 2005; ASGW, 2008; Education Trust National Center for Transforming School Counseling, 2013; Falco et al., 2011; Gerrity & DeLucia-Waack, 2007; Kalodner & Hanus, 2010; Paisley & Milsom, 2007).

Future research should look at outcomes of group work with adolescents in the schools that consider the topics of career development and substance use. Future research in this area should also include more minority populations and groups that include all students in a school. There is also a need for outcome research on the impacts of group member gender, age, socioeconomic status, leader variables, group size

including large group or classroom guidance groups, and the number and length of group sessions on outcomes in the area of quantitative outcome research on group work with adolescents in the schools. All research in this area needs to include the specifics of group type and group member and leader variables, such as age, gender, race, socioeconomic status, and training and experience with group work (Burlingame et al., 2004).

This literature review reveals that previous methodological limitations in research on group work in the schools, such as single group designs, small sample sizes, lack of a control group, no follow-up data, and outcomes assessed with mostly self-report measures (Gerrity & DeLucia-Waack, 2007), have been addressed but continue to be salient in outcome research on group work with adolescents in the schools. Collaboration among researchers and school counselors should address the current gaps in outcome research on group work with adolescents in the schools (Gerrity & DeLucia-Waack, 2007).

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Chapter 3

"Sticking Together": The Adolescent Experience of Cohesion
in Rural School Counseling Groups

Tara M. Gray
Oregon State University
Deborah J. Rubel, Ph.D.
Oregon State University

Abstract

The purpose of this article is to give voice to the adolescent experience of group cohesion in school counseling groups in rural areas. While cohesion is an essential therapeutic factor in group process, the adolescent experience of cohesion in school counseling groups has not been researched. The purpose of this study is to address the marginalization of adolescent voices in group process and school counseling research and using grounded theory methodology describe how adolescents experience cohesion in school counseling groups. A total of twenty individual interviews with seven adolescent research participants over the course of four months, included three interviews with each participant. All participants had experienced cohesion as group members in middle school or high school counseling groups in the last two years. Grounded theory analysis generated the central category of the cohesion process as *"sticking together,"* which describes a "tight bond" which includes both internal and relational contexts including *feeling close to the group* and *making friends. Feelings of belonging, positive feelings, open social interactions,* and *lasting connections* further characterize the cohesion process as experienced by adolescent participants. Participants also highlighted the importance of group structure and group process as salient context in their experience of group cohesion. This study provides a qualitative, descriptive view of how adolescents experience cohesion in school counseling groups in rural areas. Implications for school counselors and counselor educators and future research are discussed.

Introduction

While group work with adolescents is highly prevalent in the schools, research on these groups is limited. The majority of group dynamics research has been based on adults and it is important to understand group process with adolescents due to their unique developmental level (DeLucia-Waack, 2000, p.132). Some authors note a lack of knowledge of adolescents' perspectives on therapeutic process variables, which include group cohesion (Chase & Kelly, 1993; Diamond, Liddle, Hogue, & Dakof, 1999; Shirk & Karver, 2003). While researchers have called for sound research in school counseling with adolescent students (Whiston, Tai, Rahardja, & Eder, 2011) and recommended collaboration among school counselors and researchers regarding group work (Geritty & DeLucia-Waack, 2007), no one has responded by researching how adolescents experience cohesion in school counseling groups.

Over 30 million adolescents between the ages of 12 and 18 attend U.S. middle and high schools and close to 6 million adolescents attend schools in rural areas (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Approximately 20 percent of the US population is defined as rural by the U.S. Census Bureau (2010), however the rural context has been marginalized in counseling research (Breen & Drew, 2005; Grimes, Haskins, & Paisley, 2013; Sutton & Pearson, 2002). In a review of qualitative counseling research from 1997 to 2002, only 2 of 98 published articles were specific to counseling in rural settings (Berrios & Lucca, 2006). While urban and rural areas have different population densities they share similar challenges including socioeconomic disadvantages and greater risks of mental health issues (Stamm, 2003).

According to Hoagwood & Erwin (1997), children receive more services through schools than through any other system. An American School Counselor Association (2008) position statement specifically addressing group counseling asserts the use of groups as an "efficient, effective and positive" (p. 24) intervention for addressing youth development. Counseling groups emphasize "personal and interpersonal problems of living and promote personal and interpersonal growth and development" among people at risk of personal or interpersonal problems (ASGW, 2000, p. 330). In a social context where demand for services is high and resources limited, Kruczek and Vitanza (1999), propose that group counseling offers important economic advantages relative to other forms of treatment. Group counseling in schools supports positive student development (Gladding, 1999; Newsome & Gladding, 2007), while positively impacting the school (Littrell & Peterson, 2002). Authors have also identified group counseling as a useful venue for offering culturally relevant services to youth of diverse cultures (Steen, Bauman, & Smith, 2007). Therefore, while group counseling in schools is prevalent, there is a lack of research on school counseling with adolescents and a lack of qualitative research on school counseling groups.

In a meta-analysis of 153 school counseling interventions, Whiston, Tai, Rahardja, & Eder (2011) found a significant overall average weighted effect size of .30, indicating that "students who receive school counseling interventions score almost a third of a standard deviation higher on various outcomes than do students who do not receive school counseling interventions." (p. 45). Additionally, the authors were perplexed to find so few studies on adolescent middle school students. However, noting both a "lack

of methodological rigor and a dearth of studies" (p. 48), the authors suggest more sound research in school counseling, in particular with adolescent students.

While the literature on groups in schools is extensive" (Gerrity & DeLucia-Waack, 2007, p. 98) most of the studies are case studies that describe the content and topic of groups rather than the process or experience of group members. Group counseling interventions in schools have been shown to be effective (Gerrity & DeLucia-Waack, 2007; Whiston & Sexton, 1998; Whiston, Tai, Rahardja, & Eder, 2011), but many of the studies that evaluate school-based group counseling in particular are limited by small sample sizes, a lack of replication and the exclusive use of self-report measures (Gerrity & DeLucia-Waack, 2007). In their systemic analysis of meta-analytic research on the effectiveness of psychoeducational and counseling groups in the schools, Gerrity and DeLucia-Waack (2007) found support for the efficacy of group counseling within and across group topic areas and recommend that researchers and group counselors work together to increase the effectiveness of school counseling groups.

Group counseling may be particularly suitable for adolescents who are at a stage of development where the presence of peers is very important and valuable (Dies, 2000; Kruczek & Vitanza, 1999). Research has shown that group interventions have consistently better effects than individual interventions with adolescents (Tillitski, 1990). Accordingly, "group work with adolescents is a developmental necessity" (Akos, Hamm, Mack & Dunaway, 2007, p. 53).

While the research on adolescent development supports the use of group work, the therapeutic factor of group cohesiveness "parallels the developmental themes that appear in early adolescence (Akos et al.,2007, p. 56). Group cohesiveness or "the value

attached to one's sense of belongingness in group" (Chase & Kelly, p. 159) and

engagement is a necessary precondition for all other therapeutic factors (Yalom, 1995).

In order to have successful groups with adolescents, students need to experience group

cohesion, feel valued and unconditionally accepted, and be willing to share and listen to

others (Akos et al., 2007; Yalom, 1995).   Chase and Kelly (1993) gave thirty-three

adolescent psychiatric inpatients a questionnaire based on Yalom's (1970) sixty-item Q-

sort of therapeutic factors in group therapy. Based on a rank-ordered list of the

adolescents' responses, the most highly valued curative factor for the adolescents was

universality (12.23) with cohesiveness (11.88) the second most highly valued curative

factor. According to Steen and Bemak (2008), group cohesiveness was a constructive

aspect of their pilot study group with at risk high school students. They reported that

group cohesiveness added depth to the group and allowed for the emergence of student

concerns early in the group's development (p. 347).

Researchers have identified the need to study process in adolescent group work

(Shechtman, 2004) and to study how adolescents view the process of engagement in

counseling (Oetzel & Scherer, 2003). Researchers have also identified a lack of

"descriptions of group dynamics" in school-based group research (Riva & Haub, 2004, p.

316), which signifies the need for qualitative research on group process and dynamics in

adolescent school counseling groups. Additionally, there is a lack of knowledge of

adolescents' perspectives on therapeutic process variables such as cohesion in group

work (Chase & Kelly, 1993; Diamond et al., 1999; Shirk & Karver, 2003). Researchers

have also noted the importance of developing conceptualizations of how group

therapeutic factors, such as cohesion, develop over time (Kivlighan, Miles, & Paquin,

2010). Specifically, Marmarosh and Van Horn (2010, p. 159) highlight the importance of collecting group member perceptions of cohesion. Rubel & Okech (2010) recommend grounded theory research to investigate how adolescent groups develop. While cohesion is an essential therapeutic or curative factor in group process, little is known regarding how adolescents experience group cohesion. Therefore there is a need to study how adolescents experience group cohesion and to give voice to their experiences. This research will help counselors, group leaders, supervisors and counselor educators understand the perspective of adolescents regarding group cohesion and contribute to the literature on group process with adolescents in school counseling groups.

The purpose of this study was to address the marginalization of adolescent voices in group process and school counseling research and to deeply understand how adolescents experience cohesion in school counseling groups. The overall research question was, "How do adolescents experience group cohesion in school counseling groups?"

Methodology

Qualitative research is an appropriate methodology when a researcher's question is of the "how" nature with regard to the experience of adolescents (Nelson & Quintana, 2005). While previous research has been conducted *on* adolescents, this study aims to give voice to adolescents and their experience of group cohesion, through qualitative research *with* adolescents (Bassett, 2010; Schulz, 2011). By engaging with adolescents as active participants and empowering them to tell their own story in their own way, their subjective perceptions and inner experiences generate meaningful and rich descriptive data (Grover, 2004, p. 84). Qualitative research, with its focus on collaboration with

participants (Bassett, 2010; Creswell, 2007), helps alleviate the imbalance of power that exists between researcher and vulnerable adolescent participants.

The intent of grounded theory is to generate a theory or explanation from data on a process or interaction that all research participants have experienced (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Creswell, 2007). The grounded theory, that is developed from data rather than preceding data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 204), is intended to help explain the process and provide a framework for further research and practice. Rubel & Okech (2010) recommend grounded theory research to investigate how adolescent groups develop. The process that was researched in this study is the process of group cohesion development and the purpose was to develop a theory or explanation of how adolescents experience cohesion in school counseling groups.

Researcher as Instrument

Consistent with the social constructivism-interpretivism tradition "reality is constructed in the mind of the individual" (Ponterotto, 2005, p.130) with the assumption that humans develop varied and multiple subjective meanings of their experiences in their social, cultural and historical contexts (Creswell, 2007, p. 20). Given this researcher's philosophical orientation (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) of social constructivism-interpretivism (Charmaz, 2006) and the qualitative methodology of grounded theory, the researcher practiced reflexivity about her own subjective experiences to examine and analyze biases and assumptions about the process of cohesion development with adolescents in school counseling groups. Reflexivity means that the interviewer is "conscious of the biases, values and experiences that he or she brings to a qualitative research study" (Creswell, 2007, p. 243). To this end, qualitative researchers must

examine their influence on the research process and participants (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 31). As a doctoral student in counseling and a professional school counselor with twenty years of experience working with adolescents, this researcher acknowledged a passion for working with adolescents, particularly in school counseling groups, a deep respect for the developmental struggles of adolescents, and a commitment to give voice to their experiences of group cohesion. This researcher also acknowledged frustration with biased literature that describes adolescents as "difficult to work with" or "tough" and confesses to not sharing in this experience in her work with adolescents. She also acknowledged that she is not an adolescent and her different age, developmental level and culture (a white, female counselor and researcher) provided a challenge to accurately describing the essence of adolescents' experience with the phenomenon of group cohesion. The researcher identified her assumptions and biases as follows: (1) Cohesion is essential for effective groups, but this experience is dynamic and can have both positive and negative qualities. (2) The experience of cohesion most likely differs depending on the previous experiences and cultural values of the individual. (3) The experience of cohesion most likely depends on other aspects of the group, such as other members, the group leader and the stage of the group's development. (4) The experience of cohesion from the perspective of adolescents may be especially salient given the developmental level of adolescents and their search for social acceptance and personal identity. (5) The experience of group cohesion in school counseling group may have a profound effect on the development of adolescents.

Participants and Setting

After IRB approval, to gain access to the population of adolescents who had experienced cohesion in school counseling groups, the researcher collaborated with middle school and high school counselors, administrators and school districts in the rural U.S. Southwest to find eligible participants. In order to produce a highly descriptive, in-depth study of group cohesion with adolescents, the number of participants was kept to a minimum of seven participants (Creswell, 2007; Nelson & Quintana, 2005).

As participants were minors, the voluntary informed consent process included both parental informed consent and participant assent. The purpose and procedures of the study, rights of participants, including the right to withdraw at any time, confidentiality and limits to confidentiality, possible risks associated with participation in the study, and potential benefits of the study were openly and clearly discussed with adolescent participants and their parents (Bassett, Beagan, Ristovski-Slijepcevic & Chapman, 2008; Creswell, 2007). Haglund (2004) found that adolescents enjoyed the research interview process, reported feeling "honored" to participate in the study, and "valued that their words and experiences would be used to help other teens" (p. 1312). The researcher remained sensitive throughout the research process to the issues of working with minors and worked to empower participants throughout the data collection and analysis process (Nelson & Quintana, 2005).

Participants were seven adolescents selected through purposeful criterion sampling in the rural Southwest of the United States. Purposeful criterion sampling means the selection of participants was based on the criterion that all participants experienced the phenomenon of study (Creswell, 2007). All participants had participated in and experienced cohesion in school counseling groups in middle school or high school.

Efforts were made to select participants based on their ability to inform the researcher about the research question but also to represent the diversity of adolescents in school counseling groups and the diversity of group structures and contexts (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Singh, Merchant, Skudrzyk, & Ingene, 2012).

Participants were recruited from and had participated in 5 different school counseling groups with 4 different school counselors in 4 different schools (3 middle schools and 1 high school), in 3 different school districts. The schools ranged in size from 175 to 400 in student population in rural areas with towns with populations of less than 2,000.

A total of 7 participants between the ages of 12-16 years old participated in three individual interviews over a four month period. All participants had participated in school counseling groups with either a licensed professional school counselor or an intern supervised by a licensed professional school counselor. Participants had experienced a school counseling group at the time of data collection (n=3), one year after the group (n=2), and two years after the group (n=2). Therefore the age of participants when they experienced the school counseling group included 12 years old (n=4), 14 years old (n=2), and 15 years old (n=1), representing students in 6th, 7th, 8th, and 9th grade. Participants included 5 females and 2 males. The race/ethnicity of the participants was Caucasian (n=3), Multiracial Hispanic/Caucasian (n=3), and Native American (n=1). Group structures included both open and closed group membership and a range of group membership size (from 4 to 8 members), length of group sessions (45-50 minutes) and number of sessions (10-12 sessions). A total of 20 interviews were transcribed. All

participants completed three rounds of data collection interviews and member checking, except one participant who moved before the final interview.

Data Collection

Data collection for this grounded theory study included three individual, in-depth interviews with each of the research participants and member checking (Creswell, 2007). Interviews were semi-structured with open-ended questions designed to elicit in-depth descriptions of adolescents' experiences with group cohesion in school counseling groups. All interviews took place in a private room in public facilities such as schools or libraries to ensure confidentiality. All 20 interviews were audiotaped and transcribed by the primary researcher. Interviews were kept to 30 minutes or less to respect the developmental level of the research participants. Subsequent rounds of interviews used questions grounded in the data and analysis of previous interviews to more fully explore concepts and relationships that emerged from the initial interviews. Three rounds of interviews were sufficient to reach saturation (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The final interviews also included member checking.

The researcher used prolonged engagement to help establish rapport (Bassett, Beagan, Ristovski-Slijepcevic & Chapman, 2008). Rapport was established over the course of three interviews over the course of four months. Additionally, the researcher's experience working with adolescents facilitated building rapport and comfort with participants, as well as relating to and understanding the cultural subtleties of this particular adolescent population (Bassett et al., 2008).

Grounded theory researchers must consider the experiences of the research participants "within the context in which they occurred so that meaning is clear and

accurate" (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 57). Therefore, participants were encouraged to reflect on their experiences and the context of their experiences with cohesion in a school counseling group. Informed voluntary consent and assent emphasized participants' rights to confidentiality and to withdraw from the study at any time. Additionally the researcher continually checked for participant comfort with research participation and adjusted data collection to remain respectful of all participants (Bassett, et al., 2008). Participants received remuneration for their participation in the form of cash compensation. Audio recordings, transcriptions and memos were kept electronically secure.

Participant identification and data collection continued with theoretical sampling until saturation occurred (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Saturation occurred after three rounds of interviews when no additional data collection was necessary to describe the grounded theory categories, properties, dimensions and their interactional process. Theoretical sampling refers to the gathering of data based on concepts (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Creswell, 2007), which enables researchers to discover and build upon the concepts that are most relevant to the problem and population of study. "Theoretical sampling is the process of letting the research guide the data collection" (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 157). "Theoretical sampling means seeking pertinent data to develop your emerging theory" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 96) and this occurred in the second and third rounds of interviews until saturation was achieved (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

The central research question was: "How do adolescents experience group cohesion in school counseling groups?" The initial interview questions reflected the group counseling literature and the literature on qualitative methodology with adolescents

yet were sufficiently general to allow participants to give detailed descriptions of their experience. Initial interview questions included: (1) How did you experience the school counseling group (including both positive and negative experiences)? (2) How would you describe what it's like to belong to a school counseling group and how would you describe what it's like to not belong to a school counseling group? (3) Did anything happen in the school counseling group that affected the way you either felt like you belonged or didn't belong in the group? (4) Did anything happen in the school counseling group that made you want to be in the group or stay in the group or did anything happen in the group that made you want to leave the group or not be in the group? (5) Describe how your sense of belonging to the school counseling group or not belonging to the group may have changed over time. (6) Was there anything that happened in the school counseling group with other members of the group that helped you feel like you belonged or didn't belong to the group? (7) Was there anything that happened in the school counseling group with the group leader that helped you feel like you belonged or didn't belong to the group?

Subsequent interview questions were designed to clarify responses given in earlier rounds of interviews. These questions built upon analysis from earlier interviews. Theoretical sampling (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) allowed for the gathering of data based on concepts and allowed researchers to select areas of data to further explore in the second and third rounds of interviews. Participant member checking occurred after interview transcription and the development of categories, properties, dimensions, and context. Triangulated data collection procedures included multiple rounds of interviews, member checking and peer review and debriefing.

Data Analysis

Grounded theory analysis of the transcript data began with open coding to determine concepts and initial categories, memos, and researcher reflections following procedures outlined by Corbin and Strauss (2008). Corbin and Strauss (p. 198) define open coding as the analytical process that identifies and categorizes emerging concepts by "breaking data apart and delineating concepts to stand for blocks of raw data."

Data analysis then continued with axial coding, the analytic process of identifying and relating categories to subcategories and characterizing subcategories, properties, dimension variations and the contexts that described these categories (Charmaz, 2006). An example of axial coding can be seen by tracing the emergence of the central category from the first round of data analysis to the final grounded theory. After the first round of data analysis, the category of cohesion existed parallel to the category of group process. However, axial coding led to the category of cohesion process becoming the central category of the grounded theory while group process became a related subcategory that described salient aspects of the context of the grounded theory of the cohesion process as experienced by adolescents in school counseling groups.

Grounded theory research involves a continuous process of data collection until conceptual saturation is achieved (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Charmaz, 2006). Thus theoretical sampling was employed by sampling or asking interview questions to more fully develop the properties of categories developed in the first or second round of data analysis and answer the theoretically based questions that emerged from the initial data until a grounded theory emerged. An example of theoretical sampling from the data analysis includes the use of second round interview questions to more fully explore the

internal and relational contexts of the cohesion process and the salient aspects of group

process and structure that eventually led to the central subcategories and contexts of the

emergent grounded theory.

The final phase of data analysis in grounded theory included integrating memos

and categories to build a theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) that would answer the research

question regarding how adolescents experience cohesion in school counseling groups.

Final data analysis also included member checking and peer review and debriefing.

Member checking occurred in third and final round of interviews and involved checking

with participants to verify and validate that the final grounded theory accurately reflected

participants' experiences. All participants who participated in member checking (*n=6*),

confirmed the grounded theory.

Peer review and debriefing included presentation of the final theory to a school

counselor experienced in facilitating adolescent school counseling groups to gauge the

accuracy of the emergent grounded theory with an unbiased professional (Lincoln &

Guba, 1985). The research results include detailed descriptions and participant quotes to

give voice to the participants' experience with the cohesion process in school counseling

groups, while providing context, and allowing readers to make decisions regarding

transferability.

Promoting Trustworthiness

To promote trustworthiness or research credibility and minimize researcher bias,

the researcher practiced reflexivity, prolonged engagement, triangulation, and peer

review and debriefing (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Creswell, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1985;

Ruble & Villalba, 2009). In addition to the researcher as instrument assumptions

previously disclosed, in order to uncover other researcher assumptions, the researcher practiced reflexivity through analysis memos and peer debriefing. The purpose of these techniques is to allow the researcher to set aside personal experience and focus exclusively on the experience of the adolescent participants (Creswell, 2007). While grounded theory methodology generated a theory of how adolescents experience cohesion in school counseling groups, this theory was generated through participant interviews and analysis by a researcher who is not an adolescent. The author acknowledged that this research and writing are a reflection of her own cultural background and experiences and a co-construction of the interactive processes between the researcher and the adolescent participants (Creswell, 2007).

Prolonged engagement served to build trust and rapport with research participants and provide opportunities to check for misinformation during the data collection process (Creswell, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Going over the informed consent and assent was an important part of the four month research process with participants. Prolonged engagement generated 20 quality, detailed interviews with adolescents while respecting their autonomy and encouraging them to voice their experience of group cohesion (Bassett, 2010; Grover, 2004).

Triangulation, the use of different sources and methods of data collection (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), occurred through the use of three rounds of interviews with diverse group participants and member checking. The researcher had previously facilitated hundreds of group counseling sessions with adolescents in the schools and has extensive professional experience with group cohesion and adolescents. After transcribing interviews and coding, the researcher consulted with participants and experts in the field to solicit their

views on the categories, properties, dimensions, and theory and make necessary

adjustments to minimize researcher bias.

Peer review and peer debriefing, "an effective way of shoring up credibility and

providing methodological guidance" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 243) took place with a

qualitative research and group research expert who played "devil's advocate" and asked

the important and hard questions regarding the research methodology and interpretations.

Detailed descriptions with many quotes give voice to the experience of participants,

while providing context, to allow readers to make decisions regarding transferability

(Creswell, 2007). For the purpose of credibility, negative case analysis is essential for

the researcher to remain open and skeptical of her own thinking and ideas while refining

initial hypotheses. Lastly, peer review and peer debriefing took place via expert

triangulation when the final grounded theory results were reviewed by a school counselor

who had facilitated many school counseling groups with adolescents.

Results

Data analysis generated the central category of the cohesion process as "*sticking*

together," a "tight bond" which includes interacting internal and relational contexts or the

subcategories of *feeling close to the group* and *making friends*. The resulting properties

include *feelings of belonging, positive feelings, open social interactions,* and *lasting*

connections. Refer to Figure 1, which illustrates the central category of the cohesion

process and the interacting nature of the subcategories and properties. Participants also

highlighted the importance of group structure and group process as salient context in their

experience of "*sticking together*." These contextual properties that influenced the

adolescent experience of *"sticking together"* included: group leadership, safe

environment, open or closed group membership boundaries, helpful group purpose, sharing, finding similarities, and resolving conflicts The following results describe the central category, subcategories, properties and their context and interactions. The context and interactions sections of the results most accurately give voice to the complexity of the "*sticking together"* process by describing the context and then the process of property interactions. These interactions provide insight into the "*sticking together"* process from the adolescent participants' point of view and provide a detailed story of the "tight bond" experienced including individual variations in their experiences as represented in the variations in property dimensions. Results begin with descriptions and voice data for the central category, subcategories, properties and dimensions before concluding with the context and interactions.

"Sticking Together"

The central category of the experience of the cohesion process was described by participants as "*sticking together"* and includes a "tight bond" or a strong, resilient, intragroup bond that develops in the group and influences and is influenced by the other properties of the emergent theory. Participant 6, a 15 year old female who participated in a school counseling group when she was 14 years old described the most salient characteristics of the "*sticking together"* bond:

> Sticking together is like…no matter what you've always got their back.
> And if anything happens you're there for them for support…we were
> going to support the other person no matter what they're going through or
> what the cause me be. It was really fun to bond with those girls.

