THE DEVELOPMENT OF AN ALTERNATIVE GROUP THERAPY CURRICULUM 
TO ADDRESS AGGRESSION AMONG ADOLESCENT BOYS

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THE DEVELOPMENT OF AN ALTERNATIVE GROUP THERAPY CURRICULUM TO ADDRESS AGGRESSION AMONG ADOLESCENT BOYS

A Project

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Abstract

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The ways and limitations in which boys express their emotions is the focus of and inspiration for the development of this project. Boys are taught to limit the expression of their emotions, resulting in the development of few tools to appropriately handle difficult social situations. Through exposure to the media, movies, parents, teachers, and peers, boys learn how to act masculine. This socially constructed idea of what it means to be a man greatly restricts boys' emotional and social development. Through extensive research and conversations with school social workers an anger management group curriculum was developed. This curriculum takes an alternative approach to traditional group therapy by incorporating social construction and narrative theory. The curriculum focuses on exploring how boys learn to handle difficult situations while also learning how to deconstruct their notions of masculinity. This curriculum gives boys the tools to critically analyze their environment and learn skills to better handle their aggression.

Committee Chair

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Chapter 1
INTRODUCTION

Problem Statement

Acts of aggression on elementary, middle school and high school campuses has become a growing concern among teachers, parents and administrators over the last several years. The topic has dominated national news and has sparked a number of research efforts to determine what contributes to the onset and increase of aggressive behavior. While both girls and boys have been studied, the majority of the publics' and researchers' focus has been on males because of the increasing number of incidents of violent acts by male students on campuses across the nation.

Background of the Problem

Aggression among adolescent boys has become a widespread problem in society. Adolescent boys are committing more and more violent acts. Without addressing aggressive behavior at the onset, it is likely to continue into adulthood and lead to far worse problems. Statistics show that boys are more aggressive and violent than girls and that they represent 95 percent of all killings committed by juveniles (Kindlon & Thompson, 2000).

A number of factors can contribute to aggression among adolescent boys, including exposure to violence in the media, exposure to violent or aggressive behavior in the home, and poor socioeconomic status (Feder, Levan & Dean 2007; Kindlon & Thompson, 2000; Malekoff 2004, Margolin; Youga & Ballou, 2002). Interactions at school, including those with teachers and peers can affect the aggression levels in
adolescent boys. Lopez, Perez, Ochoa and Ruiz (2008) believe that during adolescence, boys have fewer close relationships and more “problematic relationships with peers,” leading to greater levels of aggression (p. 445). They argued that “social interactions” with peers and teachers has a direct impact on the development of aggressive behavior.

Aggression amongst adolescent boys is on the rise. There has been a significant increase in referrals of adolescents with aggressive behavior to mental health treatment centers. The treatment of aggression continues to pose a challenge for mental health clinicians (Connors, 2002). For the purpose of this study, aggressive behavior is defined as “reactionary and impulsive behavior that often results in breaking household rules or the law; aggressive behavior is violent and unpredictable” (Linwood, 2006). Impulsive, reactionary, tough, hard and fierce are words often associated with aggressive behavior. They are also words that can be used to define what it means to be masculine – a word many boys strive to be used to describe them. While the nation is struggling to comprehend and explain the influx of aggressive and violent behavior being exhibited by boys, it may be beneficial to examine how society defines manhood and the expectations – and consequently limitations – placed on boys.

The Mid-Atlantic Equity Consortium, a nonprofit dedicated to creating learning environments in which students from all backgrounds have a safe and equal opportunity to flourish, suggests that due to a limited definition of what it means to be masculine and male, “boys tend to define themselves in opposition to others.” They tend to be more aggressive, “withdrawn and emotionally unexpressive (2008).” Boys are learning that expressing their emotions in a sensitive and open way creates a vulnerability that
threatens their masculinity. This inability to express one’s feelings in a way that does not result in violence or other forms of aggressive behavior is a perturbing problem for boys of every age. It can be argued that the way that gender is constructed and defined directly contributes to the increased levels of aggression among boys.