Another participant, P4, a 16 year old male who participated in a high school counseling group when he was 15, describes the "tight bond" and properties of group process salient in his experience of cohesion:

> It was a tight, close, personal bond…a strong bond. They encouraged me and they helped throw in ideas and offered their help. They listened and gave me helpful advice.

Feeling Close to the Group

Feeling close to the group describes the internal context of the *sticking together* bond or the emotional response to the group as a whole. Participants reported feeling more distant or less close to the group during the first group session or two, when new group members joined open membership groups, and when groups experienced conflicts or threats to safety. When adolescent group members experienced the cohesion process of "*sticking together*", participants described *feeling close to the group*. Participant 2, a 12 year old female who was in a 6th grade school counseling support group, relates her experience:

> At first we didn't really know each other that well and we didn't really hang out. But in group we would all talk and really get to know each other. Every group we'd get closer and closer….every time anything happened we'd go over it and you'd just feel closer and closer every time.

"STICKING TOGETHER"
"A tight bond"

FEELING CLOSE TO THE
GROUP-

Feelings of Belonging
(belonging & acceptance)
&
Positive Feelings (feeling
good & confident)

MAKING FRIENDS-

Open Social Interactions
(intragroup & extragroup)

Lasting Connections (peer
members & counselor)
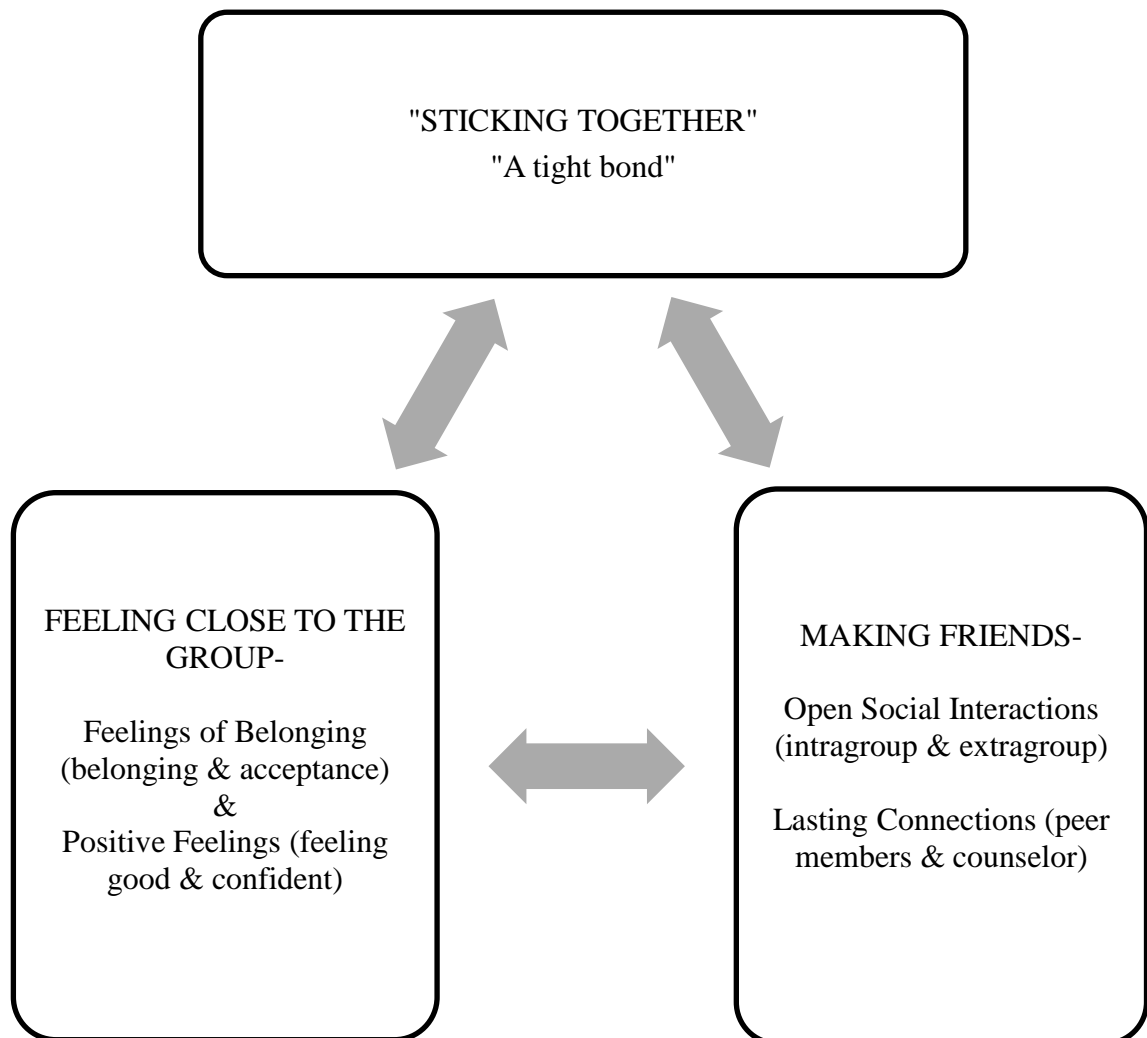
Figure 1. "Sticking Together" Subcategories, Properties & Dimensions

Feelings of belonging. *Feeling close to the group* includes the property of *feelings of belonging.* *Feelings of belonging* describes the emotions associated with nonjudgmental group acceptance where participants felt both valued and included in the group. Prior to experiencing the *feelings of belonging,* participants described feeling "left out" or "out casted" in relation to peers. When participants experienced "*sticking together"* they also experienced thoughts and *feelings of belonging.* Participant 4 described his experience of *feelings of belonging*:

> Belonging felt like people care about you and notice you and they're supportive. I was accepted… and I could sort of be myself more. I felt like I'm wanted. It was cool to have somebody to talk to and pretty fun.

Participant 2 related her experience of belonging, including her experience with not belonging, prior to her membership in a 6th grade school counseling support group:

> It's like you're a part of something helpful. Before the group ever started I felt like I didn't belong to any group. I felt like there was no one I could talk to or anything like that.

Positive feelings. The second property of *feeling close to the* group includes the *positive feelings* that describe the general positive emotions and mood participants correlated with *feelings of belonging* and *feeling close to the group.* The *positive feelings* described by participants include feeling good, calm, happy, and confident as opposed to the general feelings described prior to the experience of "*sticking together"*, which were described as ranging from sad and angry to anxious. Participant 1, a 12 year old female who was in a 6th grade support group described her experience of positive feelings associated with *"sticking together"*:

> It makes you feel genuinely happy. It was really fun…peaceful and calming. I just felt like I'm on top of the world and I can do anything.

Participant 4 also described feeling happy and calm but also described her experience with feeling confident and motivated as a result of her experience of group cohesion:

> I felt confident…calm and happy. Wanted to go to group…enjoyed the talking. I think it helped motivate me more.

Making Friends

When adolescents experience "*sticking together",* in addition to the internal context of *feeling close to the group,* they also experience a salient relational context, a subcategory characterized as *making friends. Making friends* describes the positive relationships or social connections component of the central category of the cohesion process. Prior to their experience of belonging in a school counseling group, participants' described a lack of positive social relationships or connections with peers, including social isolation and bullying. Participant 7, a 14 year old male who participated in a 7th grade academic support group when he was 13 years old, related his experience with developing a "strong friendship" as an important characteristic of his experience with cohesion in a school counseling group:

> It didn't start out as friendship but it went there as time progressed. After we connected it was a strong friendship.

Open social interactions. *Making friends* can be further categorized by the property of *open social interactions,* which refers to the open, not closed boundaries, or social relationship parameters that characterize group relationships and interactions that occur both intragroup and extragroup. Variations include friendships or relationships and social connections that exist between members before the group and varying subgroup relationships that interact outside of the group. *Open social interactions* refers to the

reality that in adolescent school counseling groups, group members and the school

counselor are interacting in various combinations of dyads or subgroups that occur

outside of the scheduled group counseling sessions, during the school day and outside of

school. An example of *open social interactions* with peer group members described by

Participant 3, a 12 year old female who participated in a 6th grade support group,

highlights the variations in social interactions that occur outside the school counseling

group that influenced her experience of cohesion:

> Not everybody in the group hung out with each other except for group and
> a little bit outside of group at like lunch…Four of them always did hang
> out together but the other two never really bonded with them outside of
> the group.

Participant 1 also described the importance of interacting with the school

counselor outside of the school counseling group as salient in her experience of cohesion

and reflected on the frequency with which this happened for her:

> You can see the counselor outside the group, too. That happened so many
> times.

Lasting connections. While *making friends* includes the property of *open social*

interactions, it also includes the property of *lasting connections* which describes the

enduring nature of group member relationships, including sustained connections with the

school counselor and peer group members after the school counseling group terminates.

Every participant repeatedly voiced the importance of the *lasting connections* they made

with the group as a salient characteristic of their experience of *"sticking together"* and

experiencing the group cohesion process. Participants referred to these relationships as

friendships and every participant experienced a sustained relationship with at least one

peer group member after group termination. In fact, participants experienced *lasting*

connections with multiple group members up to data collection of at least two years after the termination of the school counseling groups. Participant 5, a 16 year old female who participated in a middle school counseling group when she was a 14 year old, described her experience with making friends with everyone in the group and maintaining those friendships up to data collection, which occurred 2 years after her experience with cohesion:

> I'm still friends with everyone in that group. We're still close because of that and can trust each other. We all still have good relationships.

> Likewise, Participant 6, a 15 year old female who participated in a middle school counseling group as a 14 year old, described her experience with creating a *lasting connection* with the school counselor that continued to be a salient characteristic of her relational experience of cohesion even a year after the school counseling group had ended:

> I feel like I have a better connection with her (the school counselor), 'cause she knows me. She's kind of like another friend and I think it's good because she could relate.

Context

Participants also highlighted the importance of group structure and group process as salient context in their experience of cohesion in school counseling groups. Participants emphasized group structure areas of group leadership, a safe environment, group membership boundaries, and a helpful group purpose as integral to their experience of *"sticking together."* Additionally, participants described the importance of group process such as open sharing and self-expression, finding similarities with group members, and resolving conflicts as a salient group process context for their experience

of cohesion in school counseling groups. However, while the results described in this manuscript focus on the details of the cohesion process rather than the context of the process, it is important to understand the characteristics of group structure and group process described by adolescents in their experience of cohesion. The group structure and group process subcategories influence and are influenced by the central category of *"sticking together"* as further described in the following interactions section.

Interactions

The central category of *"sticking together"* influences and is influenced by the dynamic interactions of the various dimensions of the subcategories and properties. The cohesion *"sticking together"* process involves dynamic interaction between *feeling close to the group* and *making friends.* As adolescent participants experienced *feelings of belonging* and *positive feelings* they developed strong social connections with both peers and the school counselor that they experienced as friendships; friendships that lasted long after the school counseling groups ended. All participants emphasized the importance of experiencing the "tight bond" or cohesion outside of the school counseling group, too, as their friendship connections with group members were salient to participants outside of the school counseling group both at school and outside of school and after group termination.

Salient contextual characteristics of participants' experience of cohesion in school counseling groups include characteristics of both group structure and group process. For example, participants' experience of the cohesion process of "*sticking together",* occurred within a context of group process that encouraged open sharing with the group and allowed adolescents to find similarities with their peers and the school counselor and

learn to resolve conflicts in a safe environment facilitated by the school counselor. This

context of group structure and group process facilitated the adolescent experience of the

"*sticking together*" cohesion process and their corresponding *feelings of belonging,*

positive feelings, open social interactions, and *lasting connections* that describe the "tight

bond" cohesion process. Participants reported variations in their emotional responses and

behavioral levels of engagement with the group that influenced and were influenced by

their immediate, here-and-now experience of the cohesion process. However participants

also gave voice to the strength and resiliency of the group bond as a salient part of the

"*sticking together*" process, especially in terms of group process and returning to the

experience of *feeling close to the group* and *making friends.* The following data excerpts

illustrate these and other important interactions of theory categories, subcategories,

properties and dimensions within the contexts of group process and group structure. The

following example describes how Participant 4, a 16 year old male, experienced the

"*sticking together*" cohesion process in a high school counseling group, while illustrating

the interaction of *feelings of belonging, positive feelings* and *making friends.* This

example also highlights the salience of group process and group structure, including the

importance of experiencing a safe environment in the group as context for the experience

of cohesion:

> Well it was my freshman year so I didn't have any high school friends yet.
> It sort of helped me be myself and get friends. The group just helped us
> get to know each other and make a connection and a tight bond just by
> talking…It was pretty weird at first not knowing people and telling them
> your story…But after a while we started to get along and make a lot of
> friend bonds. Whenever I first started talking they said "It's all right" and
> "We can help you get through this." And they did. They wanted to help
> me get out of the life I was stuck in. Help me, give me more options…It
> felt nice that people were working with me. Having people help you was

pretty cool. Then I felt safer and I was comfortable sharing with the people I was with. And throughout there'd be some kids not willing to participate or they'd tune out. And that messes up the bond. But the next day we'd probably be fine and we'd get back to helping each other out. And I gained a new friend from being in the group.

Participant 6, a 15 year old female who experienced a middle school counseling group as an 8th grade student, described her experience of "*sticking together,*" while illustrating the interaction of *feeling close to the group, feelings of belonging,* and *making friends,* and highlighting the importance of group structure such as a helpful group purpose and group process with open sharing and helping:

> I knew I was going in there to get help and help the others. So when I told them what's happening in my life it made me feel better. Because now after every session I felt relief, like I told somebody and I can just go on with my life being a better and happier person. It felt good that somebody wanted to make sure that I was safe and OK and wanted to hear what I had to say. It felt nice going to get all those weights off my shoulders. When I felt close to the group was when we shared some of the stuff that we've gone through and some of the girls told us stuff that they didn't tell anybody else and that just made us feel closer because we had a trust bond now. Then after that it got better and better and we became good friends. I don't think there was ever a time when I didn't feel close to the group. By the time we got close we were pretty much all good friends. I felt like it was a great experience to have that…And it felt nice actually to belong to a group that you can get help from and you can also help somebody else…The girls were really chill…they never did anything to any of us to make us feel like we didn't belong.

Discussion

This study explored the experiences of adolescents with the cohesion process in rural school counseling groups. The grounded theory developed during this investigation identified *"sticking together"* as the central category describing participants' experience of a "tight bond" or the group cohesion process. The central category of "*sticking together"* includes the subcategories of *feeling close to the group* and *making friends.*

Properties of the central category include *feelings of belonging, positive feelings, open social interactions,* and *lasting connections*. The *"sticking together"* cohesion process occurs within the context of group structure and group process. The central category and corresponding properties play an integral role in the adolescent participants' experience of the cohesion process in rural school counseling groups. Participant interviews consistently illustrated the complex and dynamic process of "*sticking together*." Member checking confirmed the emergent grounded theory of "*sticking together*": the adolescent experience of cohesion in rural school counseling groups.

While cohesion is an essential therapeutic factor in group process, to date, the adolescent experience of cohesion in school counseling groups has not been qualitatively researched. The findings from this study represent a description of the adolescent experience of the cohesion process in school counseling groups and address the marginalization of adolescent voices in group process (Shechtman, 2004) and school counseling research (Whiston et al., 2011), while also adding to counseling research in rural settings (Breen & Drew, 2005; Grimes, Haskins, & Paisley, 2013; Sutton & Pearson, 2002). Results share similarities with existing research that group counseling in schools supports positive student development (Gerrity & DeLucia-Waack, 2007; Gladding, 1999; Newsome & Gladding, 2007) and that group cohesion is a salient therapeutic factor in group process with adolescent school counseling groups (Akos et al., 2007; Steen & Bemak, 2008).

Implications

This study provides detailed descriptions of adolescent participants' experiences with the cohesion process in rural school counseling groups. The grounded theory

emphasizes the adolescent experience of cohesion as a process of creating a "tight bond" which highlights feelings of belonging and confidence and lasting social connections and interactions with peers. The findings of this study are relevant to group workers, school counselors, and counselor educators and supervisors, specifically those interested in group work with adolescents in rural areas. In adding to the research on group process in adolescent group work in the schools, it is hoped that school counselors will better understand the salience of group cohesion in group process and provide increased group counseling opportunities for all students to experience belonging and create social connections.

This research has implications for counselor educators and middle and high school counselors facilitating counseling groups with adolescents particularly those working in rural areas. Giving adolescent students the opportunity to experience group cohesion in school counseling groups in rural areas facilitates the development of positive feelings and feelings of belonging while making social connections with peers and the school counselor. Therefore, school counselors have an ethical obligation to offer counseling groups to adolescent students (ASCA, 2008), especially those students experiencing social isolation and feelings of depression, anger and anxiety, as a way to help students experience group acceptance and support while creating lasting connections and positive feelings.

Qualitative descriptions of cohesion by 8-13 year olds in a social skills group (Ware, Ohrt, & Swank, 2012, p. 143) also included the characteristics of a strong bond, developed friendships, and mutual acceptance and support. The subcategory of feeling close to the group is consistent with group process qualitative research with adolescents

that highlights group cohesion as salient in the experience of females in sandtray groups (Swank & Lenes, 2013, p. 341).

While a pilot study of group counseling with high school students (Steen & Bemak, 2008) points to group counseling as a way for adolescents to develop connections, this research gives qualitative voice to the adolescent experience of cohesion and the complex nature of these connections in school counseling groups in rural areas. Additionally, while responsive school counseling facilitates adolescent student experiences of school connectedness (Lapan, Wells, Petersen, & McCann, 2014), this research specifically points to the adolescent experience of developing connections with both peers and the school counselor through school counseling groups. Research with secondary school counselors (Williams, McMahon, McLeod, & Rice, 2013, p. 108), also pointed to the importance of developing meaningful relationships as salient in the cohesion process of group work with adolescents from the perspective of the school counselor. With secondary school counselors specifically describing the importance of group counseling in developing strong and lasting connections between students and the school counselor that improved their work with students and continued after the group ended, this parallels the adolescents' experiences of cohesion in school counseling groups and the lasting connections with the school counselor described in this study albeit from the group leader perspective.

In terms of the result of open social interactions, extragroup interactions between group members were important to intragroup interactions and the adolescent experience of the cohesion process. Similarly, in their discussion of group process, Shechtman and Bar-El (1994, p. 194) reported that adolescent group members felt closer to students

outside of the counseling group and this parallels the experiences of adolescents in this study in terms of the cohesion process extending beyond and outside of the counseling group itself. Similarly, the practice of school counseling in rural areas has been described as having permeable boundaries (Sutton & Pearson, 2003) between school and community and this seems to parallel the experience of adolescents in rural areas in terms of group cohesion and open social interactions where the group boundaries are permeable and variations of extragroup connections interact with and influence the group cohesion process in school counseling groups.

Previous meta-analytic research supports the efficacy of group counseling in the schools (Gerrity & DeLucia-Waack, 2007). Specifically, quantitative research outcomes of group work with adolescents in the schools also highlight improvements in peer relationships and social skills along with improvements in self-esteem and decreases in symptoms of mood, depression, anxiety, and PTSD (Gray & Rubel, n.d.). Specifically, empirical results show adolescent self-esteem and social acceptance improve with group counseling (Shechtman & Bar-El, 1994; Shen & Armstrong, 2008). The results of this research significantly contribute to qualitative research on group process with adolescents and school counseling groups, while also adding voice to counseling research in rural areas.

Limitations

This study provides a deeper understanding of how adolescents experience group cohesion in school counseling groups in rural schools. This grounded theory and detailed descriptions of the adolescent experience of cohesion contribute to the gaps in the literature on group process and adolescents and school counseling research. This

qualitative research gives voice to the group process experience of rural adolescents in school counseling groups and should inform the practice of school counselors, group leaders, supervisors and counselor educators.

While a strength of the study includes the inclusion of a diversity of adolescent research participants and a diversity of school counseling groups in which participants experienced group cohesion (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Singh et al., 2012), only a limited number of participants ($n=6$) provided data, and all participants experienced school counseling groups in rural areas, thus limiting the generalizability of findings. Results include detailed descriptions and participant quotes to provide context and allow readers and school counselors to make decisions regarding transferability of these results across participants and settings. Likewise, while this research focused on adolescent school counseling groups in rural settings, similar research on the group cohesion process in adolescent school counseling groups could be explored across settings and populations.

Additionally, while data collection occurred during the last few sessions of the school counseling group for 3 participants, 4 participants had experienced the group 1 to 2 years after group termination. To capture evolving experiences of cohesion (Kivlighan et al., 2010), future research could target data collection from the beginning to the end of adolescent school counseling groups. Additionally, future research data collection could include research observations of the cohesion process and perhaps participant journals or written responses. Future qualitative research on the adolescent experience of group process in school counseling groups may focus on other areas of group process or the

context of the cohesion process in this grounded theory, such as group leadership or resolving conflicts.

Conclusion

Adolescents who had participated as group members in school counseling groups in rural areas described their experiences of group cohesion. Grounded theory data analysis yielded a theory of the participants' experiences of *"sticking together"* as a "tight bond" that emphasized the internal and relational contexts of the cohesion process including the salient characteristics of positive feelings and feelings of belonging which influenced and were influenced by the development of strong social connections with peers and the school counselor. When adolescents experienced feelings of belonging they also felt confident and experienced intragroup and extragroup social interactions with peers and the school counselor that were described as friendships and close, supportive social connections. Adolescent participants highlighted the saliency of making lasting friendships as an essential characteristic of the cohesion process in school counseling groups in rural areas.

These results add voice to the adolescent experience of group process, specifically group cohesion, in school counseling groups in rural areas and will help inform school counselors and counselor educators in the area of group process with adolescents. Contributing to the limited research on the adolescent experience of group cohesion in school counseling groups, specifically in rural areas, this research opens the door for continued group process research with adolescents and adds perspective on the adolescent experience of cohesion in school counseling groups, which may facilitate the practice of school counseling groups with adolescents.

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Chapter 4

CHAPTER 4: General Conclusions

This dissertation resulted in the creation of two scholarly manuscripts, Chapter 1 and Chapter 2, which both explore the topic of adolescents in school counseling groups. The first manuscript is a literature review on the quantitative outcome research on group work with adolescents in the schools published in the last decade. The second manuscript includes qualitative, grounded theory research to give voice to the adolescent experience of group cohesion in school counseling groups.

The literature review on published quantitative outcome research on group work with adolescents outlines the efficacy of group work with adolescents in the schools while addressing gaps in the literature on group work literature reviews, outcome research on group work with understudied populations, such as adolescents, and outcome research in school counseling. Additionally, this manuscript characterizes and summarizes the current quantitative outcome research on group work with adolescents in the school in the areas of group type, group topic, group participants, group leadership, group size, number of group sessions, length of group sessions, research design, sample size, data measurement and quantitative research outcomes.

This literature review is important because it is the only literature review to address quantitative outcome research regarding group work specifically with the adolescent population in the school setting. From 2003-2012, only 15 of the 30 quantitative research studies on the outcomes of adolescent school counseling groups included participant populations in the United States, the other 15 studies took place in 9 other countries. The majority of the research was on brief psychoeducation and school

counseling groups ranging from 8 to 10 group sessions and typically lasting from 45 to

60 minutes, which focused on personal/social and academic development.

The review included a variety of research designs with a diversity of adolescent

populations and yielded group counseling outcomes of significant efficacy in the areas of

academic, personal/social and career development.

In terms of outcomes, this review revealed the overwhelmingly positive impacts

of group work with adolescents in the schools. The literature review outlined outcomes

of school counseling groups with adolescents that included significant improvements in

achievement test scores, grades, attendance, behaviors, responses to bullying, social

skills, peer relationships, self-esteem, anxiety, depression, and student career

development. The results of this review add to the research efficacy of school counseling

groups (Gerrity & DeLucia-Waack, 2007; Whiston & Sexton, 1998; Whiston, Tai,

Rahardja, & Eder, 2011).

While literature supports the use of group counseling in the schools with

adolescents, there remains a gap in the research literature regarding the dynamics of

group process in school counseling groups (Riva & Haub, 2004, p. 316), and specifically

with the adolescent population (Shechtman, 2004). In terms of group process, successful

groups must have cohesion (Yalom, 1995), an essential therapeutic factor described as

"the value attached to one's sense of belonging in group" (Chase & Kelly, p.159). Given

the developmental importance of peer acceptance and belonging for adolescents (Akos,

Hamm, Mack & Dunaway, 2007, p. 56), and a lack of knowledge of adolescents'

perspectives on cohesion (Shirk & Karver, 2003), the purpose of the research manuscript

was to address the marginalization of adolescent voice in group process and school

counseling research and to understand how adolescents experience cohesion in school

counseling groups. The overall research question was, "How do adolescents experience

group cohesion in school counseling groups?"

The second manuscript presents a detailed description regarding how adolescents

experience cohesion in school counseling groups. Using a grounded theory methodology

to investigate how adolescent groups develop (Rubel & Okech, 2010), adolescent

research participants were interviewed over several months and interviews were

recorded, transcribed and analyzed (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). All participants had

experienced group cohesion in middle school and high school counseling groups in rural

areas. Open and axial coding generated the central category of the cohesion process as

"*sticking together,*" which describes a "tight bond" which includes both internal and

relational contexts including *feeling close to the group* and *making friends.* The central

category of *"sticking together"* influences and is influenced by the dynamic interactions

of the dimensions of the following properties, which further characterize the cohesion

process as experienced by adolescent participants: *feelings of belonging, positive*

feelings, open social interactions, and *lasting connections.*

Participants also highlighted the importance of group structure and group process

as salient context in their experience of cohesion. Participants emphasized the group

structure areas of group leadership, a safe environment, group membership boundaries,

and a helpful group purpose as salient in their experience of group cohesion.

Additionally, participants described the importance of group process such as sharing,

finding similarities and resolving conflicts as a salient context for their experience of

cohesion in school counseling groups.

This study provides a qualitative, descriptive view of how adolescents experience cohesion in school counseling groups in rural areas. The grounded theory emphasizes the adolescent experience of cohesion as a process of creating a "tight bond" that emphasized the internal and relational contexts of the cohesion process including the salient characteristics of positive feelings and feelings of belonging which influenced and were influenced by the development of strong social connections with peers and the school counselor. When adolescents experienced feelings of belonging they also felt confident and experienced intragroup and extragroup social interactions with peers and the school counselor that were described as friendships and close, supportive social connections. Adolescent participants highlighted the saliency of making lasting friendships as an essential characteristic of the cohesion process in school counseling groups.

These results add voice to the adolescent experience of group process, specifically group cohesion, in school counseling groups and will help inform school counselors and counselor educators in in the area of group process with adolescents. This contribution to the limited research on group process in adolescent group work in the schools adds to our understanding of the adolescent experience of group cohesion.

Recommendations for Future Research

More research on school counseling groups with adolescents will facilitate the supervision, training and practice of school counselors while facilitating efficacious outcomes with adolescents in school counseling groups. Future quantitative outcome research on group work with adolescents in the schools should consider research on groups that address the topics of career development and substance use. Future research should also include more minority populations. There is also a need for outcome

research on the impacts of group member gender, age, socioeconomic status, leader variables, group size, and the number and length of group sessions on outcomes in the area of quantitative outcome research on group work with adolescents in the schools. The literature review revealed that previous methodological limitations in research on group work in the schools have been addressed but continue to be salient in outcome research on this topic.

While the qualitative research on the adolescent experience of cohesion contributed to the gaps in literature on group process with adolescents and school counseling research, this research focused on the experience of a limited number of adolescents in a rural setting and readers should consider the transferability of these results across settings and populations. To capture evolving experiences of cohesion and group process, future research could target data collection from the beginning to the end of school counseling groups. Additionally, future research data collection could include research observations of the cohesion process and perhaps participant journal or written responses. Future qualitative research on the adolescent experience of group process in school counseling groups may focus on other areas of group process or the context of the cohesion process in this grounded theory, such as group leadership or resolving conflicts.

Collaboration among researchers and school counselors should address the current gaps in quantitative outcome and qualitative group process research with adolescents in school counseling groups.

Conclusion

While an American School Counselor Association (2008) position statement recommends group counseling should be offered to all students in PK-12 settings,

including the 30 million adolescents attending U.S. schools, it is essential that school counselors have the necessary training and supervision to facilitate efficacious group counseling with adolescents in the schools. This research contributes to research on how adolescents experience group cohesion in school counseling groups by detailing the positive adolescent experience of the cohesion process referred to as "sticking together," which included the characteristics of a tight bond with positive feelings of belonging and group acceptance and making social connections that included lasting friendships Given the importance of peer acceptance for adolescent development, middle school and high school counselors in particular, should consider group counseling as an effective and efficient means to facilitate student success. With the results of the two manuscripts, school counselors should better understand the salience of group cohesion in adolescent school counseling groups and optimally provide increased group counseling opportunities for students to experience belonging and create social connections and friendships. School counselors, counselor educators, supervisors and researchers may incorporate these results into practice and future research with adolescent school counseling groups.

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Appendices

APPENDIX A

Flier for Research Participant Recruitment

OSU

Oregon State
UNIVERSITY

College of Education

SEEKING VOLUNTEERS FOR A RESEARCH STUDY

The purpose of this study is to understand how teens experience belonging in a school counseling group.

To participate in this research, you must:

- Be 12-18 years old
AND
- Have participated in a counseling group with a school counselor in the last 2 years

Participation in this study involves:
- 3 face-to-face interviews (each interview will be less than one hour)
- Answering questions about your experiences of being in a school counseling group
- Audio recording of interviews
- Cash compensation for study participation

Study Title: A Grounded Theory Study of How Adolescents Experience Cohesion in School Counseling Groups   Principal Investigator: Dr. Deborah Rubel

To find out more information about this study,
please contact Tara Gray @ 970-769-9472

Research Study: Teens & School Counseling Groups **Contact:** Tara Gray

Research Study: Teens & School Counseling Groups **Contact:** Tara Gray

Research Study: Teens & School Counseling Groups **Contact:** Tara Gray

Research Study: Teens & School Counseling Groups **Contact:** Tara Gray

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Research Study: Teens & School Counseling Groups **Contact:** Tara Gray

APPENDIX B

Research Participant Recruitment Letter

OSU
Oregon State
UNIVERSITY
College of Education

104 Furman Hall, Corvallis, Oregon 97331-3502
T 541-737-4661 | F 541-737-8971|
http://oregonstate.edu/education

February 28, 2014

Dear Student and Parent(s)/Guardian(s),

I am seeking students who are:

1. 12-18 years old
and
2. who have participated in a school counseling group in the last 2 years

to participate in a research study titled *A Grounded Theory Study of How Adolescents Experience Cohesion in School Counseling Groups*. The purpose of this study is to understand how teens experience cohesion or the sense of belonging in a school counseling group. This study is important because while we know that teens benefit in many ways from participating in school counseling groups, to date, no one has asked teens about how they experience belonging in school counseling groups. This research may help both counselors who work with youth and teens who participate in school counseling groups.

Participation in this study involves:
*   Three face-to-face interviews (each interview will be less than one hour)
*   Answering interview questions about your experiences of belonging in a school counseling group
*   Audio recording of interviews
*   Cash compensation for study participation

For more information about participation in this research study, please contact Tara M. Gray, by phone at (970) 769-9472 or email at grayta@onid.oregonstate.edu. I have enclosed parental permission and consent/assent forms for your review. If you/your child decide(s) to participate in the study, prior to the first interview, we can meet in-person to discuss these forms and allow you and your child the opportunity to ask questions before signing the forms.

Thank you,

Tara M. Gray, MA   Deborah J. Rubel, Ph.D.
Doctoral Candidate   Principal Investigator
Oregon State University   Oregon State University
(970) 769-9472   (541) 737-5973
grayta@onid.oregonstate.edu   deborah.rubel@oregonstate.edu

APPENDIX C

Parental Permission Consent Form

PARENTAL PERMISSION CONSENT FORM
(For parents of participants who are 12-17 years old)

Project Title: A Grounded Theory Study of How Adolescents Experience Cohesion in School Counseling Groups
Principal Investigator: Deborah J. Rubel, PhD
Student Researcher: Tara M. Gray, MA, Doctoral Candidate
Version Date: February 28, 2014

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS FORM?

This form contains information you will need to help you decide whether to allow your child to be in this research study or not. Please read the form carefully and ask the study team member(s) questions about anything that is not clear before signing this form.

WHY IS THIS RESEARCH STUDY BEING DONE?

The purpose of this research study is to explore the experience of cohesion or belonging in a school counseling group with adolescents. This study is a requirement for the completion of my student dissertation. Up to 10 participants may be invited to take part in this study.

WHY IS MY CHILD BEING INVITED TO TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY?

Your child is being invited to take part in this study because he or she is 12-18 years old and has been identified as a previous participant in a school counseling group.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN IF YOUR CHILD TAKES PART IN THIS RESEARCH STUDY?

If you choose to allow your child to participate in this research study, the study activities include participation in three face-to-face interviews and member checking that will take place in a private location mutually agreed upon by the participant and the researcher. Each interview will last approximately 30 to 45 minutes and take place over a four month period. Included in the second and third round of interviews will be a member check which involves an ongoing dialogue with research participants to gauge the accuracy of data and subsequent interpretations. The member checks will only occur in the 2nd and 3rd face-to-face interview and will involve approximately 10 minutes of time. Total participant involvement will consist of approximately 2 hours to 2 hours and 30 minutes over the span of four months. Your child will be asked questions about their experience as a member of a school counseling group and will be asked to reflect on their experiences of belonging in a school counseling group. The second and third interviews will be to clarify and elaborate upon responses from the first round of

interviews and member checking will occur in the 2nd and 3rd interviews. Whether or not you choose to participate in this research study will not affect the school counseling services for your child at their school.

An audio recorder will be used during each interview to record the verbal information your child shares. The audio recordings are being made so that the researchers can make sure that they get everything your child says on record. The audio recording of interviews is a required part of this research study. If you do not wish for your child to be audio recorded please do not enroll them in this study.

The audio recordings of interviews will be stored securely and only researchers, Dr. Deborah Rubel and Tara Gray, will have access to them. After each interview, I will transcribe the interview and then destroy the audiotape. All other data, such as the transcription of audiotapes will be labeled only with the participant's assigned number. Only the researchers, Dr. Deborah Rubel and Tara Gray, will have access to participant names or corresponding numbers. All study related documents, forms and data, including electronic data, will be securely stored by Dr. Deborah Rubel on campus separately in a locked file cabinet in the offices of the Department of Teacher and Counselor Education at Oregon State University for a minimum of three years post study termination. As a safeguard against inadvertent disclosure of individually identifiable information, only completely de-identified date will also be stored by Tara Gray. Data stored on a computer will be password protected and only accessible to the researchers, Dr. Deborah Rubel and Tara Gray.

The study results will be shared with you and your child if you or they request to see the results. Also as part of the member check process the study results will be shared with your child. .

WHAT ARE THE RISKS AND POSSIBLE DISCOMFORTS OF THIS STUDY?

The possible risks and/or discomforts associated with being in the study may include emotional distress. All of the interviews will be conducted in a way that should not inflict any harm. However, the interview questions do ask for you to be reflective of your experiences and that may be uncomfortable. If you feel like talking about your experience is too difficult, I will stop the interview and talk with you about your distress. I am a licensed school counselor and feel very qualified to help you through any emotional distress that may occur during the interviews. Oregon State University has no program to pay for research-related emotional distress. If you would like a referral for counseling, I will work with you to find an appropriate referral for counseling. If at any point you decide that you no longer want to participate in the study, you may leave the study.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF THIS STUDY?

This study is not designed to benefit your child directly. However, when researchers respectfully engage with adolescents as active research participants, teens often find the experience to be empowering and rewarding. Adolescents have reported feeling honored and valued to participate in research interviews because their words and experiences would be used to help other teens. Indirect benefits to your child's participation in this research study include contributing to the understanding of how teens experience the sense of belonging in school counseling groups. This research may help both counselors who work with youth and teens who participate in school counseling groups.

WILL YOUR CHILD BE PAID FOR BEING IN THIS STUDY?

Your child will be paid for being in this research study. Each participant will receive $60 in cash for full participation by completing the three interviews. If you or your child decide(s) to withdraw from the study after two interviews, your child will receive $40 in cash. If you or your child decide(s) to withdraw from the study after one interview, your child will receive $20 in cash.

WILL IT COST ME OR MY CHILD ANYTHING TO BE IN THIS STUDY?

Parking and transportation to and from the agreed upon interview sites will be your responsibility and will not be paid for by the researchers. If you or your child request counseling referrals as a result of discomfort encountered during the research interviews, the cost of counseling will be your responsibility and will not be paid for by the researchers.

WHO IS PAYING FOR THIS STUDY?

The Association for Specialists in Group Work is paying for this research to be done.

WHO WILL SEE THE INFORMATION YOUR CHILD GIVES?

The information your child provides during this research study will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by law.   Research records will be stored securely and only researchers, Dr. Deborah Rubel and Tara Gray, will have access to the records. Federal regulatory agencies and the Oregon State University Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews and approves research studies) may inspect and copy records pertaining to this research. Some of these records could contain information that personally identifies your child.

If the results of this project are published your child's identity will not be made public. Results will be reported in a summarized manner in such a way that your child cannot be identified.

To help ensure confidentiality, your child will be asked not to reveal any identifying information or identifying information of anyone else they mention, including friends or other school counseling group members, during the interviews The researchers will utilize a technique called peer review and debriefing, where the research will be reviewed by academic colleagues, such as other professors and doctoral students, to strengthen the research process. This discussion will not reveal any identifiable participant information.

Under Oregon law, researchers are required to report to the appropriate authorities any information concerning child abuse or neglect. The researchers may also report threats of harm to self or to others. The only time your child's identity would be revealed is if during an interview, they tell me something that I must report by law.

WHAT OTHER CHOICES DOES MY CHILD HAVE IF THEY DO NOT TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY?
Participation in this study is completely voluntary. If you decide to allow your child to participate, you are free to withdraw them at any time without penalty. Your child will not be treated differently if they decide to stop taking part in the study. If you choose to withdraw your child from this project before it ends, the researchers may keep information collected about your child and this information may be included in study reports.

WHO DO I CONTACT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS?

If you have any questions about this research project, please contact:
Tara Gray, MA at: (970) 769-9472   Email: grayta@onid.oregonstate.edu
Deborah Rubel, PhD at: 541-737-5973   Email: deborah.rubel@oregonstate.edu

If you have questions about your rights or welfare as a participant, please contact the Oregon State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) Office, at (541) 737-8008 or by email at IRB@oregonstate.edu

ASSENT STATEMENT
This research study has been explained to my child in my presence in language my child can understand. He/she has been encouraged to ask questions about the study now and at any time in the future.

WHAT DOES MY SIGNATURE ON THIS CONSENT FORM MEAN?
Your signature indicates that this study has been explained to you, that your questions have been answered, and that you agree to take part in this study. You will receive a copy of this form.

Do not sign after the expiration date:

Participant's Name (printed):_____

_____ _____
(Signature of Participant)   (Date)

_____ _____
(Signature of Researcher Obtaining Consent)   (Date)

_____ _____
(Parent/Guardian/ Legally Authorized Representative)   (Date)

APPENDIX D

Research Participant Assent Form

ASSENT FORM (For participants who are 12-17 years old)

Project Title: A Grounded Theory Study of How Adolescents Experience Cohesion in School Counseling Groups
Principal Investigator: Deborah J. Rubel, PhD
Student Researcher(s): Tara M. Gray, MA, Doctoral Candidate

We are asking you if you want to be in a research study. Research is a way to test new ideas and learn new things. You do not have to be in the study if you do not want to. You can say Yes or No. If you say yes now, you can change your mind later.

Ask questions if there is something you do not understand. After all of your questions have been answered, you can decide if you want to be in this study or not.

This study is about how teens experience belonging in a school counseling group with other teens. We are studying this because, to date, no one has asked teens about how they experience belonging in school counseling groups.

We are asking you if you want to be in this study because you are a teenager between the ages of 12-17 years old, and we want to hear what it was like for you to be in a school counseling group.

If you take part in this study, we will ask you to participate in three different face-to-face interviews with the researcher that will take place in a private place (like the public library). Each interview will last about 30 to 45 minutes and take place over a four month period. In the 2nd and 3rd interviews we will show you some of our ideas about the results to see if we are understanding what you said correctly. This will take approximately 10 minutes. If you agree to take part in this study, your total involvement will consist of approximately 2 hours to 2 hours and 30 minutes over the span of four months. You will be asked questions about your experience as a teenager in a school counseling group and you will be asked to reflect on your experiences of belonging in a school counseling group. Each interview will build upon previous information shared in the first round of interviews. There are no right or wrong answers to the questions. Whether or not you choose to participate in this research study will not affect the school counseling services at your school.

An audio recorder will be used during each interview to record the information you share. The audio recordings are being made so that I can make sure that what you think is important is on record. The audio recording of interviews is a required part of this

research study. If you do not wish to be audio recorded you should not say yes to being in this study.

Some things that might happen to you if you are in this study include possible discomforts from answering questions about your experience in a school counseling group and the inconvenience of spending time outside of the school day to answer questions. All of the interviews will be conducted in a safe way so that no teen will be harmed. However, the interview questions do ask you to think about your experiences and sometimes that may be uncomfortable. If you feel like talking about your experience is too difficult, I will stop the interview and talk with you about your distress.

Some good things that might happen to you if you are in this study include feeling special because someone cares about what you have to say and will spend time listening to you. Teens have reported feeling honored and valued when they participate in research interviews because their words and experiences are used to help other teens. We are not sure that these things will happen. We might also find out things that will help other teens some day.

We will write a report when the study is over, but we will not use your name in the report.

If you want to be in the study, please have your parents call or email Tara M. Gray at (970) 769-9472 or grayta@onid.oregonstate.edu. If you decide to participate in the study, prior to the first interview, we can meet in-person to discuss this form and allow you the opportunity to ask any questions before signing your name on the line below.

Participant's Name (printed): _____

_____ _____
(Signature of Participant)   (Date)

_____ _____
(Signature of Person Obtaining Assent)   (Date)

APPENDIX E

Initial Interview Questions

How do adolescents experience cohesion in school counseling groups?

1) How did you experience the school counseling group you were in (including both positive and negative experiences)?

2) How would you describe what it's like to belong to a school counseling group and how would you describe what it's like to not belong to a school counseling group?

3) Did anything happen in the school counseling group that affected the way you either felt like you belonged or didn't belong in the group?

4) Did anything happen in the school counseling group that made you want to be in the group or stay in the group or did anything happen in the group that made you want to leave the group or not be in the group?

5) Describe how your sense of belonging to the school counseling group or not belonging to the group may have changed over time.

6) Was there anything that happened in the school counseling group with other members of the group that helped you feel like you belonged or didn't belong to the group?

7) Was there anything that happened in the school counseling group with the group leader that helped you feel like you belonged or didn't belong to the group?

APPENDIX F

First Round Interviews

After the first round of interviews, open coding and axial coding generated the following

concepts and definitions (along with a saved paper audit trail of diagrams, *in vivo* codes

and concepts).

Categories are in CAPITALS
Subcategories are in **bold**
Properties are in standard font
Dimensions are *italicized*

"Before I was in the group, I had more problems than I do now."

"They gave me respect, I gave them respect back. Then they opened up with me, I
opened up with them. Then we became friends." "The more drama the closer we get"
"yeah like the more heaviness the closer we feel afterwards"

"it (not being honest with the group) just wrecks what we had and the group's not the
same."

"It feels better because you have a group to run to if you're having problems"

I.   EXPERIENCING ISOLATION-Prior to their school counseling group experience
      and during the group experience under certain contexts, this category
      characterizes the experience not belonging. "Before the group ever started, I felt
      like I didn't belong to any group." "it was my freshman year, so I didn't have any
      high school friends yet."

      A. Internal context

      1. Feeling left out-(*in school; outside of school)*- "for a while I was really
         sad" "lonely" "I felt that nobody cared about my opinion or what I said"
         "It felt like there was no one I could really talk to or anything like that."

      2. Coping with stress (*range of coping with academic & personal/social
         problems; from not to coping)* "I was stuck" "At first I didn't like
         anyone" "There were some people that when they joined the group I was
         like "I don't really like them that much. But then I never really talked to
         them."

B. External context-"Before I was in the group, I had more problems than I do now."

   1. School Environment (range of problems at school-grades; attendance; bullying)- "nobody was talking to me" "it was my freshman year, so I didn't have any high school friends yet." "Before the group I was a C & D student" "I moved here in 7th grade and I was trying to get used to it and a couple of people weren't exactly nice to me and they kept bullying me." "it was my freshman year, so I didn't have any high school friends yet."

   2. Home Environment (range of problem severity at home???-no problems to small problems to many severe problems???)- "Everyone in that group had a terrible home life"

II.   DEVELOPING CONNECTIONS –group process. *Responding to group experience* (both changing feelings and changing connections which are responses to the group experience/process) and *Beginning to experience therapeutic factors* (including changing feelings and changing sense of safety). Experiences of developing connections and experiencing therapeutic factors (universality, altruism, installation of hope, imparting information, etc.) and responding to new group experience (anxiety/new experience/conflict). "It's kind of like you get a new bond every time a story is told" "yeah like the more heaviness the closer we feel afterwards" "Then I started getting to know them." "The more we get to know each other the more we can open up." "If we all have a problem with each other she'll do an exercise that makes us deal with it and we'll be friends again."

   A. Beginning to experience therapeutic factors-Beginning to connect/experiencing therapeutic factors (universality, catharsis, altruism, installation of hope, imparting information, etc.)-"Sharing made me feel closer to the other girls." "I'm OK because you're here." "When they would tell me something, I knew they trusted me."

      1. Sharing experiences-experiencing universality (*member & leader sharing verbally & nonverbally of feelings, experiences and thoughts (activities/stories); active listening)-* "Well in the group the first time, we just talked about our lives and I realized that I have a lot in common with the others." "It felt good to know that I wasn't the only one who had some of these problems at home or dealing with other people in school." "Then I started getting to know them." "Being able to find similarities in our problems." (*feelings of relief; empathetic feelings for others)-*"I felt relieved being able to tell people" "It felt good to know that I wasn't the only one who had some of these problems at home or dealing with other people in school." "Whenever I heard this one kid's story, it sounded like

mine, so I connected with him." "it felt nice going to get all those weights off my shoulders."

2. Changing sense of safety-Safety and respect-(*safe, not safe*)-"Being able to trust everybody" I felt "safer and I was comfortable sharing my ideas with the people I was with." "They gave me respect and I gave them respect back." "Aggravating" and "irritating" (when members not participating/respecting). "When they would tell me something, I knew they trusted me." "They would share their personal experiences of what happened and it felt like they really trusted me with that information and knowing that I wasn't going to tell anybody because what was told in the group stays in the group." "I just felt like they really trusted me." "I felt like they really look up to me." "it made me feel really honored to know that she was trusting us younger girls with stuff." "Some people you can't trust in our group because they're blabber mouths and they can't keep secrets." "Me and my friends in the group we keep secrets and we don't tell anyone else outside the group"

B. **Responding to group experience-** (resolving/processing) "The more drama the closer we get" "It was a totally different experience. But then you tried it out and realized it was helpful." "Then sometimes we get in really, really big argument. And then we're kind of away from each other that whole day." "If we all have a problem with each other she'll do an exercise that makes us deal with it and we'll be friends again." "some of the kids would disrupt the lessons and that makes the group feel horrible for the rest of us."

1. Changing feelings in group/about group- (*uncomfortable, depressing, scary, irritation;comfortable, motivating,safe,happy, fun)*- At first, "Why am I being picked?" "So we were just sitting there trying to talk about our personal life when we barely knew each other. I thought it was really awkward" "I wouldn't want to tell anyone anything if I thought they were just going to go tell other people about it." "nervous" "it didn't really feel good" "it gets depressing, really scary" "everybody was mad at me" "Aggravating" and "irritating" (when members not participating/respecting) "it was uncomfortable and I just wanted to leave" "it gets really heavy" vs. "We would laugh about it or we would want to do it again and again. It was just really fun to bond with these girls." "I'm OK because you're here." "some of the kids would disrupt the lessons and that makes the group feel horrible for the rest of us." "it made me irritated when they don't pay attention" 'It made me feel empty and like no one liked me" "it made me happy" "Then I felt safer and I was comfortable sharing my ideas with the people I was with"

2. Changing connections in the group (*connecting more to members & leader; connecting less to members/leader)*-"Some of us are really close

and some of us are not that close" "She betrayed all of us. She did everything behind our back and she said she wasn't. It was really bad" "it (not being honest with the group) just wrecks what we had and the group's not the same." "They were telling each other secrets and whispering. Usually the group's not like that and we're always doing the same thing." Some kids didn't want to do it. They just took out time arguing." "people were screaming and crying" "She made everyone feel really welcome." "At first I was kind of against it because they were recognizing that I had some issues." "So then I noticed that I had a friend in there and that the leader was really cool." "They're outlasting people." "I was trying to avoid it" "Sometimes in the group it was just me sitting there for the entire time only listening. So it was basically like all them sitting there talking or fighting and I didn't really say anything. Then other times they wanted my input. Like I shouldn't have been there for those times because it wasn't mine to deal with." "I was sitting away from everybody"

III.   EXPERIENCING COHESIVENESS- **Sticking together** *Experiencing belonging* is the central category because of its central and pivotal relationship to the whole process of the participant adolescents'experience of cohesion in school counseling groups. "Like more and more trust and being able to have them help me out and me help them out." "It's really helped a lot" "I'm OK because you're here." "Basically they were all just there for me" "She (the group leader) talked about that. She's like, "it just seems like you just don't care about the group" and then everyone started acting like they cared."