One way in which therapists have approached aggression amongst adolescents is through group therapy. Group therapy allows youth to come together and address the issue at hand while learning new skills, obtaining support from other students and adults, and identifying with other peers who are experiencing the same feelings and issues that they are. The group process can be incredibly powerful for youth to experience, especially when addressing feelings of aggression and the inability to control acts of aggression. Traditional approaches to aggression among adolescents in a group setting have focused primarily on cognitive behavioral strategies.

Group therapy, especially anger management groups, has been a common tool used to aide adolescent boys in changing their behavior so that they learn to express their anger and aggression in more appropriate ways. The use of group therapy is a logical one when working with adolescents. As Kymissis and Halperin (1996) point out, the transition to adolescents is a process of socialization and connecting to peers. The use of group therapy in addressing social, emotional, and behavioral issues among adolescents utilizes some of the themes that are familiar to the youth in their normal interactions. Peer groups are incredibly valuable to adolescents and this is exactly what group therapy is. Group therapy provides youth with feedback and support from their peers while helping them understand that their experiences are similar to their peers, bringing about a
sense of universality. However, little dialogue takes place in anger management groups about the stories the youth have created about what it means to be a male and how this dictates the ways in which they deal with their emotion, specifically their anger.

Purpose of the Project

The purpose of this project is to further explore the possibility of taking a constructionist approach to anger management groups with adolescent boys. Little research has been done on the effectiveness of engaging adolescent boys in a conversation about masculinity and how it dictates their actions. Incidentally, few group curriculums exist that encourage boys to deconstruct some of their ideas about masculinity and its relationship to their aggressive behavior.

Through extended research and interviews with professional social workers who work with adolescent boys, this project focused on creating a curriculum that guided adolescent boys through a group process that addresses their aggression while taking a constructionist approach. The curriculum utilizes input received from social work professionals to effectively create a group therapy approach that teaches boys alternative ways of expressing their anger while developing alternative notions or constructs of what it means to be a man.

The variables that make up this study include adolescent boys who have been identified as aggressive and a group therapy model used to address the boys’ aggression. Some of the variables that may contribute to the aggressive behavior within boys will also be examined. These variables include environmental factors, family and peer relationships, gender norms and the construction of masculinity. It is important to look at
some of the factors that lead to aggressive behaviors specifically amongst adolescent boys. It is hypothesized that the relationship between gender norms or expectations and how boys express aggression is important to explore. This is because the ways in which boys internalize notions of masculinity and what it means to be a man can have profound affects on the ways in which they express their feelings and ultimately exhibit aggressive behavior.

Building on the theory and research regarding this relationship, the researcher explored through interviews with professional social workers ways in which group therapy can incorporate ideas surrounding masculinity to addresses aggressive behavior among adolescent boys. The goal was to create an alternative curriculum that can be utilized by school social workers, counselors and therapists. The group therapy intervention created was designed to be different than traditional group approaches to adolescent aggression.

Assumptions

An assumption was made that traditional group approaches alone do not significantly address the root causes of aggressive behavior, therefore the group curriculum has a cognitive-behavioral component but will also incorporate elements of group analysis of gender roles and ideas surrounding masculinity. By incorporating this element into the group therapy the hope is that group participants will not only be able to identify their triggers and more effective ways to handle them but will also begin to deconstruct some of their ideas surrounding masculinity and how that comes to dictate the ways in which they handle their anger.
Theoretical Framework

The theories and perspectives being used to support the exploration of this approach include narrative theory and social constructionist perspective. Narrative theory suggests that it can be therapeutically beneficial for individuals to "deconstruct and reconstruct a new narrative that helps him function better in life (McKenzie, 2008 p. 56)." Narrative theory is a product of a constructionist perspective that supports the "notion that reality is not absolute or objective but is created by all human beings (McKenzie, 2008 p. 55)." The social constructionist perspective suggests that gender is a social construct and thus the belief that boys are expected to be aggressive and tough is a construct that can be challenged and changed through the use of such therapy as narrative (Johnson & Rhodes, 2005). Narrative therapy can be especially successful with adolescents because it treats them as the expert and feeds into and supports their burgeoning need for autonomy (McKenzie, 2008). Thus, an assumption can be made that the use of narrative therapy in group work can enable adolescents to deconstruct and reconstruct gender roles that support less aggressive interpretations of what it means to be masculine or a man.