   A. Experiencing therapeutic factors -giving and receiving help in the group "Feeling like you're a part of something that's helpful." "There was something going on at home with one girl and we all got to help her and that felt good."

      1. Feeling a part of something helpful (*feeling safe, cared about, welcomed, listened to; empathy, caring for other group members*)-"it made me happy and excited because I wouldn't be spending my time alone anymore." "I just feel happier and like I'm wanted." "It feels better" "Feeling Welcome" "wanting to go (to group)" "really looking forward to it" "It's been 2 years, but I remember it was on Tuesdays and I always looked forward to it." "There would be crying in the session but at the end of the day, we all knew that we had each other's back." "I feel like I have a better connection with her because she knows me." "When we do the stress release exercises it replenishes me a lot" "I'm OK because you're here." "I trusted the group at first and then one boy told one thing to a whole bunch of people." "enjoyed the talking"

      2. Relating to others-Maintaining/Negotiating relationships (*during the group with members & leader; outside of the group with members, leader,*

family)-"having some help" "you have a group to run to if you're having a nervous breakdown." "you know that there's someone there for you" "you can really pour your heart out" "She (group leader" relates to us" "Got to do a lot of cool stuff." "we can really express ourselves with each other." "we were going to support the other person no matter what they're going through or that the cause may be." "People care about you notice you and support you." "It helped me be myself and get friends." "During lunch he'd come and talk to me and see how I was doing. Just checking up with me. And he still does that" "I'm still friends with all of them." "Basically they were all just there for me" "I finally realized that there are people who care about me" "now I have a whole bunch of friends so I'm not lonely but I still like going to group"

B. Coping with stress "It's helped a lot" "now we don't even need the counseling because we know what to do. And how we work together."

1. Feeling confident/empowered to solve problems (*personal/social; academic)*- "made me feel happy because I wouldn't be so lonely any more" "now we don't even need the counseling because we know what to do. And how we work together." "we just don't even need the counseling now" "it felt pretty good being able to actually have good relationships with people" "it's confidence boosting" "we always have fun and talk with each other in a good way and see how each other is doing and in a way that always helps you feel more confident about yourself and what you're wearing and doing." "being wanted. People wanting to see you and talk to you. Feeling like someone likes you"

2. Context-Applying skills (*personal/social skills (friendships with group members, friendships with nongroup members, relationship with the school counselor); academic skills)*-"Some of the scenarios helped and we worked on different skills" "I felt like I was more able to be open to anybody who would be out of the group." "I felt good about who I am." "I felt like I was still going to be able to talk to the friends that I made in group." "learned how to overcome the problems" "I gained a new friend being in the group." "It helped me be myself and get friends." "I made a lot of friends and got to know a lot of people." "I use the stress release exercises whenever I get insane." "Before I was in the group, I had more problems than I do now." "Now I'm an A & B student" "I'm still friends with all of them."

What is happening? What are the process, interactions, and relationships between categories? What does it mean for the participants? Open coding began with in vivo

codes and constant comparison of data. Initial categories included Belonging, Getting to know each other, Leader interventions, Continuing connections, Feeling left out. Analysis included asking "how does cohesion develop?" and categories were reduced to Experiencing isolation, Developing connections, and experiencing cohesion with subcategories of internal context (feeling left out and coping with stress), external context (group, school and home environment), sharing experiences, changing sense of safety, responding to group experience (changing feelings and changing connections), experiencing therapeutic factors, feeling a part of something helpful, relating to others, coping with stress, feeling empowered to cope with stress, and applying skills. At this point, I found that Yalom's group theory and stage theories of group development began influencing how I was analyzing data. Charmaz (2006) cautions against forcing data into extant concepts and theories.

After consultation with advisor, I began asking "What's central to the process of cohesion development? What is the context?" At this point, I began looking more closely at the experience of conflict and noticed it takes place in several categories. At this point, I elevated experiencing conflict to a category and even considered its place as a central category. I also began more closely looking at the experience of isolation and where that fits with cohesion development. Experiencing isolation seems to coincide with conflict and reportedly occurs before school counseling group experience and during cohesion development. Many participants reported that experiencing isolation influenced cohesion development. Experiencing isolation in the group decreased the feeling of cohesion while experiencing conflict either increased or decreased the experience of cohesion development depending on how the conflict was dealt with. This seems to

indicate a salient part of the process that adolescents' experience in school counseling group cohesion development. When I look at data again, I remember that with some participants, conflict or feeling left out was not a critical part of the cohesion development experience for them. This makes me wonder more about this experience and how participants either encounter or deal with conflict. I also wonder about their comfort level and experience with talking about conflict. In the next data collection interviews, I want to know more about the experience of conflict (Who?, When?, How?, Why? and consequences for cohesion development?).

Where does the group leaders' interventions fit into the emerging theory? Is the leader a context of the experience? Could contexts include relationships in school counseling group, relationships in school, and relationships at home or outside of school? The following data are critical to the process of cohesion development. New categories must be developed to adequately describe these experiences:

"They gave me respect, I gave them respect back. Then they opened up with me, I opened up with them. Then we became friends." "The more drama the closer we get" "yeah like the more heaviness the closer we feel afterwards" "it (not being honest with the group) just wrecks what we had and the group's not the same." "It feels better because you have a group to run to if you're having problems" "Before I was in the group, I had more problems than I do now."

Axial coding relates categories to subcategories, specifies the properties and dimensions of a category, and reassembles the data you have fractured during initial coding. Now I'm reconceptualizing the data and defining the categories with empirical

evidence. I'm asking how the categories, subcategories, properties and dimensions interrelate. New categories created:

Assessing relationship safety/trust-This category is defined by the participants' changing assessment of the sense of safety/trust throughout the group experience. Assessing relationship safety/trust includes the subcategories of Expressing ourselves and Giving/receiving help/support. Expressing ourselves includes characteristics of expressing emotions (sad;happy;varied intensity) and expressing behaviors (????) "I trusted the group at first and then one boy told one thing to a whole bunch of people." "Like more and more trust and being able to have them help me out and me help them out." "Basically they were all just there for me" "Some of us are really close and some of us are not that close" "So we were just sitting there trying to talk about our personal life when we barely knew each other. I thought it was really awkward" "I wouldn't want to tell anyone anything if I thought they were just going to go tell other people about it." "When they would tell me something, I knew they trusted me." "They gave me respect, I gave them respect back. Then they opened up with me, I opened up with them. Then we became friends." "Being able to trust everybody" I felt "safer and I was comfortable sharing my ideas with the people I was with." "They gave me respect and I gave them respect back." "When they would tell me something, I knew they trusted me." "They would share their personal experiences of what happened and it felt like they really trusted me with that information and knowing that I wasn't going to tell anybody because what was told in the group stays in the group." "I just felt like they really trusted me." "I felt like they really look up to me." "it made me feel really honored to know that she was trusting us younger girls with stuff." "Some people you can't trust in our group

because they're blabber mouths and they can't keep secrets." "Me and my friends in the group we keep secrets and we don't tell anyone else outside the group" The subcategory of respect is defined by listening…………. (need to define more!). Participants identified contextual subcategories that include their experiences in the school counseling group but also include their experiences outside of the group at school (and outside of the group outside of school???). Participants described the conditions of relationship trust/safety in the school counseling group with respect to their relationship with the other group members and the group leader. "At first I didn't like anyone" "There were some people that when they joined the group I was like "I don't really like them that much. But then I never really talked to them." Participants described the conditions of relationship trust/safety in school outside of the school counseling group with other group members and the group leader. Participants described the conditions of relationship trust/safety outside of school at home (is this relevant to their experience of cohesion development in school counseling groups???? Ask more questions about how this relates to the categories/subcategories!). Need to know more about this process/category!

Getting to know each other and self, which includes getting to know the group members and leader. .")- .")-"having some help" "you have a group to run to if you're having a nervous breakdown." "you know that there's someone there for you" "you can really pour your heart out" "She (group leader" relates to us" "Got to do a lot of cool stuff." "we can really express ourselves with each other." "we were going to support the other person no matter what they're going through or that the cause may be." "People care about you notice you and support you." "It helped me be myself and get friends." "During lunch he'd come and talk to me and see how I was doing. Just checking up with

me. And he still does that" "I'm still friends with all of them." "Basically they were all just there for me" "I finally realized that there are people who care about me" "now I have a whole bunch of friends so I'm not lonely but I still like going to group" "I feel like I have a better connection with her because she knows me." "Feeling like you're a part of something that's helpful." " "Some of us are really close and some of us are not that close" "We would laugh about it or we would want to do it again and again. It was just really fun to bond with these girls." "So we were just sitting there trying to talk about our personal life when we barely knew each other. I thought it was really awkward" "I wouldn't want to tell anyone anything if I thought they were just going to go tell other people about it." "It's kind of like you get a new bond every time a story is told" "The more we get to know each other the more we can open up." "Sharing made me feel closer to the other girls." "It was a totally different experience. But then you tried it out and realized it was helpful." "At first I didn't like anyone" "There were some people that when they joined the group I was like "I don't really like them that much. But then I never really talked to them." "Everyone in that group had a terrible home life" "I moved here in 7th grade and I was trying to get used to it and a couple of people weren't exactly nice to me and they kept bullying me." "it was my freshman year, so I didn't have any high school friends yet." "It feels better because you have a group to run to if you're having problems" "Well in the group the first time, we just talked about our lives and I realized that I have a lot in common with the others." "It felt good to know that I wasn't the only one who had some of these problems at home or dealing with other people in school." "Then I started getting to know them." "Being able to find similarities in our problems." "I felt relieved being able to tell people" "It felt good to know that I wasn't

the only one who had some of these problems at home or dealing with other people in school." "Whenever I heard this one kid's story, it sounded like mine, so I connected with him." "it felt nice going to get all those weights off my shoulders." This category also includes the subcategory of **Getting to know myself better**, **"It's helped a lot" "now we don't even need the counseling because we know what to do. And how we work together."** Feeling confident/empowered to solve problems (*personal/social; academic)*- "made me feel happy because I wouldn't be so lonely any more" "now we don't even need the counseling because we know what to do. And how we work together." "we just don't even need the counseling now" "it felt pretty good being able to actually have good relationships with people" "it's confidence boosting" "we always have fun and talk with each other in a good way and see how each other is doing and in a way that always helps you feel more confident about yourself and what you're wearing and doing." "being wanted. People wanting to see you and talk to you. Feeling like someone likes you" Context-Applying skills (*personal/social skills (friendships with group members, friendships with nongroup members, relationship with the school counselor); academic skills)*-"Some of the scenarios helped and we worked on different skills" "I felt like I was more able to be open to anybody who would be out of the group." "I felt good about who I am." "I felt like I was still going to be able to talk to the friends that I made in group." "learned how to overcome the problems" "I gained a new friend being in the group." "It helped me be myself and get friends." "I made a lot of friends and got to know a lot of people." "I use the stress release exercises whenever I get insane." "Before I was in the group, I had more problems than I do now." "Now I'm an A & B student" "I'm still friends with all of them." which includes learning about their thoughts, feelings, and

actions with others both in the group and outside of group.)-"having some help" "you

have a group to run to if you're having a nervous breakdown." "you know that there's

someone there for you" "you can really pour your heart out" "She (group leader" relates

to us" "Got to do a lot of cool stuff." "we can really express ourselves with each other."

"we were going to support the other person no matter what they're going through or that

the cause may be." "People care about you notice you and support you." "It helped me

be myself and get friends." "During lunch he'd come and talk to me and see how I was

doing. Just checking up with me. And he still does that" "I'm still friends with all of

them." "Basically they were all just there for me" "I finally realized that there are people

who care about me" "now I have a whole bunch of friends so I'm not lonely but I still

like going to group"

 "When we do the stress release exercises it replenishes me a lot" "I felt relieved being

able to tell people" "I realized that I have a lot in common with the others." "I'm OK

because you're here." "Before I was in the group, I had more problems than I do now." "I

moved here in 7th grade and I was trying to get used to it and a couple of people weren't

exactly nice to me and they kept bullying me." "I was stuck" "Before the group I was a

C & D student" "it made me happy and excited because I wouldn't be spending my time

alone anymore." "I just feel happier and like I'm wanted." "It feels better" "Feeling

Welcome" "wanting to go (to group)" "really looking forward to it" "It's been 2 years,

but I remember it was on Tuesdays and I always looked forward to it."

Responding to conflict-"The more drama the closer we get" "yeah like the more

heaviness the closer we feel afterwards" "it (not being honest with the group) just wrecks

what we had and the group's not the same." **Experiencing conflicts**, a subcategory of

Responding to conflict, describes the conditions of experiencing conflicts as reported by adolescents. Experiencing conflicts has three properties: An argument or fight ("I trusted the group at first and then one boy told one thing to a whole bunch of people." "everybody was mad at me" "Then sometimes we get in really, really big argument. And then we're kind of away from each other that whole day."), intense feelings "There would be crying in the session but at the end of the day, we all knew that we had each other's back."), and when someone in the group isn't participating ("some of the kids would disrupt the lessons and that makes the group feel horrible for the rest of us.") or doesn't feel included in the group. **Changing connections** is a subcategory of Responding to conflict and describes the conditions of **feeling left out** and **feeling closer** in the school counseling group. *)-* "She (the group leader) talked about that. She's like, "it just seems like you just don't care about the group" and then everyone started acting like they cared." "There would be crying in the session but at the end of the day, we all knew that we had each other's back." "Some of us are really close and some of us are not that close" "Then sometimes we get in really, really big argument. And then we're kind of away from each other that whole day." "it was uncomfortable and I just wanted to leave" "some of the kids would disrupt the lessons and that makes the group feel horrible for the rest of us." "nervous" "it didn't really feel good" "it gets depressing, really scary" "everybody was mad at me" "Aggravating" and "irritating" (when members not participating/respecting) "for a while I was really sad" "lonely" "I felt that nobody cared about my opinion or what I said" "It felt like there was no one I could really talk to or anything like that." "nobody was talking to me" "it was my freshman year, so I didn't have any high school friends yet." "At first I didn't like anyone" "There were some

people that when they joined the group I was like "I don't really like them that much. But then I never really talked to them." "It feels better because you have a group to run to if you're having problems" "If we all have a problem with each other she'll do an exercise that makes us deal with it and we'll be friends again." "We would laugh about it or we would want to do it again and again. It was just really fun to bond with these girls." "I'm OK because you're here." "some of the kids would disrupt the lessons and that makes the group feel horrible for the rest of us." "it made me irritated when they don't pay attention" 'It made me feel empty and like no one liked me" "it made me happy" "Then I felt safer and I was comfortable sharing my ideas with the people I was with." " "She betrayed all of us. She did everything behind our back and she said she wasn't. It was really bad" "it (not being honest with the group) just wrecks what we had and the group's not the same." "They were telling each other secrets and whispering. Usually the group's not like that and we're always doing the same thing." Some kids didn't want to do it. They just took out time arguing." "people were screaming and crying" "She made everyone feel really welcome." "At first I was kind of against it because they were recognizing that I had some issues." "So then I noticed that I had a friend in there and that the leader was really cool." "They're outlasting people." "I was trying to avoid it" "Sometimes in the group it was just me sitting there for the entire time only listening. So it was basically like all them sitting there talking or fighting and I didn't really say anything. Then other times they wanted my input. Like I shouldn't have been there for those times because it wasn't mine to deal with." "I was sitting away from everybody" "Feeling like you're a part of something that's helpful." ""it made me happy and excited because I wouldn't be spending my time alone anymore." "I just feel happier and like

I'm wanted." "It feels better" "Feeling Welcome" "wanting to go (to group)" "really looking forward to it" "It's been 2 years, but I remember it was on Tuesdays and I always looked forward to it."

Emerging Hypothesis

After narrowing the process of cohesion to really focus on participants' experience to group cohesion and moving away from group theories, data analysis generated four major categories that describe participants' experience of cohesion in school counseling groups: (1) *sharing experiences,* (2) *experiencing and responding to getting to know each other*, (3) *experiencing and responding to trust and safety*, (4) *experiencing and responding to conflict.*

Sharing experiences- This category seems to be the main category and includes the categories described above (Getting to know each other and self, Assessing relationship trust/safety, Responding to conflict) and the dimension of Feeling close/feeling left out (which is a consequence or condition of the category and subcategory properties). Feeling close/left out is the crux condition of cohesion development and changes and fluctuates depending on the subcategory and subcategory properties of Getting to know members, Getting to know leader, Getting to know self, Expressing ourselves, Giving/receiving help, Disrupting members and Not participating members.

Process interactions- The process of interaction between the categories is ongoing throughout the group and occurs simultaneously to influence the adolescents' experience of cohesion development. Responding to conflict influences and is influenced by Assessing relationship safety/trust and Getting to know each other and self. Getting to know each other and self, influences and is influenced by Assessing relationship

safety/trust and Responding to conflict. Assessing relationship safety/trust influences and

is influenced by the categories of Getting to know each other and self and Responding to

conflict. All of the properties and dimensions of the subcategories influence the

experience of Feeling close/feeling left out. Also the categories of Getting to know each

other and self, Assessing relationship trust/safety, and Responding to conflict represent

conditions that contribute to the higher, main concept category of Sharing experiences.

Some of the experiences lead members to feel closer to the group while some of the

experiences lead members to feel less close to the group. "When they would tell me

something, I knew they trusted me." "Then sometimes we get in really, really big

arguments. And then we're kind of away from each other that whole day." "I trusted the

group at first and then one boy told one thing to a whole bunch of people." "She (the

group leader) talked about that. She's like, "it just seems like you just don't care about

the group" and then everyone started acting like they cared."

Sharing Experiences

From the moment the school counseling group begins, participants' report the

importance of "being a part of something." "you have a group to run to" "basically they

were all just there for me" The central category, *sharing experiences*, includes sharing the

experience of being in the group together. "sharing made me feel closer to the other girls"

As highlighted by participants, three types of *sharing experiences* are of categorical

importance to the process of cohesion development, including *experiencing and*

responding to getting to know each other, experiencing and responding to trust and

safety, and *experiencing and responding to conflict. Sharing experiences* includes the

participants' experiences of *sticking together-*"you know that there's someone there for

you" and "But at the end of the day we all knew that we had each other's back" and *feelings of closeness*-feeling close, feeling closer, not feeling close, feeling left out-varies in relation to the group members and the leader "feeling like someone likes you, being wanted, people wanting to see you and talk to you" "I'm still friends with all of them." "at first I didn't like anyone" "there was some people that when they joined the group I was like "I don't really like them that much, but then I never really talked to them" "everybody was mad at me" "they're out casting people" "I was trying to avoid it" "it felt like there was no one I could really talk to or anything like that" "nobody was talking to me" "some of us are really close and some of us are not that close." The experiences of *sticking together* and *feelings of closeness* influence, are influenced by and interact with the other categories, *experiencing and responding to getting to know each other, experiencing and responding to trust and safety,* and *experiencing and responding to conflict.* The process of interaction between the categories is ongoing throughout the school counseling groups and occurs simultaneously to influence the adolescents' experience of cohesion development. These experiences occur in the context of the school counseling group but also occur outside of the group (both at school and outside of school). Given that group members frequently interact outside of the group, participants' experiences of each category of the cohesion development process influence and are influenced by both contexts.

Experiencing and Responding to Trust and Safety

Safety and trust were a key characteristic of the participants' experience of group cohesion development. *Experiencing and responding to trust and safety* is defined by the participants' experience of trust and safety which varies throughout the cohesion process

from not feeling very safe and not trusting the group to feeling very safe and trusting the

group "like more and more trust" and "being able to trust everybody" and "I just felt like

the really trusted me" "if made me feel really honored to know that she was trusting us

younger girls with stuff." "feeling welcome" "wanting to go (to group)" "really looking

forward to it" Experiencing *and responding to trust and safety* facilitated participants'

experiences of *expressing ourselves* and *giving and receiving support. Expressing*

ourselves "we can really express ourselves" "you can really pour your heart out…it

makes you feel better" "it felt nice going to get all those weights off my shoulders" refers

to the verbal and nonverbal expressions of feelings. Examples range from laughing,

poetic dancing, screaming, crying, curling up in a ball, and talking "the way that we

usually do with each other." "She doesn't make us censor our language so we went along

with that." At times the expressed feelings were very intense and participants' responded

in various ways, including feeling "feeling better" "feeling relieved" and *feeling closer*

"yeah like the more heaviness the closer we feel afterwards."

Giving and receiving support includes giving and receiving respect, help, advice,

caring, and feedback. "we were going to support the other person no matter what they're

going through or what the cause may be" "people care about you, notice you and support

you" "I finally realized that there are people who care about me" "They gave me respect,

I gave them respect." "being able to have them help me out and me help them out" "you

know that there's someone there for you." Participants expressed discomfort and

awkwardness in *expressing ourselves* and *giving and receiving support* when trust and

safety were developing in the beginning of the group. However, as participants

experienced confidentiality and trust and safety in the group, they reported more comfort

with *expressing ourselves* and *giving and receiving support.* Likewise, as participants began expressing themselves more and giving and receiving support they reported experiencing more trust and safety in the group and outside of the group. These experiences influenced, were influenced by and interacted with *feelings of closeness* and *sticking together.* As participants experienced trust and safety they felt closer to the group and stuck together more. "then they opened up to me and I opened up with them. Then we became friends" However when the experience of trust and safety was compromised, participants' reported withdrawing from the group and feeling "left out." "I wouldn't want to tell anyone anything if I thought they were just going to tell other people about it." "I trusted the group at first and then one boy told one thing to a whole bunch of people." "some people you can't trust in our group because they're blabber mouths and they can't keep secrets"

Experiencing and Responding to Getting to Know Each Other and Self

Integral to the participants' experience of belonging in a school counseling group is the process of *experiencing and getting to know each other and self,* which includes telling personal stories and respectfully listening to other members. "now we don't even need the counseling because we know what to do and how we work together" "It felt good to know that I wasn't the only one who had some of these problems at home or dealing with other people in school" "being able to find similarities in our problems" "I felt relieved being able to tell people" "whenever I heard this one kid's story, it sounded like mine, so I connected with him. "I feel like I have a better connection with her because she knows me" "it helped me be myself and get friends" "I don't really like them that much, but then I never really talked to them" "When they would tell me something, I

knew they trusted me" and "the would share their personal experiences of what happened

and it felt like they really trusted me with that information and knowing that I wasn't

going to tell anybody because what was told in the group stays in the group" highlights

the interaction between getting to know each other and experiencing trust and safety.

Participants reported the importance of getting to know members, getting to know the

group leader, getting to know themselves. As group members got to know each other and

self they reported feeling more connected to each other and this influenced their feelings

of trust and safety. As participants got to know each other and experienced more trust

and safety, they also encountered conflict in the group. "so we were just sitting there

trying to talk about our personal like when we barely knew each other. I thought it was

really awkward."

Experiencing and Responding to Conflict

Conflict in this category is defined as group member participation and includes a

range of experiences including not participating "sometimes in the group it was just me

sitting there for the entire time only listening" "it made me irritated when they don't pay

attention", participating in a disruptive way "some of the kids would disrupt the lessons

and that made the group feel horrible for the rest of us" , arguing among members

"everybody was mad at me" "then sometimes we get in really, really big arguments and

then we're kind of away from each other that whole day", and dishonesty with the group.

When these conflicts occurred participants reported varying responses to their experience

of sticking together and feelings of closeness. However, depending on how conflicts

were addressed (by members, leader), the *feelings of closeness* and *sticking together* were

significantly impacted. "She (group leader) was like 'it just seems like you just don't care

about the group' and then everyone started acting like the cared" "the more drama the closer we feel" Participants reported feeling much closer to some members and the group after conflicts were resolved and they reported feeling less close to some members and the group if conflicts were left unresolved. "(not being honest with the group) just wrecks what we had and the group's not the same." "it was uncomfortable and I just wanted to leave" *Experiencing and responding to conflict* influenced and was influenced by trust and safety and getting to know each other and self.

Continued Data Analysis

Meeting with co-investigator shed light on the *Experiencing and responding* category, in that if you have categories that have essentially the same components then try those components as contexts for each of the categories. So, extracting the *experiencing and responding* from each category to be the internal context or the *experiencing feelings/thoughts* and the external context of *responding or relational responses/actions.* This change in the juxtaposition of categories makes sense.

Also, in looking more at the conflict category, there is a lack of data regarding both the level of conflict engagement and level of emotional and relational responses to conflict. I recall that several participants initially reported no conflicts in their groups, however as rapport increased, they seemed more comfortable talking about conflict experiences. Theoretical sampling for this category needs to continue to more fully understand the adolescent school counseling group members' experience with conflict and the cohesion process. The second round of interview questions will include a question around their experience with conflict engagement, including the internal and external context, and how this relates to their experience of cohesion. Also need more

questions to elicit rich description of cohesion process. Need to include group leader element in external relational context. Theoretical sampling shall include question for 2nd interviews around "some of us are close and some of us are not close" to better understand their experience of this. Context in every category? No, just main category. Difficult to take dynamic process/interaction and make it into a figure. Theoretical sampling with 2nd interview questions will help the researcher more fully understand their experience of the cohesion. Need more data regarding properties or characteristics of the process and dimensions or variations of the properties of the process. Plan to do second round interviews and continue open, axial and selective coding.

 Second round interview questions:

1. Participants talked about feeling close in the group and sometimes feeling closer or not feeling so close in the group. Can you think of a time when you felt close in the group? When you felt close in the group what happened next? Can you think of a time when you didn't feel close in the group? When you didn't feel close to the group, what happened next?

2. How would you describe "sticking together" in the group? What do you do when you're "sticking together"? How does it feel?

3. Participants have talked about the importance of conflict in their experience of belonging in the school counseling group, conflicts like fighting and arguing in the group (maybe when someone breaks group trust) or conflicts like other members not paying attention or disrupting the group or conflicts like other members taking up all the group so you may have felt left out of the group. Can you think of a time when you experienced conflict in the group? How did you respond to the conflict?

4. Participants have talked about the importance of trust and safety in their experience of belonging in the school counseling group. Can you think of a time when you felt a lot of trust and safety in the group? Can you tell me how experiencing the trust and safety in the group affected your experience of feeling close to the group? Can you think of a time when you didn't feel trust and safety in the group? Can you tell me how that experience affected your experience of feeling close to the group?

5. How did your experience of getting to know each other in the group by telling and listening to others' stories influence your experience of belonging in the group?

6. Participants have talked about the experience of belonging in the group as including "some of us are close and some of us are not close." Can you tell me about your experience of this?

APPENDIX G

Second Round Interviews

While collecting data in the second round of interviews, I found myself struggling with bracketing assumptions. It surfaced that I had an inclination as a doctoral candidate and researcher to have more complex data. However, I reminded myself that my role is to collaborate with participants and research their experience of cohesion. It is important to note that while I have been working with adolescents for over 20 years, and have participated in many school counseling groups with adolescents, I have not been asking them about their experience of cohesion. My experience in school counseling groups with adolescents does not supplant the fact that I am not an adolescent and when I was an adolescent, I did not participate in a school counseling group.

Relatedly, as I asked for process details in the second interviews, it seemed that this detail did not fit with their experience of cohesion. They would respond with "I don't know how to describe it" or "that's hard to explain." They seemed to be trying very hard to answer the questions and it seemed they were providing as much detail about their experience as they could. I felt it was a difficult balance to be mindful of rapport and respectful of their developmental level while trying to fully understand their experience and get rich detail and description about their experience. It was also helpful to then look at some recently published qualitative research with adolescent group participants.

Reading Swank and Lenes (2013), a phenomenology of adolescent experience in a sand-tray group, gave credence to the importance of self-expression, an important part of the category of *sharing* in the cohesion experience of adolescents in school counseling

groups. This research reported, for example, a participant stated "I began to know stuff about people that I didn't know and it brought us closer." This parallels the importance of this study's data which highlights the connection between cohesion and sharing and self-expression.

When asked about the experience of "feeling closer to some group members than others," two important concepts emerged. Two participants explained that their experience of that occurred when new members joined the group and they didn't feel close to them because they didn't know them yet. Once the new members had shared their stories and experiences then they felt as close to them as the other group members that had been in the group before. This has important implications for open groups with adolescents and cohesion. The second important variation of this experience included the internal context of not feeling close to some members if it was perceived that those members weren't really participating or self-expressing or being "real." Hypothesis that participants don't feel as close to group members that have not shared in the group by talking and expressing "real" feelings and experiences, including new group members in open groups and members at the very beginning of school counseling groups.

Axial coding resulted in changes from initial categories to current ones. *Sharing experiences* has been elevated to the core category of *Developing or creating and maintaining relationships or friendships (*not sure on title of category yet), which defines participants' experience of cohesion and now includes a relational context *Sticking together* and an internal context *Feeling close.* The next three categories significantly influence and are influenced by each other and the contexts of cohesion. *Experiencing and responding to getting to know each other* has been renamed *sharing. Experiencing*

and responding to trust and safety has been renamed *safety* and *experiencing and responding to conflict* has been renamed *conflict*. No need for "experiencing and responding" in each category now because that is reflected in the contexts of the central category of cohesion process. These categories are now titled simply with the title of the key circumstances or events of *sharing, safety,* and *conflict* that contribute to the cohesion process. It is important to note that the experience of cohesion was impacted by experiences both in and outside of the school counseling group.

Sharing-sharing experiences in the group facilitates getting to know each other, "learning about them and their background" and getting to know self, including sharing in **self-expression** of thoughts, feelings, "what we dreamed about," and personal stories and **feedback**, which includes dimensions of giving and receiving feedback such as help and support and feedback that contributes to understanding themselves more. With **self-expression** participants felt "you get more detail, you're not just looking at the cover" which contributed to "getting to know each other" and making connections/finding similarities between their personal stories, feelings, and thoughts. Participants reported "feeling closer" to group members who shared more and were being "real" as opposed to members they felt weren't participating or being real in their self-expression. **Self-expression** includes dimension of **relief** and **empathy**. Relief to not be alone and to not be the only one who has gone through a difficult time or experienced a challenging problem. "weight off my shoulders." **Empathy** refers to participants' internal experience of "feeling the same" regarding "very personal and touching" stories shared by group members. For example, when group members shared their experiences of family drug use and suicidal ideation, participants' felt "scared" for the group members.

In the beginning of the school counseling groups or when new members joined an open group, participants experienced not feeling close in the group because they didn't know each other. However, "once we talked and got to know each other then we felt close" and they related to each other more by sharing more.

Safety-this category defines the participants' experience with feeling safety and trust in the group and how they respond relationally when they feel safety and trust in the group. "basic sense of security" versus a feeling "scared and nervous." Participants' emphasized the role of the group leader in explaining confidentiality in helping establish safety in the group. When trust was broken in a school counseling group, participants reported not feeling safe and not sharing as much in the group. "When a few kids started telling rumors about other kids in the group, I didn't feel safe." When I didn't feel safe, "I wouldn't talk or say anything" in group and after breaking her trust by telling her secret, "she doesn't trust me so she doesn't talk to me as much." "They can say or do one thing that breaks that trust, so you don't trust people the same as you used to" "I trusted her the same but she probably trusts me a little less, but of course we're still sticking together." Other influences on participants' experiences of safety included their group experiences with group member suicidal ideation, an unexpected school lock down drill that occurred during the school counseling group, and equine therapy.

Conflict-refers to the varying **emotional responses** (don't like it, felt bad/sad, irritated, fed up, annoyed to reporting they didn't really experience any conflict/neutral to feeling needed) and **levels of conflict engagement** when group members are disagreeing, arguing or fighting. "When they're attacking, I don't feel close"/shut down/wanted to

leave, stay out of it, go with flow, let adult handle it vs. "It made me feel like I could help and that I did belong in the group"

Developing/Creating and maintaining connections/relationships/friendships- Results indicate that adolescents in school counseling groups experience cohesion as a process of developing/creating and maintain relationships/friendships, an intertwined process of both internal context (feeling close) and relational context (sticking together) which influences and is influenced by the categories of sharing, safety and conflict. "We became like a big family" "like a link of chains" "Like a pulley, like gears that help each other along." "I'm still close with all of them, even the ones who moved away."

Feeling close-internal context of cohesion-feeling like you belong in the group, feeling connected, needed, wanted, felt like people care about you, felt nice, happy, good, comfortable, feeling respected, feeling free from worries for a while, felt motivating, more confident, feeling like you can be yourself more, feeling empathy vs. feeling alone, not close, not belonging, out casted, nervous

Sticking together-external relational context-includes how adolescent group members relate to each other when they're feeling close "being a part of the group" and have developed cohesion. When members are "sticking together" they're sharing and dealing with conflict in a safe group environment. Sticking together means the group members are connected relationally and "we stand up for each other and support each other no matter what." When members are "sticking together," they're "getting along" "bonded" and "making decisions together and doing stuff together." "working together, working with me" "hanging out"

In breaking down a category like *safety,* different categories emerged like violation of group trust/suicidal ideation and threats to a group member and discomfort in the general environment such as school-wide anxiety due to global stress or uncertainty which really refers to a contextual lack of safety. Discomfort in the general environment also had to do with a contextual lack of safety due to group structure. Therefore a clear context of group structure began to emerge as an important category.

In using theoretical questioning and clarifying context or underlying conditions versus central parts of the process and experience of cohesion, the category of group structure helps define and frame the previous categories of safety, conflict, and sharing as these categories are all components of group structure, which is essential for the process of cohesion. The pervious categories of safety, conflict and sharing have now become properties of the category of group structure. Safety has become the property of safe environment, sharing has become the property of connecting and conflict has become the property of managing conflict. The central category has stayed the same and has been renamed the group cohesion process. Analysis and theoretical questioning have also led to a new property of group structure which is called boundaries. This property is important to capture the important variation in group boundaries that exist in school counseling groups versus groups in other settings. These boundaries include the dimensions of open and closed groups and out of group interactions that includes the variation in member connections before, during and after the school counseling group.

Further analysis maintained the central category of the cohesion process with internal and relational context subcategories and the creation of two new categories of group norms and group structure. Group norms includes the previous categories of

managing conflict and connecting and a new subcategory of member roles. Group

structure includes the previous category of safety (now called safe environment) and the

new subcategories of group purpose and member roles. Group structure and group norms

influence each other while influencing the central cohesion process which in turn

influences group structure and norms.

Data analysis after the second round of interviews and data analysis generated the

central category of the cohesion process which includes interacting internal and relational

contexts. Participants also described the importance of group structure and group norms

as salient context for the cohesion process. Additional subcategories include safe

environment, group purpose, group membership, self-expression, and managing conflict.

Group structure and group norms influence each other while influencing and influenced

by the cohesion process.

Group Structure

Group structure defines the context of group organization and includes the

subcategories of safe environment, group purpose, and group membership. Participants

described the importance of a safe environment as a salient condition of the group

structure as related to their experience of cohesion. A safe environment describes a

nonjudgmental climate where group members feel secure and trust they are protected

from harm.

An internal context of safety describes the sense of security experienced in the

school counseling group. The importance of the sense of safety in the group was

repeatedly referenced by participants as extremely influential to the cohesion process.

Salient conditions of the internal safety context include variations in feeling safe or

threatened in the school counseling group. Participants reported feeling safe, a "basic sense of security," in the group. Participants' also felt unsafe or threatened in the group with the introduction of equine therapy and when members disclosed suicidal ideation. When members talked about suicide, participants' felt "scared and nervous" at first but group processing restored their sense of safety in the internal group environment. Participants viewed a violation of confidentiality as a significant threat to their sense of safety in the group. One participant explained it this way, "When a few kids started telling rumors about other kids in the group, I didn't feel safe." When trust was broken in a school counseling group, participants reported not feeling safe and not sharing as much in the group. Participants' also emphasized the importance of the group leader and member roles in creating and maintain a safe environment in the school counseling group.

An external context of this subcategory describes variations in the general sense of security experienced by group members in contexts outside the school counseling group including experiences both in school and outside of school. Inherent to the experience of cohesion, participants discussed the importance of the safe school counseling group environment compared to their experiences with safety or a contextual lack of safety outside the school counseling group. Participants emphasized threats to safety as an important dimension to external context. Participants specifically referenced their experiences with varying levels of safety in school and varying levels of safety in their home environments. School safety varied with experiences such as social isolation, bullying and school lock down drills. Participants also described group members as

having problems in their home environments that contributed to their level of safety in the school counseling group.

Group Purpose

Participants viewed the purpose of the group as a whole as inherently related to the social support of the group and their experience of cohesion. Group purpose describes the goals of the group as viewed by participants. Participants viewed the groups' purpose in general terms as a way to help and support them in a group context. Participants saw it as a way to learn "different skills" in a variety of areas including self-esteem, social skills, problem solving, self-expression, stress-management, academic achievement and career development. Participant examples of achieved goals, include, "It helped me be myself and get friends," "I learned how to overcome the problems," "I use the stress release exercises whenever I get insane," and "The group helped me with school work. I used to be a C & D student but now I'm an A & B student." Participants identified the importance of group membership in relation to their experience of a safe environment in the group and group norms as an inherent part of the group cohesion process.

Group Membership

Participants described the importance of membership as a group structure important in their experience of cohesion. Membership refers to the parameters of group membership including open versus closed group membership boundaries and group member roles. Participants in groups with open membership experienced changes in their level of safety in the group environment and group norms that influenced the cohesion process.

Membership roles refers to the various functions or roles of both individual group members and the group leader. Participants identified the importance of the role of the group leader specifically in starting the group, making everyone feel welcome, explaining confidentiality, modeling self-expression, and introducing activities to facilitate group norms and the learning and practicing of new skills. As one participant stated it, "I think if you just put a bunch of different kids with similar problems in a room together and left them alone it would just cause chaos" without the group leader. Member roles varied across members and across group norms and were described as including mediators, role models and help seekers.

Group norms

Group norms defines the context of group operating and functioning levels in the areas of self-expression and managing conflict. Group norms interact with group structure to influence the group cohesion process.

Self-expression "It's kind of like you get a new bond every time a story is told." Self-expression describes group operating and functioning in reference to both verbal and nonverbal, bidirectional communication. Including sharing or self-disclosure of thoughts, feelings and personal experiences and the giving and receiving of feedback by group members and the group leader. This subcategory includes the salient experience of "getting to know each other" including "what we all dreamed about" and "learning about them and their background."

Participants also identified the importance of finding similarities between their personal experiences, feelings and thoughts and those of other group members. For example, "In the group the first time, we just talked about our lives and I realized that I

have a lot in common with the others" and "when I heard this one kid's story, it sounded like mine, so I connected with him." Participants' also experienced self-disclosure by the group leader as a salient component of their experience of group norms relevant to cohesion.

Participants reported varying levels of sharing and authenticity of sharing in the groups. The more open the level of self-expression the more connected participants felt to the group and vice versa. As one participant explained "You get more detail, you're not just looking at the cover." Participants reported feeling closer to the group when members shared more and were engaged in the group as evidenced by "very personal and touching" stories and the experience of "really pouring your heart out." As one participant described it, "the more heaviness, the closer we feel afterwards." However, when levels of sharing were more closed or some members were not participating in sharing then participants reported less group cohesion. Also participants reported experiencing more cohesion when they perceived group members as being "real" or authentic in their self-expression.

Emotional responses to self-expression includes the internal experience of the thoughts and feelings of group members in reaction to their own sharing and the sharing of other group members and includes varying responses from relief to empathic feelings of sadness or fear for group members. Participants experienced relief to express themselves openly with peers in a school counseling group and "get the weight off my shoulders" and relief to not be the only one who has gone through a difficult time or experienced a challenging problem. For example, "It felt good to know that I wasn't the only one who had some of these problems at home or dealing with other people in

school." Empathy refers to participants' internal experience of "feeling the same" and experiencing feelings such as sadness or fear in response to group member sharing. For example, when group members shared their experiences of family drug use and suicidal ideation, participants' experienced strong empathic feelings for group members and in turn, reported experiencing more cohesion. In the beginning of the school counseling groups or when new members joined an open group, participants experienced not feeling close in the group because they didn't know each other. However, "once we talked and got to know each other then we felt close." In summary, participants' experienced more open self-expression in the group as positively influencing the cohesion process.

Participants unanimously agreed on the significance of self-expression as a group norm that positively influenced and was influenced by their experience of making connections. As one participant stated, "The more we get to know each other, the more we can open up" and "Sharing made me feel closer to the other girls." Self-expression also relates to the safe environment structure of the group as stated by a participant, "When they would tell me something, I knew they trusted me."

Managing conflict

Managing conflict refers to the varying emotional responses to and levels of engagement in group responses to and management of intragroup conflict such as tension between group members. The group norm of managing conflict includes the property of emotional responses and a range of experiences from "I don't like it" to feeling sad and angry, including feeling "irritated," "fed up," and "annoyed" in response to group conflict.

Levels of conflict engagement refer to the range of involvement in managing group tensions. Experiences ranged from "It made me feel like I could help and that I did belong in the group" to just "going with the flow" to withdrawing or staying out of it and letting the leader handle it. Participants' pointed to the importance of member roles, a property of group membership, in managing conflict including the leader's role. "If we all have a problem with each other, she'll do an exercise that makes us deal with it." Participants highlighted the importance of managing conflict through group process such as "talking through it" to reach a "win-win" for everyone in the group.

The group norm of managing conflict directly influenced participants' experience of cohesion. For example, "When they're attacking, I don't feel close to the group" and in contrast, "Sometimes we goofed off, but I still felt close to the group." Managing conflict also influenced how participants' experienced the safety of the group environment and the group norm of self-expression as one participant described, when conflict was resolved, she "felt safer and was comfortable sharing my ideas with the group." The group norm of managing conflict influenced and was influenced by the group norm of self-expression and the group structural properties of safe environment and group membership.

Group cohesion process

The central category of the adolescent experience of cohesion in school counseling groups includes the group cohesion process, an intertwined process of both internal and relational contexts which influence and are influenced by the contexts of group structure and group norms. The group cohesion process defines the interrelation of the emotional and relational responses to the group experience and describes a resilient,

intragroup bond that develops in the group and influences and is influenced by the dimensions of a safe environment, group membership, self-expression, and managing conflicts.

As adolescent group members experience group structure and group norms, they also experience the **internal context** of cohesion or the emotional response to the group as a whole. This internal context includes participants' experiences of thoughts and feelings related to social acceptance by the group and corresponding self-acceptance. Participants described their inner experience of group acceptance as including feeling "close" to the group and "belonging" in the group. Participant voice of this experience includes "I felt close to everyone and it felt good," feeling "comfortable," "needed," "wanted," "respected" and feeling "like people care about you." Prior to experiencing cohesion in school counseling groups, participants had experienced not belonging to a peer group, feeling "out casted," "alone," and "left out."

While the internal context of the cohesion process includes the property of social acceptance by the group it also includes the participants' experience of thoughts and feelings related to self-acceptance. When experiencing cohesion, participants felt positive self-acceptance including positive self-esteem and self-worth evidenced by feeling "confident and motivated," "happy," and "like you can be yourself more." However, prior to their experience of group cohesion participants experienced varying levels of self-acceptance including thoughts of negative self-worth and feeling "sad" and "anxious."

When adolescent group members experience feelings of group and self-acceptance, they also experience the **relational context** of group cohesion. The

Relational context refers to the external context of the cohesion process and can be further characterized as the relationship parameters or social connections component of the cohesion process. When the group experiences cohesion, members are "working together" to support and help each other and "standing up for each other and supporting each other no matter what." "Basically they were all just there for me," explained one participant. The relational context of the cohesion process describes positive social relationships with the group and is in stark contrast to participants' experience of social isolation prior to the school counseling group. Prior to the group, participants experienced a lack of positive social relationships with peers, including experiences with bullying and being new to the school.

The relational context of the cohesion process can be further characterized as including varying dimensions of **open boundaries** and **relationship sustainability**. **Open boundaries** refers to the open social relationship parameters that characterize group relationships and interactions that occur outside of the group as a whole yet significantly influence the group cohesion process with adolescents in school counseling groups. Open boundaries includes the reality that in adolescent school counseling groups, at times the group does not function as a whole when dyads or subgroups of group members interact socially outside of the group. These social interactions outside of the group include interactions in school and outside of school between various group members and the school counselor, including the dimension that some members may have prior social relationships with other members prior to the school counseling group. This means that out of group interactions between various group members, during the time frame of the group, are quite common.

Participants reflected on the importance of the social relationships they made in the group to their social relationships outside the group and emphasized the contribution of extra group social interactions on the cohesion process, group norms, and group structure in the group as a whole. For example, if group members experienced conflict outside the group boundary, this inevitably influenced the internal and relational context of the cohesion process and the adolescents' experience of group structure and group norms.

Open boundaries with the group leader occurred when participants accessed the school counselor outside of the group as a whole in dyads or subgroups. Participants highlighted the importance of the group connection with the school counselor as salient in seeking school counseling services outside of the group as a whole.   In summary, participants highlighted the significance of open boundaries as a salient component of the relational context of the cohesion process in adolescent school counseling groups.

Sustainability of the relational context of cohesion refers to the enduring nature of participants' relationships with group members, including both peer group members and the school counselor both during and after termination of the school counseling group. Every participant repeatedly referenced the importance of the sustained nature of the relationships they made with group members. Participants' referred to these relationships with group member peers as friendships and every participant experienced a sustained relationship with at least one group member after group termination. In fact participants' experienced sustained relationships with multiple group members up to data collection of at least two years after the conclusion of the school counseling group. Participants' reported maintaining connections with friends from the group even if they moved away.

Data such as "I made a lot of friends" and "I'm still friends with all of them" support the salience of this dimension of the relationship component of the cohesion process. Participants' did not refer to their relationship with the group leader as one of friendship but as a relationship with an adult that "could relate" to them. When participants' experienced relational connection with the group they also experienced feelings of group and self-acceptance and in turn more open self-expression and conflict management in the group and vice versa.

Interactions

Overall, one participant described her experience with cohesion as "it felt pretty good being able to actually have good relationships with people" which illustrates both the internal and relational context of cohesion. Participants voiced their experience of cohesion as "Like a pulley, like gears that help each other along." In this metaphor, the gears are the group members including the group leader with their various roles and the cohesion process is the working of the pulley, influenced by the properties of group structure and group norms. Group structure interacts with group norms to influence both the internal and relational context of the cohesion process. For example, the safe environment of the group influences and is influenced by the group norm of self-expression as described by a participant, "They would share their personal experiences of what happened and it felt like they really trusted me with that information and knowing that I wasn't going to tell anybody because what was told in the group stays in the group." Likewise the group norm of self-expression influenced the relational context of cohesion as recalled by one participant, "I feel like I have a better connection with her because she knows me." Group acceptance and self-acceptance interact with open

boundaries and sustainable relationships to describe the crux of the cohesion process. When participants felt accepted by the group they in turn experienced more positive self-acceptance and interacted socially with group members outside of the group as a whole, creating sustainable relationships with both group member peers and the school counselor both after termination of the group and during the school counseling group.

After 2nd round interview analysis, this researcher will use theoretical sampling in the third round of interviews to more fully explore the proposed emergent grounded theory property dimensions of member roles and self-acceptance. The third round of interviews will also include member checking to dialogue with research participants regarding the accuracy of the grounded theory for their experience with group cohesion in school counseling groups. The following third round interview questions were created with this in mind.

Third Round Interview and Member Checking Questions

1. Participant interviews have led to the development of a theory about how teens experience belonging in school counseling groups. An important part of the theory is that I check with you and see if this accurately describes your experience. The theory explains that the most important part of belonging in the school counseling group includes the experience of bonding with the group or feeling close to the group and making friends. To do this, it's important to feel safe and trust the group so everyone can get to know each other and help each other. Tell me how this happened for you?

2. Sharing stories and feelings and dealing with tensions or conflicts in the group were important parts of the group experience and really helped with getting to know each other and feeling connected to the group. Tell me how this happened for you?

3. Once everyone bonded with the group, group members interacted more in the group and outside of the school counseling group. Tell me how this happened for you?

4. The theory also points to the importance of feeling accepted by the group. Tell me about your experience of feeling accepted by the group and how this felt for you?