Definitions of Terms

Psychoeducation group therapy is the model primarily represented in this project. Psychoeducation group therapy is defined as a model that focuses on group members critically examining one's thoughts, feelings and behaviors through the development of skills (Corey & Corey, 2006). Constructionism is defined as a perspective that reality is based on perception and thus subjective. For the purpose of this project gender is defined
through a constructionist lens. Constructionist perspective suggests that differences between men and women or socially and culturally constructed, created gender norms and expectations (Johnson & Rhodes, 2005). Finally, narrative approaches are addressed in this project with narrative defined as the story one has constructed to define and describe their life experiences (McKenzie, 2008).

Limitations

The information received to develop the curriculum will be limited to the feedback from social workers who freely agree to participate with the researcher. The outcome and final product is not representative of all social workers but rather those that contributed to the research and the researcher. This study is therefore limited to the feedback and contributions of professional social workers and the development of a group curriculum. It has not studied the implementation of the curriculum and therefore is not able to remark on its direct effectiveness.
Chapter 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

According to the Surgeon Generals Report (2001), boys are 3.5 times more likely than girls to commit violent acts. Researchers are beginning to make an argument for the connection between the ways in which boys are socialized and their propensity for violence and aggressive behavior. When working with adolescent boys who are exhibiting signs of aggression social workers, counselors and therapists often utilize a group therapy approach as a means of addressing the aggressive behavior. Cognitive behavioral therapy is the commonly viewed as an effective form of group therapy and is used most often. CBT, however, often fails to address the underlying social themes surrounding why boys specifically are more likely to be aggressive and potentially violent. How boys view themselves and the ways in which their identity as a male is socially constructed can have profound affects on how they interact with others. Therefore, it is necessary and pertinent to explore alternative forms of therapy when considering running anger management groups with adolescent boys.

Aggressive behavior can have detrimental effects on youth. Unaddressed aggressive behavior can lead to academic failure, delinquency, antisocial behavior, conduct problems, substance abuse, family stress, and social exclusion (Blake & Hamrin, 2007; Sharry & Owens, 2000). Increased aggression among adolescents is often attributed to media influence, family situations, socioeconomic status, and peer relationships (Feder, Levant, & Dean, 2007). Studies have indicated that youth who are
regularly exposed to violent images in the media, violent and aggressive behavior in the home, and violence in their community, are far more likely to exhibit aggressive behavior themselves. According to the Surgeon General’s report on youth violence, violence “peaks” in adolescence. The report states that, “for some young people, violence represents a way of gaining the respect of peers, enhancing their sense of self or declaring their independence from adults (2001).” Growing research is indicating a connection between gender and aggressive behavior (Feder, Levant & Dean, 2007). Boys in particular are expressing their feelings and frustrations in a more aggressive and violent ways. Boys are conditioned to hide their emotions, appear tough and limit any suggestion of vulnerability. Feder, Levant, and Dean (2007) argue that boys are made to feel ashamed to express emotions that may identify them as weak, vulnerable, or powerless. Instead, boys are encouraged to block those emotions and erect an emotionless, hostile façade. Thus, aggressive behavior becomes an acceptable form of expressing one’s emotion and often the only option for boys (Feder, Levant & Dean, 2007).

**How Boys View Themselves**

Boys are receiving mixed messages about how they are expected to act and express their emotions. They are being socialized to limit the expression of their emotions (Feder, Levant & Dean, 2007; Pollack, 2006; Kindlon & Thompson, 2000). Pollack identifies a “gender gap” in regards to the healthy emotional development of boys. According to Pollack (2006), boys represent 72% of school suspensions and are four times more likely to be a victim of homicide than girls. Kindlon and Thompson
(2000) argue that there is an emotional miseducation occurring with boys. They are not being taught the necessary tools to address their anger and therefore are unable to appropriately handle their aggression, ultimately getting themselves into trouble. Research on delinquency shows that boys who are unable to effectively communicate their feelings are at greater risk for aggressive and delinquent behavior (Kindlon & Thomson, 2000). Margolin, Youga and Ballou (2002), who interviewed 15 adolescent boys about the reasons behind their aggressive behavior, found that feelings of anger were the main reason boys became aggressive. They were unable to identify other ways to handle their anger appropriately, other than through aggressive behavior. “The key factor that emerges from adolescents’ narratives is the role that anger plays in their aggressive behavior. ...Aggression for the adolescents in this study was a direct result of their feelings of anger” (Margolin, Youga & Ballou, 2002 p. 217).