5. When you felt like you were accepted by the group, how did that influence how you felt about yourself?

6. Participants talked about having different roles in the group as an important part of belonging in the group. For example the school counselor had the role of starting or structuring the group and helping relieve group tension. Participants described feeling like they belonged in the group when they felt like that had a role in the group. Tell me how this happened for you? What did you see as your role or function in the group? What did you see as the role of other members in the group?
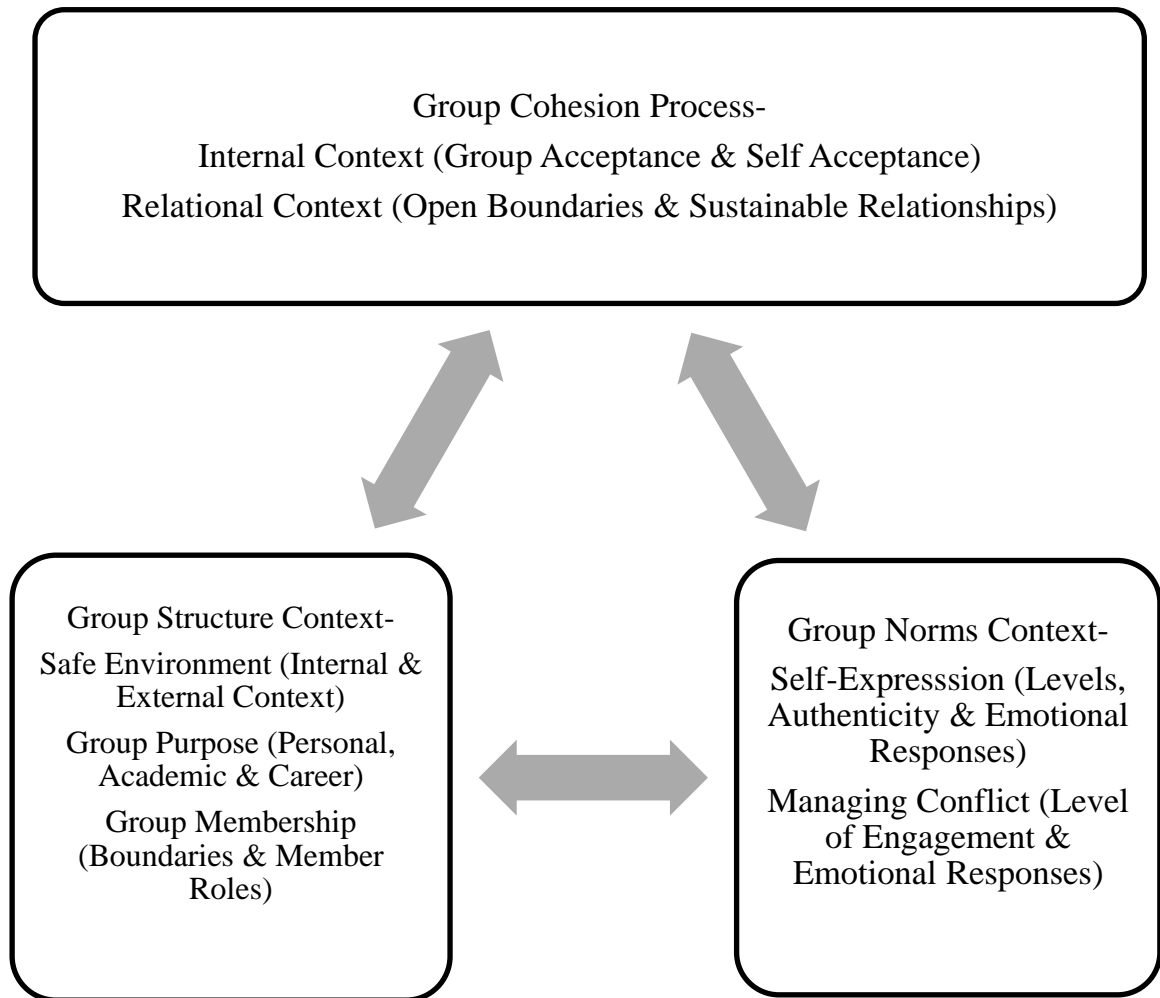
Group Cohesion Process-

Internal Context (Group Acceptance & Self Acceptance)

Relational Context (Open Boundaries & Sustainable Relationships)

Group Structure Context-

Safe Environment (Internal & External Context)

Group Purpose (Personal, Academic & Career)

Group Membership (Boundaries & Member Roles)

Group Norms Context-

Self-Expresssion (Levels, Authenticity & Emotional Responses)

Managing Conflict (Level of Engagement & Emotional Responses)

Figure 1. Group Cohesion Process: Categories, Subcategories, Properties & Dimensions.

Group Cohesion Process

Internal Context-
Group Acceptance
Self Acceptance

Relational Context-
Open Boundaries
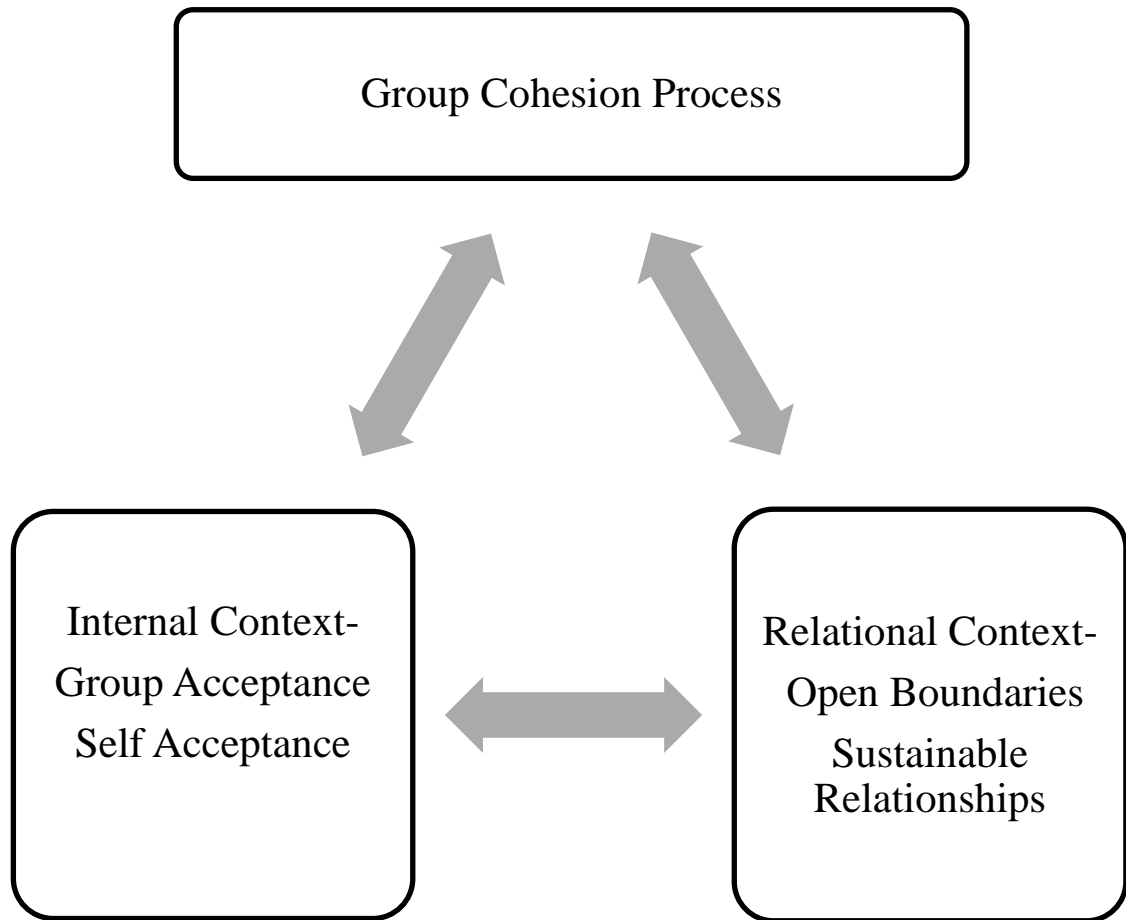Sustainable
Relationships

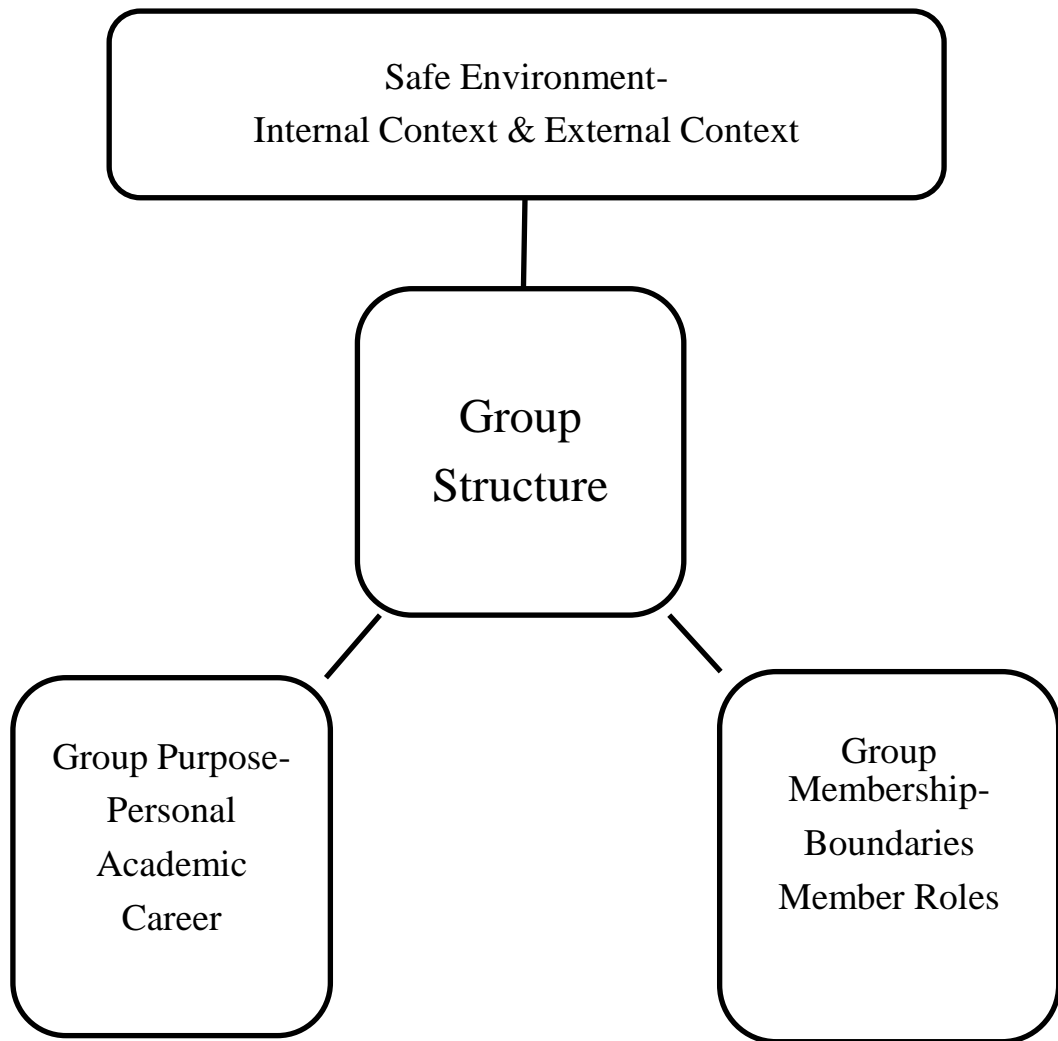Figure 2. Group Cohesion Process: Internal & Relational Contexts.

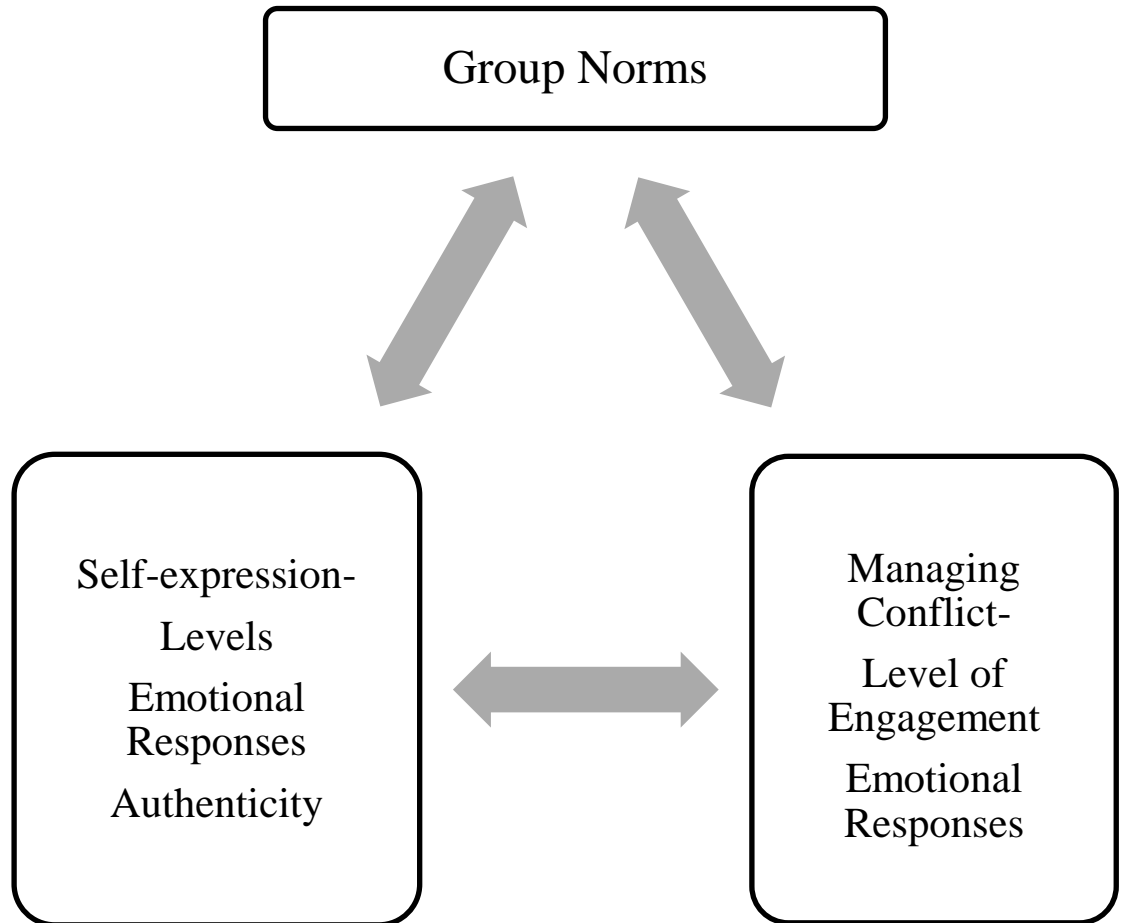Figure 3. Group Structure: Subcategories & Properties.

Figure 4. Group Norms: Subcategories & Properties.

APPENDIX H

Third Round Interviews

Triangulated data collection included theoretical sampling involving three rounds of interviews and member checking. Round one and two interview data analysis yielded an outline or tentative structure representing the adolescent experience of the cohesion process in school counseling groups. Third round interviews concluded the theoretical sampling process and finalized the grounded theory of how adolescents' experience cohesion in school counseling groups. Prolonged engagement with participants enhanced rapport and facilitated detailed descriptions of the cohesion process.

Final results include more complete and detailed quotes to more accurately describe participants' experience with cohesion process and respectfully capture the nuances associated with their unique culture, developmental level and language. Additionally, the researcher acknowledges that the emergent theory represents the adolescent experience of the cohesion process in rural school counseling groups as all participants were in school counseling groups in rural schools. Twenty percent of our country's adolescents live in and attend schools in rural areas, thus representing a minority population.

An example of a participant's perspective in regards to rapport and data collection includes:

> P5 At first it was awkward because I had no idea who you were but now I'm pretty open and I could tell you anything if I wanted to. I feel like you did pretty good cause you didn't act like we're some kids who don't know anything.

This data represents the benefits of prolonged engagement to ensure trustworthiness and minimize researcher bias.

Reflexivity means that the researcher is conscious of biases, values and experiences that they bring to qualitative research. To document reflexivity, this researcher acknowledges that initial first round data analysis did not include a category or subcategory for group leadership. In an effort to control for any possible biases as an experienced school counseling group leader with adolescents, this researcher initially undervalued the importance that participants placed on the school counselor as a facilitative group leader that significantly influenced their experience of belonging in the group. A subcategory of group structure entitled facilitative group leadership was added to the category of group structure to represent the properties of structure and process as salient to facilitative group leadership as related to the central category of the cohesion process or sticking together.

Group cohesion process title changed to "sticking together" to reflect the language used by participants to describe their experience of the "tight bond" process. The previous property of self-acceptance has been changed to positive feelings to more accurately describe participants' experience and reflect the developmental level of participants. As P7 described, "I didn't really get a sense of learning about myself until high school" and interview questions about participant self-acceptance did not yield enough data to maintain a property of self-acceptance. However, general positive feelings were a salient component of the internal context or feelings of belonging (new property title). Also, positive feelings replaces the property title of external context to more accurately describe the property.

Resolving conflict replaces managing conflict as subcategory title and more accurately reflects participant language in regards to their experience. Given that participants use the term counselor when referring to the school counselor as group leader, the researcher will maintain the use of this term in results. Changed group norms category title to group process to more accurately reflect the dynamic group process nature of the subcategories of sharing, finding similarities and resolving conflicts. Open boundaries renamed open social interactions. Lasting connections better describes subcategory of sustainable relationships and coincides with professional literature on school connectedness. The role of function of group members eliminated as a property of group membership because there was not enough data to support this property.

Additionally, this researcher acknowledges the challenge to find an appropriate balance between respectfully representing the experience of adolescents while also writing a research manuscript that professionally describes the experience for group leaders and researchers. The uniqueness of the process of research data collection with adolescent participants regarding the group process of cohesion also proved challenging in that the tight bond or sticking together process of the group cohesion also limited the type of detailed research data I could collect because the cohesion process also hinges on the importance of confidentiality. Therefore, the continued or lasting nature of the tight bond of the cohesion process, limited researcher access to more detailed data given the private and personal, confidential information of the group cohesion process.

Third round interview data analysis memos describe the final stages of data analysis and the finalization of dimensions, properties, subcategories, and categories, including their titles, descriptions, and interactions. The central category of the cohesion

process has been renamed *sticking together* to describe the adolescent experience of the cohesion process in rural school counseling groups.

Third round interviews and data analysis generated the central category of the cohesion process as *sticking together*, a "tight bond" which includes interacting internal and relational contexts or the subcategories of feeling close to the group and making friends. Participants also described the importance of group structure and group process as salient context for sticking together. The contextual subcategories include *facilitative group leadership, safe environment, helpful group purpose, group membership boundaries, sharing with the group, finding similarities, and resolving conflicts.* The subcategories of group structure and group process interact with each other while influencing and influenced by the cohesion process of *sticking together.* The final *interactions* section of the results most accurately gives voice to the complexity of the *sticking together* process by describing the process of interactions between the properties of the categories. These *interactions* provide insight into the *sticking together* process from the adolescent participants' point of view and provide a detailed story of the "tight bond" they experienced including individual variations in their experiences as represented in the variations in property dimensions. Results begin with descriptions and voice data for the central category, subcategories, properties and dimensions before concluding with the *interactions* of properties, subcategories and categories of this grounded theory.

Sticking Together

The central category of the experience of the cohesion process is called *sticking together* and includes a "tight bond" or a resilient, intragroup bond that develops in the

group and influences and is influences by the other properties of the emergent theory.

The following voice data describe the most salient dimensions of the *sticking together*

bond.

> P1 We're all pretty tight. It's kind of like a family. There was a lot of friendship within the group. Then we all just got really close. We stick together. We all help each other deal with each other. So it's like that. We all just stick up for each other.
>
> P2 It's good, fun. We hang out together. Whenever I was going through anything, the group was there for me. They were supporting me and they helped me through it. It felt like you could trust the group with anything and they'd help you through it.
>
> P3 We had a very close bond. Whenever they would need a shoulder to cry on I would comfort them. Like always making decisions, always doing something together, like bonding and having the same thoughts. It's kind of like having a twin in a way, not identical. Like always being friends and close and together. We always talk and laugh. Like a pulley. Like gears that help each other keep moving.
>
> P4 It was a tight, close, personal bond. A friendship bond. It was a strong bond. They encouraged me and they helped throw in ideas and offered their help. It was pretty fun. They just listened and gave me helpful advice.
>
> P5 We had a pretty tight bond. We stand up for each other and support each other no matter what. It feels pretty good. I mean I'm still close with all of them.
>
> P6 Sticking together is like hanging out or no matter what you've always got their back. And if anything happens you're there for them for support. At the end of the day, we all knew that we had each others' back. And we were going to support the other person no matter what they're going through or what the cause may be. It was really fun to bond with those girls. I think if you're going through anything, true friends are always going to stick by your side no matter what. And they're always going to help you through situations.
>
> P7 After we connected it was a strong friendship. Then it's like there was already an established connection, so we already knew each other.

Feeling Close to the Group. *Feeling close to the group* describes the internal

context of the s*ticking together* bond or the emotional response to the group as a whole.

Participants also report feeling more distant or less close to the group at times which will

be fully explained in the Interactions section. When the group was *sticking together*,

thoughts and feelings included the following.

> P1 We just get really, really close.

> P2 At first we didn't really know each other that well and we didn't really
> hang out. But in group we would all talk and really get to know each
> other. Every group we'd get closer and closer. I never felt not close to the
> group. It made me feel closer with the group. About every time anything
> happened we'd go over it and you'd just feel closer and closer every time.

> P4 We were all pretty close in that group.

> P5 If felt pretty good being able to actually have good relationships with
> people.

> P6 Oh it was actually pretty great. There was a lot of good vibes in there.

> P7 It made me feel connected with everyone else.

Feelings of Belonging. *Feeling close to the group* includes the property of

feelings of belonging. *Feelings of belonging* describes the emotions associated with

nonjudgmental group acceptance where participants felt both valued and included in the

group. Prior to experiencing the *feelings of belonging,* participants described feeling "left

out" or "out casted" in relation to peers. When participants experiences s*ticking together*

they also experienced thoughts and *feelings of belonging*. Examples of *feelings of*

belonging include:

> P1 I thought I belonged and I had a place to run to other than my family.
> To belong it feels better because you kind of like know that there's
> someone there for you. Because you have a group to run to if you're

having a nervous breakdown. And you can really pour your heart out so it just makes you feel better. Before I was in the group, I had more problems than I do now and I kind of didn't deal with anything. I didn't have a group to run to or anything. It's better now. It's like we're all in a sisterhood. And we've got to know each other so we've always stuck together. So it's a good experience.

P2 It's like you're a part of something helpful. It made me feel like I could help and that I did belong in that group. Being a part of something like that is like being able to help the people in your group and if anyone else needs help you can also help them. Before the group ever started I felt like I didn't belong to any group. I felt like there was no one I could talk to or anything like that. And then with the group it got a lot easier.

P3 I think it makes all of us happy and feel welcomed and needed in a way. Being wanted. People wanting to see you, talk to you. Feeling like someone likes you. It would always make you feel like you were belonging because you could help   people or they could help you more or you could always help each other. It's kind of like a link of chains. And knowing what you can do and how you can help other people would make you feel more needed. Because if one of our friends ever needed something we would help them. Other peoples' feedback teaches that you can be a better person & helps you with other things. And can really affect your thinking of yourself, how you think about yourself as a being. It made me happy and excited because I wouldn't be spending my time alone anymore. Now I have a whole bunch of friends and I like going to group.

P4 Belonging felt like people care about you and notice you and they're supportive. It was cool to have somebody to talk to and pretty fun because there are other kids there. It felt nice that people were working with me. Having people help you was pretty cool. And I could sort of be myself more. I felt like I'm wanted.   They   were there to listen and to help me figure other ways around it. They gave ideas.
P5 Basically they were all just there for me, having some help. I was accepted and it doesn't matter really what I do with myself as long as I'm surrounded by people who support me. I could go to them and cry or just be like "Yeah this happened, but I'm OK because you're here!"

P6 It felt nice actually to belong to a group that you can get help from and you can the girls were really chill. They never did anything to any of us to make us feel like we didn't belong.

P7 I'm mainly referring to the people in that group. They treated me more friendlily and have treated me more friendlily. Like the environment there was no harmful vibes.

Positive Feelings. The second property of *feeling close to the* group includes the *positive feelings* that describe the general positive feelings and mood participants correlated with *feelings of belonging* and *feeling close to the group.* The *positive feelings* include feeling good, happy and self-confident as opposed to the their general feelings prior to the experience of *sticking together*, which were described as ranging from sad and angry to anxious. Examples of variations in participant experiences with *positive feelings* include:

P1 It makes you feel genuinely happy. It was really fun. I just felt like I'm on top of the world and I can do anything. It feels like you can kind of conquer anything. Before the group I was really angry and I didn't feel as emotional or angry ever again. It was peaceful and calming.

P2 I felt good about who I am. It was easier for me because I wasn't alone. It's like the thing we look forward to all day. Some days they tell us, "Don't forget we have group today," and we're like "Yah!"

P3 It would always give you this boost of confidence that you would most likely need throughout the day. When we were all close with the bond I felt very happy. It made me feel happy because I wouldn't be so lonely.

P4 I felt confident. Felt calm and happy. I just felt happier, more calm, peaceful. Wanted to go to group. Enjoyed the talking.

P5 Huge confidence boost! Like I was good enough and happy feelings. Then you could just be happier and deal with things on a daily basis.

P7 I think it helped motivate me more. Later on, more than anything, it wasn't really kind of something that rested in my subconscious and it made me more motivated as a person to do things.

Making Friends. When adolescents experience *sticking together,* in addition to the internal context of *feeling close to the group,* they also experience a salient relational

context, a subcategory characterized as *making friends. Making friends* describes the

positive relationships or social connections component of the central category of the

cohesion process. Prior to their experience of belonging in a school counseling group,

participants' described a lack of positive social relationships or connections with peers,

including social isolation and bullying. The following voice data describes the

subcategory of *making friends:*

> P1 We're all friends. I felt like a friend. I felt really good and like I have a
> purpose to help them. Some of them were suicidal and cutting, of course,
> and they're not anymore. Of course I'm not really popular but I have
> friends that can support me so it's good.

> P5 I felt close to everyone because they were all my friends.

> P6 After we did a couple of sessions, the girls became really cool and I
> became really good friends with them. I saw the counselor more as like a
> friend and a mother type figure.

> P7 It didn't start out as friendship but it went there as time progressed.
> After we connected it was a strong friendship.

> ***Open Social Interactions.*** *Making friends* can be further categorized by the

property of *open social interactions,* which refers to the open, not closed boundaries, or

social relationship parameters that characterize group relationships and interactions that

occur both intragroup and extragroup. Variations include friendships or relationships and

social connections that exist between members before the group and varying subgroup

relationships that interact outside of the group. *Open social interactions* refers to the

reality that in adolescent school counseling groups, group members and the school

counselor are interacting in various combinations of dyads or subgroups that occur

outside of the scheduled group counseling sessions, during the school day or outside of

school. Examples of *open social interactions* include:

P1 Since we all got to know each other we started hanging out at lunch. And we started going to the park and just hanging out in different places. You can see the counselor outside the group, too. That happened so many times. Usually I say it after the group when everybody else leaves because then you can have one on one time with the counselor.

P2 Every group we'd get closer and closer until we were just hanging out all the time.

P3 Not everybody in the group hung out with each other except for group and a little bit outside of group at like lunch or something. Four of them always did hang out together but the other two never really bonded with them outside of the group. I would always go back and forth but at times they would all come together at recess and play and stuff but they really weren't all as social and active together as they were inside the group.

P4 Yeah. We (the counselor and I) talked at lunch. During lunch he'd come and talk to me and see how I was doing. Just checking up with me. And he still does that.

P5 We all kind of hung out any ways so really we hung out before the group, too. We were able to tell each other everything and we were just this group of people and basically with them knowing everything I could go to them for anything I wanted. Like whether it was in the counselor's office or not.

P6 Well after our probably like our second session, I started saying "Hi" to them in the hallways and they started saying "Hi" to me. And we would have little conversations on how their day was going between passing periods and it just went from there.

P7 I hang out with them outside of school and walk around and find things to do. Mainly the point of contact is school.

Lasting Connections. While *making friends* includes the property of *open social interactions,* it also includes the property of *lasting connections* which describes the enduring nature of group member relationships, including sustained connections with the school counselor and peer group members after the school counseling group terminates. Every participant repeatedly voiced the importance of the *lasting connections* they made with the group as a salient characteristic of their experience of *sticking together* with the

group. Participants referred to these relationships as friendships and every participant experienced a sustained relationship with at least one peer group member after termination. In fact, participants experienced *lasting connections* with multiple group members up to data collection of at least two years after the termination of the school counseling groups. Examples of *lasting connections* include:

> P1 She's (the group leader) just kind of like another friend and I think it's good because she could relate.

> P2 I'm still friends with all of them. I felt like I was still going to be able to talk to the friends that I made in the group. That feels good.

> P3 She (the group leader) would be like a friend to us when we needed a friend or a counselor when we needed her to be. She would be our friend while she was being our counselor so it would be more of an easy thing. So she was kind of like a friend to all of us.

> P4 He's (the group leader) a motivator and a friend out of all of it. A friendship bond.

> P5 I'm still friends with everyone in that group. We're still close because of that and can trust each other. We all still have good relationships.

> P6 Well these girls that were in the group were way younger and I don't talk to them anymore. Which I'm fine with. I talk to the other girl and we're pretty close. There's this mindset that when you get in high school you tend not to talk to people younger than you in middle school. So that happens to everybody.

> I feel like I have a better connection with her (counselor), 'cause she knows me. Even if I'm still in high school, I go over there and talk with her. Actually, I really love (the counselor). She's my favorite counselor ever I think.

> P7 Some of the people that were in the group I'm actually still friends with today. Well, I've hung out with two guys from the group a lot. So after the group had ended the same people I as in the group with treated me more kindly in general after the experience.

Group Structure

Group structure describes the category of group organizational or structural context and includes the subcategories of *facilitative group leadership, safe environment, helpful group purpose and group membership boundaries.* Participants described the importance of these *group structure* subcategories in their experience of the central category of *sticking together.*

Facilitative Group Leadership. *Facilitative group leadership,* a subcategory of *group structure* describes the important role of the school counselor in the *sticking together* process as experienced by participants. The following voice data highlights *facilitative group leadership* with specific examples of the school counselors' role in facilitating the organizing of the group and introducing fun activities that facilitate group bonding. Additionally, the following data highlight examples of *facilitative group leadership* that emphasizes the school counselors' role in group process. Participants identified the school counselor as an important part of the *sticking together* process and specifically pointed to the school counselors' role in starting the group, making everyone feel welcome, modeling group process, and introducing activities to facilitate group structure and process, all of which interact with and influence the central category.

> P1 She (the counselor) was the one with the idea for a support group. She was probably the most important thing about the group other than the bonding. Cause if it wasn't for her we'd probably still be really violent and we wouldn't have as many friends as we do and we wouldn't have aspirations to help others. It's kind of like the counselor isn't the leader. She's like a part of the group and we're all the counselors, everybody in the group. So it's nice. Sometimes we'd do a bonding activity that was really fun or we'd do something with our family and try to relate that to everyone else's family. She does stress, depression, anger, family, bonding, friendship, stuff like that. It helps us share our stories and lead to other questions. If we all have a problem with each other she'll do an exercise that makes us deal with it and we'll be friends again. So she more solves problems than creates them. She doesn't make us censor our

language so we went along with that. She lets us talk the way we usually do with each other; any way we need to, which is good to get it all out. We'd go get coffee and draw pictures. She (the counselor) taught us how to handle mental stress and things. She gave us a really good influence of how not to screw up your school year or your life and it really helped. When we do the stress release exercises it replenishes me. And I use it a lot whenever I get insane. She (the counselor) breaks up conflict really easily and she will solve them when we can't.

P2 She (the counselor) did activities about different things that were going on and that was a really helpful way to connect. I felt like the counselor was helping all of us get close.

P3 She (the counselor) would always try to communicate with you and relate with you and try to name some possibilities and would try to get everyone to talk about it. One time she asked all the kids to talk about what we like about each other and when it was her turn she said, "What I like about you is your ability to overcome rough situations and pull through it and not give up easily." It was really special. She was always so nice to us.

P4 He (the counselor) was like another teacher. Teaching us new skills. He was pretty important because he was there to help me and motivate me, encourage me and teach me the skills. He sort of pushed us, but not too much, to use our skills more. He helped us understand the skills and sometimes he'd jump in the scenario. We worked on different skills like win-win and that helped.

P5 She (the counselor) was the peacekeeper. I thought she was really important because there was actually no way we could talk face to face without her when we were trying to solve a conflict. She usually got all our input and then she would go to the root of it.

P6 She (the counselor) made it a fun time in there. We did trust skills. And we made collages of what represents us and stuff and then we told the group about it. We did a blindfold one and it's like that trust fall. So we did that and we all did really good. And there was another one. And we did team building, too. We just went outside and it's that one where you have some boards and wider boards and you have to get everyone to the other side without the person falling off. It was pretty cool. It took us a couple of ties but we got it. The first session, she went over what we were going to be doing and she told us, "what's said in the group, stays in the group." So for example, if the other 8th grader told the group something that was really extreme, we couldn't tell, like the telephone game almost, we couldn't do that. We couldn't tell anyone else what was

going on with her. So whatever was told, we had to keep hush, hush. She made everyone feel really welcome and like we all belonged. She even shared with us some stuff about her past and present.

P7 The school counselor helped us get started on topics. She played an important role because if you put a group of different kids with similar problems that don't know each other in a room together without the counselor it could get a little messy. She just kind of made a safe environment with other students and general niceness and welcoming.

Safe Environment. This subcategory of group structure describes the importance of a *safe environment* as a salient condition of the group structure as related the adolescent experience of *sticking together.* A safe environment describes a supportive, nonjudgmental climate where group members feel secure and trust they are protected from harm. The importance of a *safe environment* was repeatedly referenced by participants as extremely influential to the *sticking together* process. The internal context of safety describes the sense of security experienced in the school counseling group. Salient conditions of the internal context of safety include variations in feelings of trust, safety and security to variations of feeling threatened or unsafe in the school counseling group. Participants reported experiencing a *safe environment* when they experienced *sticking together* but as later *interactions* will illuminate, participants also experienced threats to their safety in the group including violations of group confidentiality and threats to group members such as suicidal ideation. The external context of *safe environment* refers to the general safety or lack of safety in the participants' external context of the group including their general experience of safety or a lack of safety outside of the school counseling group either in school or outside of school. Adolescent participants experienced internal and external contexts of safety that were significantly influenced by school lock downs, bullying and social isolation, family substance use,

domestic violence, sexual abuse, self-harm, and suicidal ideation. The following voice

data examples illustrate the variations in a *safe environment,* including variations in the

internal and external contexts of this subcategory.

> P1 I'm not going to lie to you I have some trust issues. But now I trust better. I mean when they're with me I feel safe. Inside the group it's a whole different thing. Like I'm way more careful outside of the group than inside the group because you can kind of let loose with them. One time this girl betrayed all of us in the group because she did everything behind our back and she said she wasn't. It was really bad. That's why I had a lot of trust issues. It just kind of wrecked what we had and the group wasn't the same. The group just kind of fell apart.

> P3 Whenever we were going to have a practice lock down, we were in one of the rooms and we were all freaked out because none of us know about it. And we were all just talking and calming each other down. And then when they said it was a drill we just got up and were laughing. We talked about what we felt then. And when the doors were locked we were talking and laughing and felt comfortable with each other even if I was scared and nervous. They were helping me calm down and feel like I was in trusted hands and not feeling so scared and fidgety and scratchy.

> If someone had betrayed our trust then it was kind of a lesser bond and it made me as a person feel really horrible about it. You feel really close to people and you feel really trustworthy with people. And then then can say one thing or do one thing that breaks that trust. So you don't rust people the same as you used to. That happened because I told one of her secrets and she got really mad at me. We've gained a lot of the trust back up so it's better now but it's still kind of irritating that she can't trust me fully anymore like she used to. We used to tell each other everything. I still trust her because she didn't do it to me. I trust her the same but she probably trusts me a little less.

> P4 Well every other Friday we did this horse equine therapy and there was a lot of trust and safety in that. Cause our counselors made us trust the horses and make sure we were safe and stuff. But nothing major affected the trust and safety with us. The safety outside of the group was I needed some skills to help prevent feeling unsafe at home. I had a way to get out of it and stuff. The group happened for me because my father got shot and it was a tough time for us. I wasn't doing so well so they got me help.

P5 There were times where I had a couple of my friends who were kind of suicidal. So they would actually tell me that and I didn't feel safe for them because they were wanting to die. But it felt like they were safe in that moment because there was one the counselor there to talk to about it and then they were able to tell me what was going on in their life.

P6 We were in the counselor's room so there was really no danger to come toward us whatsoever.

P7 Because in a sense it was a safe place. A basic sense of security in your environment. A feeling that you are safe. I remember the rule was that we couldn't take anything out of the room that went on in there.

Helpful Group Purpose. Participants viewed the purpose of the group as a salient component of the group structure that influenced their experience of *sticking together*. This subcategory describes the perceived goal or purpose of the group. Participants viewed the groups' purpose in general terms as a way to help and support them in a social group context. Participants saw the group as a way to help each other personally with social and emotional issues and to support each other academically with grades and career planning. Voice data illustrates the variations in participants' experiences with a *helpful group purpose:*

P1 It was really helpful! The group has helped me and my friends in the group a lot. It's helped a lot. The purpose of the group was to help with anger and emotional problems and to kind of build up a social support for yourself. And it has really helped. Cause now that I've solved my main problems and I know how to solve problems I can finally get along with the world now. I've been a nicer person. I also made a lot of friends and got to know a lot of people and got to do a lot of cool stuff.

P4 It helped us overcome obstacles in our life. And help each other. A helping hand. I learned that I'm a lot stronger than I think on the emotional side. And with the skills that we learned, I use them more than I expected. And it helped me out with me school work. Cause all last year I was a D and C student and now I'm A and B. I know since 6th grade I had no idea what I was gonna do. Since the group I've sort of been planning about what I'm gonna do. I've been thinking about careers.

P5 To get along better. To actually have a good or appropriate response to people. It built up our relationships.

P6 I knew I was going in there to get help and help the others. So when I told them what's happening in my life it made me feel better. Because now after every session I felt relief, like I told somebody and I can just go on with my life being a better and happier person. It felt good that somebody wanted to make sure that I was safe and OK and wanted to hear what I had to say. It felt nice going to get all those weights off my shoulders.

P7 I thought it was to help me focus with school and work better. I found it helpful and not only in the sense that I got in and had other people I could talk to about how bad my grades were, it was also a reprieve from school itself. Ever since the 4th grade, I've found school to be kind of dull and monotonous. And I believe we'd meet on Tuesdays and yeah, I'd look forward to it.

Group Membership Boundaries. *Group membership boundaries,* a subcategory of group structure, describes the parameters of group membership boundaries and includes both open and closed dimensions of the property of boundaries. Only 3 research participants described experiences with open group membership boundaries, while the other participants experienced groups with closed membership boundaries. When *group structure* consisted of group member boundaries that were open, allowing new members to join the group after the group had started, participants described a corresponding significant disruption in the *sticking together* process:

P1 Then this one time one girl screwed up the whole relationship when she came into the group. Then we just kind of got distant. But we're okay again.

P2 There was a time when more people joined the group and that made it harder but we got close, too. We just talked about things the same way we always did and then you feel closer to them, too.

P3 Well there was a time when my friend was irritating me because she joined the group and it felt like she took everyone away. So I was really

irritated with her until we finally got along with it and got better with each
other being in the group. Some of us were like 3 peas in a pod. We were
super close and then when the new people came, we tried to let them in
but it was so different because we already knew everything about each
other. And with somebody new we would be like "we don't know you
that much but we'll try." Then we all just became like a big family.
That's how we felt when (group member name) joined in. We couldn't
trust him and we always kept our distance. But then we welcomed him in
and he told us some stories and it was so much easier for us to bond.
We'd have to welcome them in and get to know them, learn more about
them and their background and then we'd be fine.

Group Process

The *group process* category describes the critical components of group process

that participants identified as critical to their experience of *sticking together* and bonding

in the school counseling group. This category includes the subcategories of *sharing with*

the group, finding similarities, and *resolving conflicts.*

Sharing with the Group. Levels (open & closed) Authenticity-the seriousness of

the story (real & not real) Emotional Responses happy/relieved & sad/angry/fearful)

Sharing with the group describes the process of verbal and nonverbal self-expression and

bidirectional communication among group members. Participants identified sharing or

self-disclosure of thoughts, feelings and personal experiences, along with the giving and

receiving of feedback as descriptive of *sharing with the group.* This subcategory of *group*

process characterizes the levels, authenticity and emotional responses to *sharing with the*

group that participants identified as salient to their experience of *sticking together* in a

school counseling group. Levels of sharing refers to the varied quality of sharing along a

dimension from closed or not very much personal sharing to very open, very expressive

levels of sharing with the group. The authenticity of sharing varied along a dimension

from real or very honest to not real or less authentic in terms of the quality of information

shared with the group. Also inherent to the category of *sharing with the group* was the

property of *emotional responses* which describes the variations in feelings and thoughts

that participants highlighted as a critical internal reaction to their own sharing and the

sharing of other group members, both peer group members and the school counselor.

Emotional responses ranged from feeling happy, calm and relieved to feeling sad, angry,

anxious and fearful depending on the *levels* and *authenticity* of *sharing with the group.*

Participants experienced relief to express themselves openly in the group and "get the

weight off my shoulders" but also experienced sadness and fear when group members

sharing included, for example, suicidal ideation, family substance use or child sexual

abuse . Examples of the dimensional variations in the key properties of the subcategory

of *sharing with the group,* include:

> P1 I didn't always open up to them. It started out with four of us   and it
> was just us and we started really opening up. After a few weeks of it I felt
> a little relieved. We can really express ourselves with each other and that's
> good. The more we get to know each other, the more we can open up.
> We just brought one thing up and it led to another and another and people
> were crying and we just felt really close. And we learned a new thing
> about each other that we can't leak to other people. But now I open up to
> my close friends and the group leader a lot. There was this one time when
> I think I just had a nervous breakdown and we shared stories and kind of
> bonded. Then the whole group we started bonding and talking. We just
> get really, really close when we tell more personal stories and then it's just
> like a different bond. Because mostly everyone in that group has a terrible
> home life and it gets really heavy. It gets depressing and really scary
> cause some of the situations are really bad. It's frightening to even think
> about or talk about 'cause some of the stuff that has happened to them is
> scary. A lot of it was sexual abuse. People were crying. And that's
> pretty much why we're all here for each other because we all know that
> story…everyone's story. Then we all just therapize each other, if that's a
> word. So the more drama, the closer we get. Like the more heaviness, the
> closer we feel afterwards. It's kind of like you get a new bond every time
> a story is told. But we can also have a lot of fun together. The rest of the
> school day is pretty boring.

P2 I felt relieved being able to tell people. Sooner or later I started realizing that I liked having people to talk to about this stuff. Which I didn't know I really could do because I didn't know anyone that I could talk to. And the group made it easier for me to talk to people. It made me feel more trust and safety and open up more.

P3 We talked about what we thought, what we do, what we dreamed about. It would always just make us feel welcomed when they would understand our story and listen and feel how we felt. Whenever somebody would share a story that was sad you'd always be sympathetic and say "It's OK. That happened to me, too." And we'd help them. We'd tell them stories that happened to us. Whenever we did group discussions where we got to talk to the other people, we felt really close. Whenever any of us felt really close we always had so much fun and laughed. Having fun and being able to have like no worries for a while.

P4 Whenever I felt close is whenever we were talking about what happened and why were in the group. It just seemed like people were paying attention and everybody was listening. And I probably listened more and talked more, too. It sort of gives you more of a detail of their life. You're not just looking at their cover. You're finding out more about them and some of it is very personal and touching. It sort of released a bunch of weight off my shoulders, too. Sort of let me hear my voice out loud and understand and hear myself more. It sort of influenced me to get involved more and interact with the group more.

P6 Sharing made me feel closer to these girls that I really didn't know before.   I mean sometimes some of the girls would tell us what's going on at home and   there would be crying in the session. I opened up with them, then they opened up with me. You know, when they would tell us stuff, we'd give them tips on what to do and what not to do and just like comments on what they could do and couldn't do really.

P7 I got to communicate with people that I didn't usually associate with, like other students. It was nice. I remember this one time when (name of group member) said his family sold heroin. When he admitted that personal stuff it sunk in and other more personal conversations happened after that. But that's really the catalyst, that's what I remember. The feeling of security just kind of clicked and then it was just a place where we could easily let those things out. There were certain kids, certain people in the group that were more open. Cause I remember that there were some kids that wouldn't talk or when they did they would say something that kind of, I don't know how to describe it, it was kind of misleading. It's just kind of like they were acting like they were

participating but they in reality weren't. They just kind of came up with whatever crap and then just said it.

Finding Similarities. _Finding similarities,_ a property of _group_ process, describes the importance of group members making connections and discovering that they "have a lot in common" with each other including similar thoughts, feelings and experiences as other group members. _Finding similarities_ occurred across group members, including peer group members and the school counselor. Participants experienced _finding similarities_ important across a variety of problem areas including a range of personal and academic areas. The following data gives voice to the properties and dimensions of _finding similarities_:

> P2 Well in the group the first time, we just started talking about our lives and I realized that I have a lot in common with the others. It was nice because we found out we had a lot in common. I felt like there were more people like me. And the group shared when they had similar problems. It felt good to know that I wasn't the only one who had some of these problems at home or dealing with other people in school or something like that.

> P3 I could relate to people a lot because a lot of things have happened in my life. And a lot of things that have happened to me are just starting to happen to other people like divorces and family fights and different kinds of things so I've already dealt with that. So they would usually ask me what to do.

> P4 We all pretty much had the same problems or close to it. Whenever I heard this one kid's story, it sounded like mine, so I sort of connected with him.

> P5 She (the counselor) would tell us stories of her own personal experiences and so it   was easier to talk to her because she went through the same exact things.

> P6 It was mostly the younger girls that were saying stuff was happening at home and me and the other 8th grader knew what they were going through because we've experienced the same things. So we just told them that it's going to take time and day by day it's going to get better.

P7 I thought there were more people that have the same thing in common as me. Because they were in there for basically the same reasons. Kids having the same difficulties as you. I've always been this way and in a sense it kind of gives me a sense of completion, I guess, to be able to communicate my personal struggles with other people and learn that they might have those same struggles.

Resolving Conflicts. Resolving conflicts, a subcategory of *group process,* describes the importance of processing group conflicts or tensions, arguments, or fights. This subcategory included the properties of level of engagement (passive & active) and emotional responses (neutral and angry/sad). The level of engagement refers to the range of involvement of group members in *resolving conflict.* It must be noted that one participant did not experience any conflicts or tensions in their school counseling group. However, for the other participants, engagement levels with resolving conflict ranged from withdrawing or passive engagement to more active and engaged levels in terms of the behavioral responses of group members to *resolving conflict.* When participants were actively engaged in *resolving conflict* they were actively communicating and talking and listening to each other and when participants were withdrawn from *resolving conflict* they were quiet and less active in group process. Participant emotional responses to *resolving conflict* describes the variations in participant feelings and reactions to conflict and range from feeling bad, angry and sad. Participants also experienced feeling helpful and as if they were needed to help resolve group conflicts. The following data represent the dimensions of both emotional responses and level of engagement in characterizing the importance of *resolving conflict* in *group process:*

P1 There was one day that was really chaotic and it was really uncomfortable. We started arguing a lot and we just started giving each other dirty looks. So I just kind of backed away from them for a while. I

just kind of hung out by myself and didn't really talk to them all that much. I guess I was just caught up in the moment and I didn't want to feel that way. I just felt so bad. And I kind of just wanted to leave because it got really bad and people were screaming and crying and I was curled up in a little ball trying to avoid it.

P2 Conflict never really happened to me but I think it might have happened to someone else, but the group helped her out with that. We talked about it and she got over it pretty well. And we talked to the other person about how would you feel if it was you.

P3 Whenever somebody got in a fight with other kids in the group, then you didn't think you could trust them. So a lot of kids didn't share things for some while. We could get into something really big or really small. And we could always get over it. It just depended on who started it and what emotions they felt.

P4 Some kids just took time out arguing and it was aggravating. I just wanted to help them pay attention and stuff. To help them not be disrespectful. I'd ask them if they could please listen and hear what they have to say and be patient and polite. Then they would try and do it. There was a major conflict between students one time and it was between them so I sort of stayed out of it. Because some things I don't like being involved with. I just stayed quiet and turned my shoulder. And let the adult handle it. After a lot of talking and listening, he got them peaceful again and everything was fine.

P5 It really started with two of my friends arguing and I wouldn't know what to do. With the counselor we all had to actually listen to each other and then say what we needed to say. When there was conflict it was mostly like people just having a bad temper and then whether it was directed at me or someone else, I usually felt pretty bad cause it's usually unnecessary. When I'm yelled at I get really quiet and I shut down. So I usually sat there for a while until they told me to talk about it and even then I wouldn't really say much. That was when I usually got really fed up and everything was annoying me. I guess it was just talked about and we came to a win-win situation. But after it was resolved it's like we're going to walk away best friends now.

P6 There were never any conflicts in that group. There was no need to. We were all there to get stuff off our chest and there was no need for conflict to happen whatsoever. So there was no conflict.

> P7 I don't really remember any conflict. I think there was a couple of times when we went in there to do work and we'd all just want to kind of goof off but we still felt close.