Social Construction and Masculinity

The ways in which boys define themselves and other boys and men in their life has been examined more closely as the expression and acts of aggression among boys has escalated (Kindlon & Thompson, 2000; Feder, Levant, & James, 2007). Through social interactions, learned behavior, media influence and other factors, boys learn the ideals of masculinity and what characteristics define a man. Values often attributed to masculinity include physical strength, aggression, and deliberate control of emotions that indicate attachment or vulnerability (Philaretou, A. & Allen, K., 2001). While boys are discouraged from expressing their emotions in ways in which they would be perceived as
anything less than masculine, they are encouraged to express emotions that exhibit aggression, strength and dominance.

Gender roles are learned from a very early age. The expectation of how an individual should act depending on their gender is laid out by the people that boys look to and respect the most. Teachers, parents and peers influence are essentially socializing boys so that they are acting appropriately male (Richmond & Levant, 2003). If boys do not conform to the gender stereotyped roles clearly laid out for them, they are often not accepted as openly by their peers, teachers or even parents. Boys learn that in order to avoid rejection and being ostracized they must conform to the roles expected of them (Richmond & Levant, 2003).

When assessing adolescent male aggression, rather than looking at individual boys' actions as pathological or somehow biologically male, researchers suggest that the focus should turn to the cultural expectation placed on boys (Richmond & Levant, 2003; Phillips, 2007). The language used and behaviors modeled create a perception and expectation of manhood and masculinity that perpetuates aggressive, emotionally detached behavior. It limits the options and tools boys have for addressing problems that arise in their lives. Many times they are shamed into limiting their emotions to ones that often only express toughness, anger, aggression and feelings of being in control (Phillips, 2007).

Group Therapy and Adolescents

One of the ways in which social workers and others in the helping field have addressed aggression amongst adolescents is through group therapy or group work.
According to Malekoff, "group work has always been there to address specific needs and enable members to find ways to better mediate the various systems effecting their lives, thus reducing the probability of a poor outcome in their lives (2004)." The effectiveness of group therapy to address aggression among adolescents is worth studying. Various studies have been completed analyzing group work’s effectiveness with varying results (Dodge & Sherril, 2006; Dwivedi & Gupta, 2000; Manen, Prins, & Emmelkamp, 2004; Martsch, 2005; Sharry & Owens, 2000; Williams; Waymouth, Lipman, Mills & Evans, 2004).

Group therapy is used over individual therapy for a variety of reasons. One reason is that adolescents are given the opportunity to address aggressive behavior in a safe and closed environment with their peers and group work can address these issues through modeling and role-playing (Dwivedi & Gupta, 2000; Blake & Hamrin, 2007). Adolescents themselves have felt that being able to talk in a group setting and having others with similar issues listen and provide feedback can be very powerful in helping them address their own aggression (Sharry & Owens 2000; Kindlon & Thompson, 2000). Another reason, which is becoming more apparent in the age of managed care is that group work is cost effective. It allows therapist to work with a number of clients dealing with similar issues at the same time. Group therapy can be particularly beneficial for boys to address their aggression in an open, peer supported environment. Richmond and Levant (2003) state, "Group therapy for adolescent boys offers a potentially effective method to facilitate ways of thinking and behaving that are outside traditional male social norms" (p. 1238).
Cognitive Behavioral Therapy: A Traditional Approach

One of the most popular, and well studied, approaches to group therapy is Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) (Dwivedi and Gupta 2000; Emmerlkamp, Manen and Prins, 2004; Martsch, 2005). It is believed that if adolescents are able to understand their feelings they will better be able to manage their feelings (Dwivedi and Gupta, 2000). Anger management group curriculums commonly used are based on cognitive behavioral theory. Examples of curriculums include Anger Management for Youth: Stemming Aggression and Violence, The Real Deal! Anger Management for Adolescents, and Aggression Replacement Training (Effective Intervention Programs, 2008). Each of these curriculums places a strong focus on structured sessions that teach students how to identify their feelings and develop more appropriate behaviors when responding to situations in which they feel angry. In the sessions students are taught appropriate social skills and given opportunities to practice them. Structured sessions, skill building, identifying triggers and modeling appropriate behavior are some of the key characteristics of cognitive behavioral group therapy. Traditional group curriculums often teach coping strategies, cognitive restructuring techniques, anger management skills, relaxation techniques, and identifying personal triggers.