Interactions

The central category of *sticking together* influences and is influenced by the dynamic interactions of the various dimensions of the subcategory properties. In the beginning of the group and when the group experienced a threat to safety, a conflict or new group members, participants' felt more distant and less close until the group processed these events. For example, open group membership and new members joining the group significantly influenced participants' experience of the cohesion process of *sticking together,* but with *facilitative group leadership,* a *safe environment* could be reestablished in the group with *group process* that includes open levels of *sharing with the group* and *finding similarities* across group members, and actively engaged levels of *resolving conflicts*. *Group process* that encourages *sharing with the group, finding similarities with group members,* and *resolving conflicts* facilitates the experience of *sticking together* and the *feelings of belonging, positive feelings, open social interactions,* and *lasting connections* that describe the "tight bond" cohesion process. Additionally, the *group structure* subcategories of *helpful group purpose, safe environment, facilitative group leadership,* and *group membership* significantly influence participants' experience of both *group process* subcategories and the central category of *sticking together.* When *resolving conflicts*, participants reported variations in their emotional responses and behavioral levels of engagement that influenced their immediate, here-and-now experience of the cohesion process and their experiences of *feeling close to the group* and *making friends*. However, participants also gave voice to the strength of the group bond

as a salient part of the *sticking together* process in terms of *resolving conflicts* and returning to the experience of *feeling close to the group* and *making friends.* The following data excerpts illustrate these and other important interactions of theory categories, subcategories, properties and dimensions:

> P1 I felt a lot of anger. I ended up being so snippy to people and rude and disrespectful. But the group has helped. I am so much better and it really straightened me out. I trust better and I'm really polite now and respectful to people and I think I carry myself more confidently. There were times when I felt like I may have opened up a little too much but I knew I'd be OK because they wouldn't spread that kind of stuff. Of course I'm not really popular but I have friends that can support me so it's good. After a few weeks of it I felt a little relieved that I can trust someone and that I was with my friends that I had now. And I just started building up confidence and better feelings about myself and about them and about everything in general. And then I got a lot of friends and I'm just a happier person now. We all just kind of stick up for each other. Then we discover new bonds.
>
> There were a few incidents that loosened that bond. A few conflicts came up. There was this one time, I think it was because of a guy. But we all were all kind of just buzzed up about it and I didn't talk to them and she finally got really snippy with me and I kind of fought back. We got in a really big fight. It was outside of the group. But we solved everything and now we're really good friends. Like we were kind of distant at first. We just kind of set back and let everyone else do their thing. Everyone was kind of questioning about it but then we started working things out. The counselor would ask, "Why are you so quiet now?" and I just say "I don't feel too good." Then I just talk it out. Usually we'll both talk and we're OK. Then (the counselor) had to help us get our stuff together and we all sorted some stuff out. I mean there's always like some tension cause we all have our little conflicts with each other but we're all good. We needed to fight it out and then we'd get over it and then we're friends again. We just knew that we were affecting them and we needed to get back to how we were. Then we were OK.
>
> P2 So before the group it was always hard for me to keep friends with people and they would get so mad at me if I was hanging out with someone else and all those problems. But in group it was easier to connect with the people in the group and it was easier for me then to connect with them out of the group because of that. We came into group and she (the counselor) would ask us questions and we'd tell a story that

was related to what she brought up and that's how I found out we were all a lot alike. Getting to know each other and relating to each other would make it easier to have a close group bond.

P3 The purpose of the group was for us to feel comfortable with a group of people that we could trust and feel safe with to share things that we wouldn't share with other people. And form a group of people that we felt comfortable and safe talking with if you had something wrong. Whenever I was having a rough time, having friends there that would comfort me through whatever was going on and always made my day a lot easier. We usually met on Mondays and those were the days I had the most trouble with cause I don't really have good days with Mondays or a few other days of the week and so knowing that they would be there to help comfort me throughout the day on Mondays and throughout the week would always really help me.

Well when we all first joined the group there were four of us and it was a very small group and we all trusted each other but then a few others wanted to join, too. We decided that it would be a smart idea so they joined in. In order for all of it to work, we all needed to be friends and have trust. So at first it took a while for us to trust the new ones because we weren't all friends with them. But after we got to know them better than we did before, we got to trust them more. We told each other a whole bunch of secrets and stuff. And then it got a lot easier for all of us to bond and be friends and communicate easier throughout the group than if we weren't all friends and bonding. I got in a fight with (group member name). She got mad at sent me mean text and said I'm done with you. We talked through it and I said I was sorry and she said it's fine. And after we just started texting and being nice and helping each other again. And then we felt like we could trust each other even more. Because before that she didn't tell me a lot of things but after that we were open about who we liked and stuff like that. So she said I'm one of the people she can trust most so she'll always text me when she has a problem. And I always answer even if it's 4 in the morning. We're still close.

She (the counselor) was a very big part of my experience of belonging because if it was just a whole bunch of kids getting together to try to deal with it, it really wouldn't work well. Because it's kind of like a house, you need the foundation and then the rest of it is built up. She was the structure of the building. Like a flower, the stem is the structure of it. She was kind of like the stem for all of us 'cause without her we would have fallen apart. She was like the glue that held everything together. She was the one who always made sure we would all feel trustworthy and accepted there. When I felt accepted by the group I thought I finally had some

people I could talk to and feel trust with and we could laugh and have fun and always have each others' backs when something was wrong.

P4 Well it was my freshman year so I didn't have any high school friends yet. It sort of helped me be myself and get friends. The group just helped us get to know each other and make a connection and a tight bond just by talking and having more social time. It was pretty weird at first not knowing people and telling them your story. It was pretty rough. But after a while we started to get along and make a lot of friend bonds. Whenever I first started talking they said "It's all right" and "We can help you get through this." And they did. They wanted to help me get out of the life I was stuck in. Help me, give me more options. Then I felt safer and I was comfortable sharing with the people I was with. And throughout there'd be some kids not willing to participate or they'd tune out. And that messes up the bond. But the next day we'd probably be fine and we'd get back to helping each other out. And I gained a new friend from being in the group.

P5 I moved here in 7th grade and right away I went from this really big school to here where everyone knows you the second you walk in. So I was trying to get used to it and a couple of people weren't exactly being nice to me and they kept bullying me. Through the counseling I was able to say that and be like "Yeah, this is going on. What can I do?" And then I got support from everyone and actually did make some friends. So being in the group helped us get better relationships and helped us get to know each other. So we were all able to mend together and be in a group and all be friends. I'm pretty sure we haven't fought since freshman year. It helped me with not being able to deal with things, like for a while I was really sad because of bullying. But then I could just go there with my friends and I was fine again. So it helped me get through that. After we started the group with the school counselor we started making more friends and now we're all able to get along. Basically it helped us feel accepted and we know each others' secrets. We have this really tight bond that I don't feel like can be broken. Whenever we would talk about how we were feeling to one another and then we got to know each other slightly more and then it's like they trust me, telling me their biggest secrets and then after that I think it was just, I don't know how to explain it, we're still close because of that and can trust each other. Now we don't even need the counseling because we know what to do and how we work together.

P6 I knew I was going in there to get help and help the others. So when I told them what's happening in my life it made me feel better. Because now after every session I felt relief, like I told somebody and I can just go on with my life being a better and happier person. It felt good that

somebody wanted to make sure that I was safe and OK and wanted to hear what I had to say. It felt nice going to get all those weights off my shoulders. When I felt close to the group was when we shared some of the stuff that we've gone through and some of the girls told us stuff that they didn't tell anybody else and that just made us feel closer because we had a trust bond now. Then after that it got better and better and we became good friends. I don't think there was ever a time when I didn't feel close to the group. By the time we got close we were pretty much all good friends. I felt like it was a great experience to have that because most girls don't really have that here. And it felt nice actually to belong to a group that you can get help from and you can also help somebody else.

P7 So my experience was that when someone shared that his family sold heroin and I thought that was kind of cool that he was so open with the group and felt the ability to share something extremely confidential. It brought a sense of connection cause I mean if he was so open to share something so personal as that. The openness. The kind of trusting to let other kids know personal issues. It just built a sense of security.

Summary

Sticking together was identified as the central category describing participants' experience of a "tight bond" or the cohesion process. The central category of *sticking together* includes the subcategories of *feeling close to the group* and *making friends.* Properties of the central category include *feelings of belonging, positive feelings, open social interactions,* and *lasting connections.* The category of *group structure* includes the subcategories of *facilitative group leadership, safe environment, helpful group purpose,* and *group membership.* The category of *group process* includes the subcategories of *sharing with the group, finding similarities,* and *resolving conflicts.* Each category and the corresponding properties played an integral role in participants' experience of the cohesion process in rural school counseling groups. Participant interviews consistently illustrated the complex and dynamic process of *sticking together*. Member checking

confirmed the emergent grounded theory of how adolescents' experience *sticking*

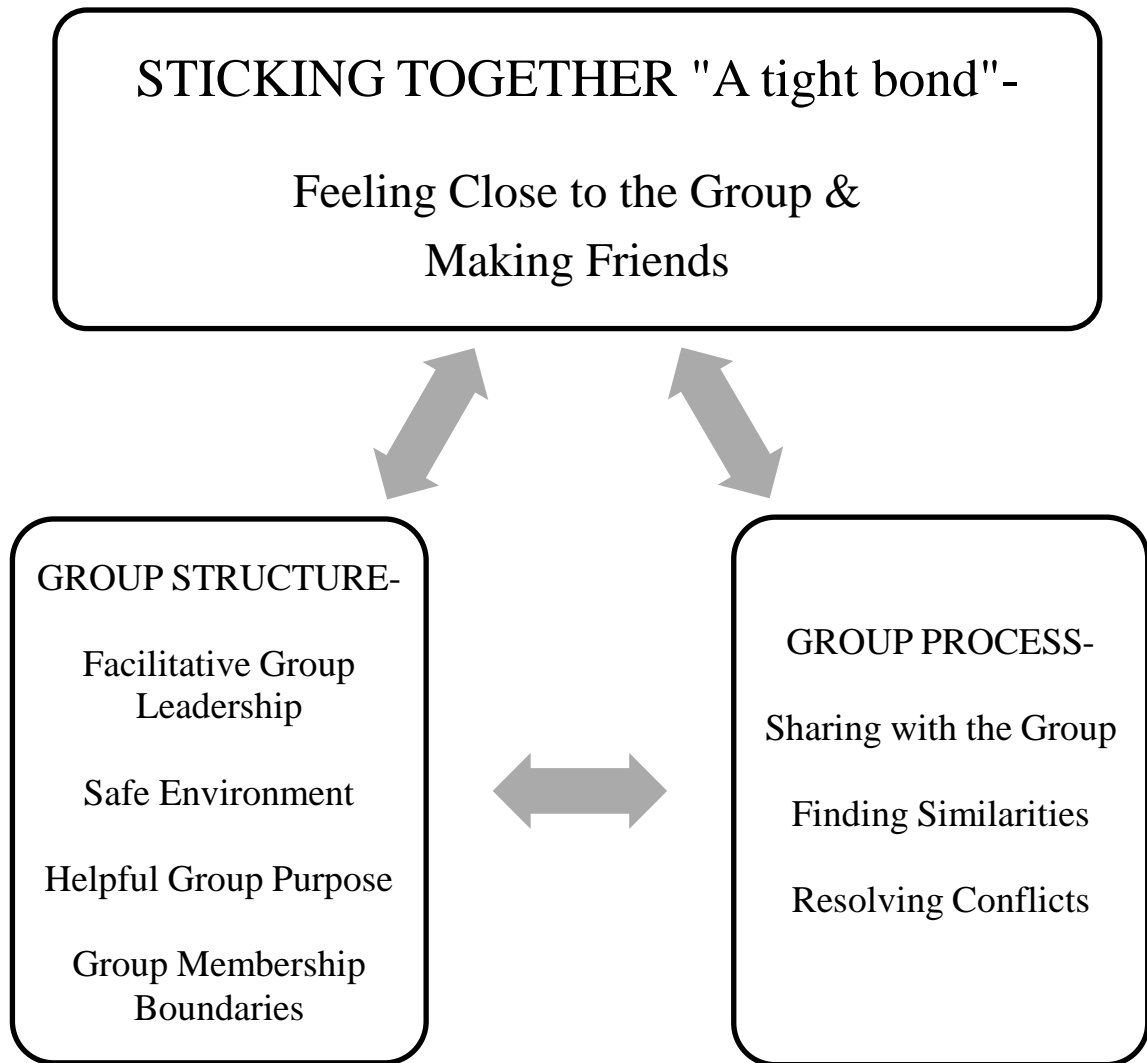*together:* the cohesion process in rural school counseling groups.

STICKING TOGETHER "A tight bond"-

**Feeling Close to the Group &
Making Friends**

GROUP STRUCTURE-

Facilitative Group
Leadership

Safe Environment

Helpful Group Purpose

Group Membership
Boundaries

GROUP PROCESS-

Sharing with the Group

Finding Similarities

Resolving Conflicts

Figure 1. Cohesion Process in Adolescent School Counseling Groups: Categories & Subcategories.

STICKING TOGETHER
"A tight bond"

FEELING CLOSE TO
THE GROUP-

Feelings of Belonging
(belonging & left out)

Positive Feelings
(confidence/feeling good
& sad/anxious/angry)

MAKING FRIENDS-

Open Social
Interactions (intragroup
& extragroup)

Lasting Connections
(peer members &
counselor)
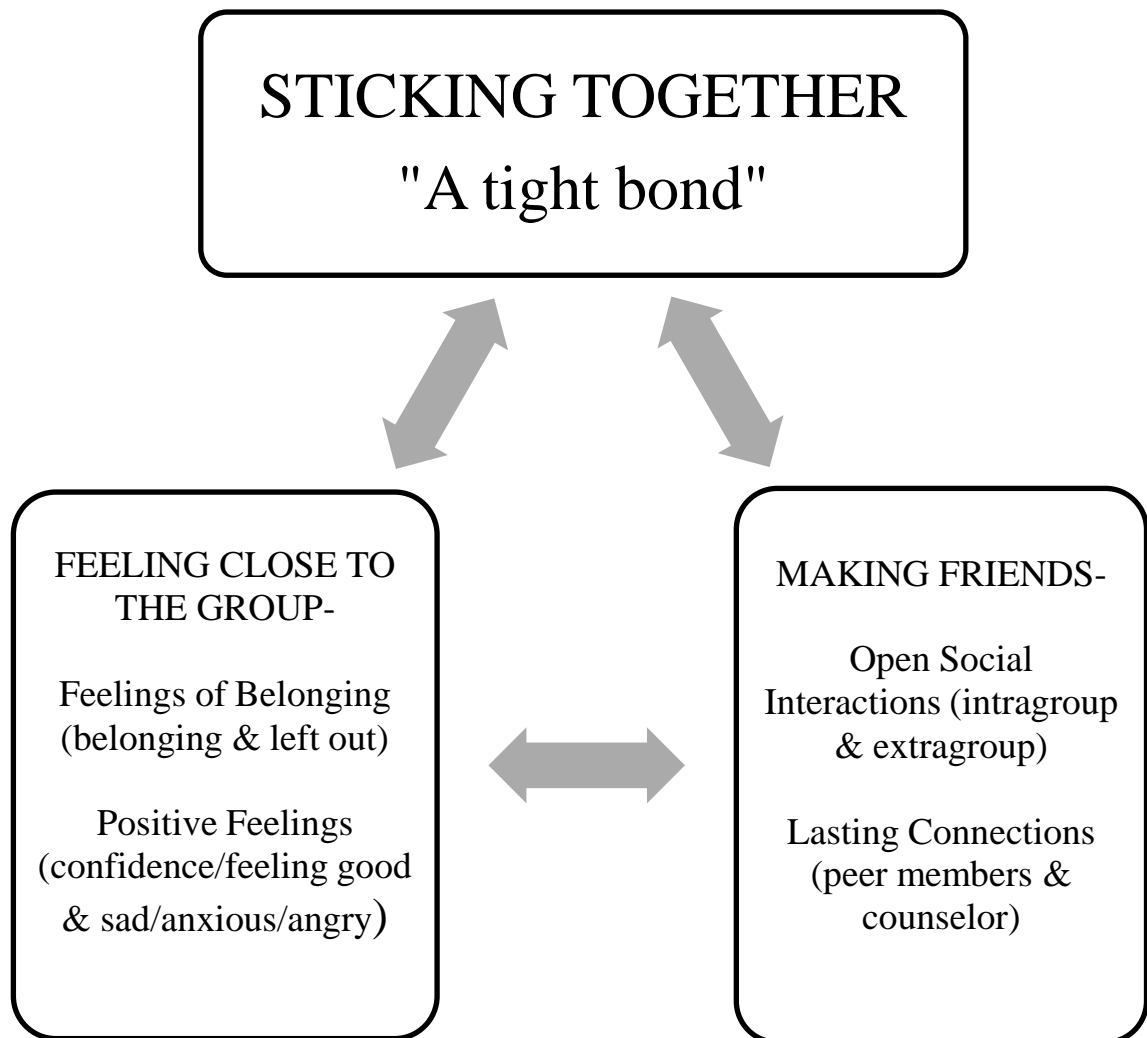
Figure 2. Sticking Together Subcategories, Properties & Dimensions.

GROUP STRUCTURE

FACILITATIVE GROUP LEADERSHIP-

Structure (organizing & introducing activities)

Process (sharing & resolving conflicts)

SAFE ENVIRONMENT-

Internal Context (safe & unsafe)

External Context (in school & outside of school)

HELPFUL GROUP PURPOSE-

Personal (social & emotional)

Academic (grades & career)

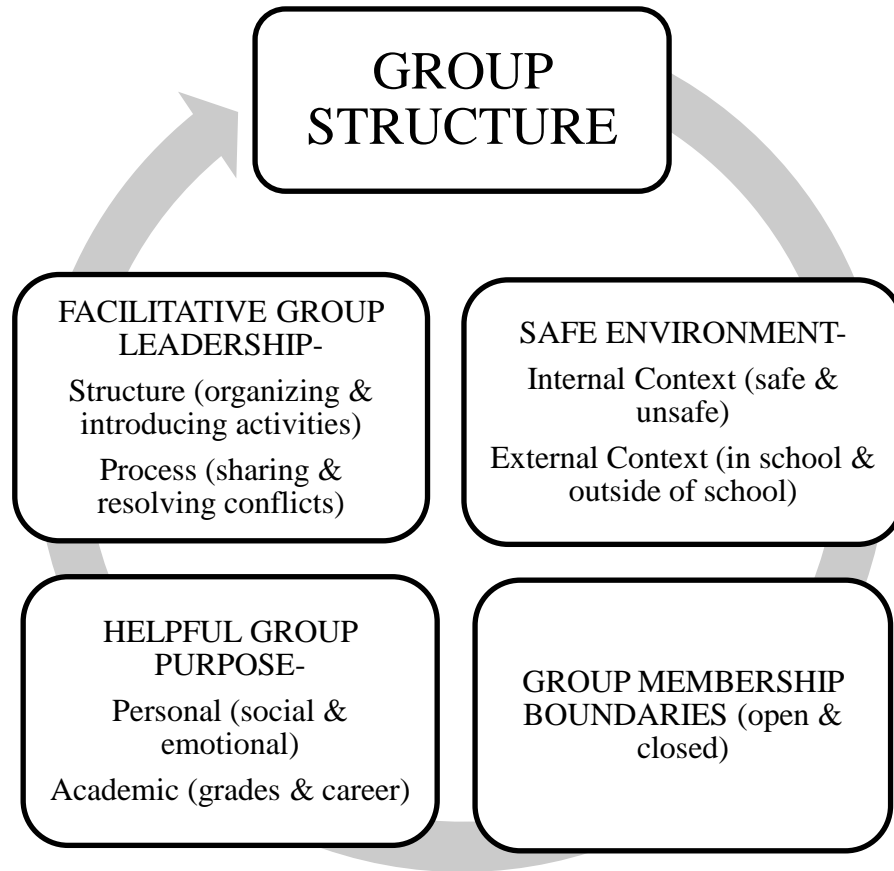**GROUP MEMBERSHIP BOUNDARIES** (open & closed)

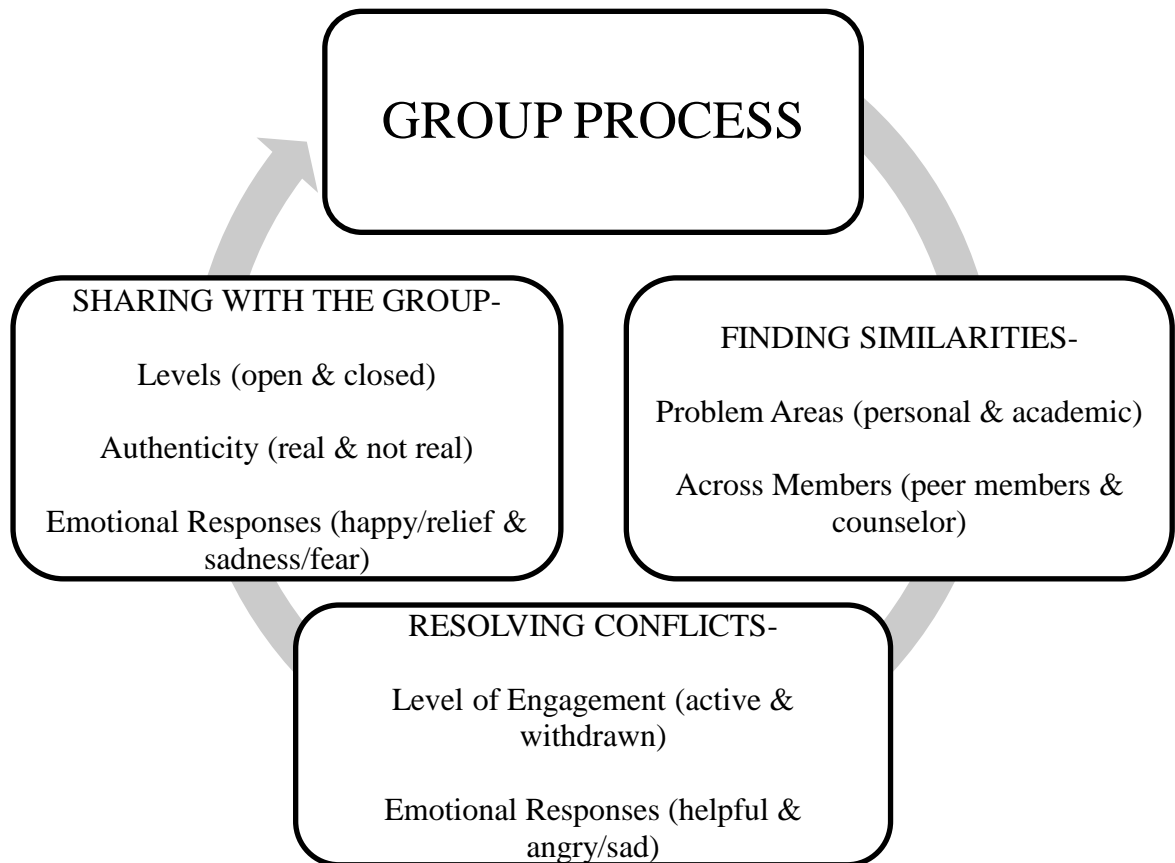Figure 3. Group Structure Subcategories, Properties & Dimensions.

Figure 4. Group Process Subcategories, Properties & Dimensions.

APPENDIX I

Member Checking

Triangulated data collection includes member checking. Member checking involves an ongoing dialogue with participants to gauge the accuracy of data and subsequent interpretations. The third and final round of interviews included member checking to verify and validate that the emerging grounded theory and diagrams accurately reflect participants' experiences. Member checking took place at the end of the interview process and after the second round of interview data analysis. Participants were given a summary of the theory categories, subcategories, and property dimensions and their interactions in the process of cohesion or *sticking together.* Both a narrative summary and diagrams were used to check the accuracy of the emergent grounded theory. After summarizing the emergent theory, the researcher asked participants, "Does that describe your experience of belonging in a school counseling group?" Participant responses to member checking include:

P1 Yes. Overall with everyone. Yeah. If there's certain kinds of support groups like for special people like let's say suicidals then I think if they start bonding that would be better for them.

P2 Yeah. Getting to know each other and relating to each other would make it easier to bond.

P3 It sounded a lot like our group with the bond and trust. A bond is nothing without trust or friendship. It really does help, too.

P4 Yeah. I experienced that. I think you did a good job. The graph is just an easier way to summarize it.

P5 That sounds exactly right! That story was just everything.

P7 Yip. Yeah, that's what I remember. But we were too young at the time to understand that we were actually building these things. But we

were kids and we understood what it was to be safe in that environment. So we were making connections and knew these people were trustful.

While only 6 of the 7 research participants participated in member checking, all of the participants involved in member checking confirmed the emergent grounded theory of the cohesion process of *"sticking together"* and confirmed the characteristic categories, subcategories, properties and dimensions. Formal member checking at the end of analysis provided participants an opportunity to confirm, correct or provide information in reference to the accuracy of the grounded theory. The use of member checking enhances the trustworthiness and credibility of the grounded theory results (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).