Researchers have study various forms of group therapy to address aggressive behavior in adolescents, however, in many of these groups the existence of aggression is accepted as a common response for boys when they are dealing with difficult situations. Dwivedi and Gupta (2000) conducted a study in which Stress Inoculation Training was
used in a group setting to address aggression among children. The group focused on helping members first understand what causes inappropriate expressions of aggression. Second it addressed developing skills to more appropriately handle the aggression. Lastly it helped group members use the skills they've learned. Group facilitators also incorporated stress relaxation techniques into the group process. Dwivedi and Grupta found that by the end of the group, participants had significantly increased their ability to more appropriately react to anger-provoking situations. Group members also reported that they felt they behaved much better when faced with anger-provoking situations at the end of the group. However, Dwivedi and Grupta could only conclude that the group therapy had a short-term positive effect, longer effects on the participants were unknown.

*Alternative Approaches to Traditional Group Therapy*

While CBT group approaches can be effective, they often fail to address a very basic question: Where and why do boys learn to handle their difficult situations in an aggressive manner? It is important to ask if this question is being posed to boys as they enter group therapy to deal with their aggressive behavior? CBT group therapy lack connection-making and interconnectedness among members. Researchers have taken the CBT models with additional social elements incorporated into it and studied their effectiveness for reducing aggression.

The effectiveness of a social cognitive intervention program (SCIP) versus social skills training (SST) was studied by Emmelkamp, Manen, and Prins in 2004. Their study looked at how well these programs worked when addressing aggression in adolescent boys. Like Dwidedi and Gupta (2000), Emmelkapm, Manen and Prins saw the value in
teaching adolescents the necessary skills to better handle aggression, however, they did not feel it dealt with some of the key underlying issues that adolescent boys were dealing with when acting aggressively. They chose to focus on a program that incorporated skills training with “interventions that target the underlying social information process of aggressive children” and compare those results with a group intervention that only focused on developing social skills.

Emmelkapm, Manen, and Prins found that both groups showed levels of effectiveness in dealing with adolescent aggression, but determined that “significantly greater improvement” was found in children who participated in the SCIP group where social information processing was emphasized and studied. It showed a reduction in aggressive behavior and impulsivity as well as an increase in appropriate social behavior and self-control.

Similar to Emmelkapm, Manen and Prins (2000) and Dwivedi and Grupta (2000), Martsch (2005) chose to research the effectiveness of cognitive behavioral groups in addressing adolescent aggression that incorporated social elements to the curriculum. Martsch felt that cognitive behavioral groups did not utilize the therapeutic benefits of group process, but rather focused primarily on content and agenda. Martsch hypothesized that a “high-process, cognitive behavioral group treatment was more effective that a low-process, cognitive-behavioral group treatment for reducing aggression and improving pro-social skills for older and younger adolescents” (2005, p. 9). In Martsch’s high-processing group, great emphasis was placed on cohesion, participation, interaction and self-determination among group members, opposed to the
low-processing group where greater emphasis was placed on skill development. Martsch determined that high-processing cognitive-behavior groups were more effective for older adolescents and low-processing cognitive-behavior groups were more effective for younger adolescents. Martsch attributed this to older adolescents ability to think more abstractly and place ideas into perspective. In Martsch's high processing groups, adolescents were given the opportunity to have more control over the dialogue and develop more connections with one another, resulting in a more positive experience.

Richmond and Levant (2003) also took an alternative approach to group therapy with aggressive adolescent boys. They conducted a group for boys between the ages of 15-17 who were court mandated for group therapy because of aggressive behavior. Richmond and Levant chose to explore "emotionally charged" topics with the participants. They lead a fairly unstructured group that offered the boys an opportunity to speak openly about such topics as school, anger, sports, and sex. Richmond and Levant facilitated discussions around these topics and discussed further why some topics are difficult to explore more deeply. They found that it took some time for the boys to participate in the discussions, but over the course of the group sessions and with probing from the facilitators they began to examine the deeper meaning behind their need to be aggressive and where they think they learned such behavior. Richmond and Levant concluded that a group therapy that incorporated both a psychoeducational component as well as foster interpersonal relationships that allowed boys to openly discuss the strain they experience when trying to maintain a masculine appearance could be effective. Richmond and Levant stated, "By fostering conversations based on topic cards, the boys
reflected on the psychologically harmful aspects of endorsing traditional masculinity” (2003, p. 1243). Their group of boys chose to stay with the group for four sessions beyond the court mandated 12 sessions and the therapists took this as an indication that the group was successful in establishing trust and cohesion.

These alternative takes on group therapy incorporated elements not often found in cognitive behavioral group therapy. Elements such as extended group processing, limited structure, and a focus on self-determination were proven successful in reducing the aggression expressed by many of the participants.

Narrative Therapy and Group Work

Another approach social workers can take when designing and running groups to address aggression is the utilization of narrative therapy. Narrative therapy comes from constructionist theory and suggests that, “misunderstandings and conflicts are viewed as developing from differing ideas and understandings of the meaning of events and behaviors” (Beiver, JL and McKenzie, K. 2007). Narrative therapy has more recently been explored as an approach to use with adolescents because it allows youth to help create a new story for themselves and be the expert on their own lives (Biever, J.L & McKenzie, K., 2007; McKenzie, F. 2008; DeSocio, J. 2005). Constructionist theory suggests that adolescent boys are learning what is means to be a man based on ideas and ideals that have been socially constructed by the media, parents, teachers and society as a whole. Narrative therapy can encourage these boys to construct a story and identity what works best for them, not one that has been imposed on them (Biever, J.L. & McKenzie, K. 2007).
Bieve and McKenzie (2007) suggest that including others such as peers in narrative therapy with adolescents can be especially useful and beneficial. Narrative therapy offers an alternative approach to a given situation or attitude. Beiver and McKenzie state that narrative therapy encourages and draws out investment and involvement by the adolescents, which ultimately lead them to creating new meanings and possibilities for themselves. DeSocio (2005) suggests that life stories are established based on particular language and behaviors and once established little room is left for an alternative. Individuals accept this story of their life as true and see little room for variation or alternative definition. When one is able to change the way they’ve described their life story – as is the goal with narrative therapy – they can begin to change their approach to life and particular situations and open up to new possibilities. As DeSocio (2005) states, “the construction of self is thus continuously open to re-authorship through relationships” (p 54). The relationships developed in group therapy can aid individual youth in exploring alternative views of themselves and those around them based on the exchanges they have with their peers in an environment in which constructions are challenged. Narrative therapy offers less structure than traditional CBT approaches to group therapy, allowing participants to develop greater autonomy within the group and have more control over the direction and pace of the group treatment. As was the case with Richmond and Levant’s (2003) study, this less structured approach allowed the boys to slowly develop trust with one another and begin to explore some of the deeper meanings behind their actions.
Argument Against Adolescent Group Therapy

While there is a great amount of literature touting the benefits of group therapy with adolescents some researchers have suggested that group intervention can be more harmful than helpful. Group therapy, specifically anger management groups, require that therapists bring together a group of potentially hostile, aggressive adolescents. Without proper preparation, management skills and positive interactions, the therapist or group facilitator could find themselves in a difficult and challenging environment. Thomas Dishion (1999) explored the hypothesis that group interventions involving high-risk adolescents could actually increase their problem behavior rather than address and control it. Dishion suggests that “high risk peers will support one another’s deviant behavior, so group affiliations should be avoided during restraining periods.” Dishion concluded from his research that the age of youth and the “kinds of youth” included in peer groups affects the effectiveness of group intervention. He found that youth in mid-adolescents were most susceptible to succumbing to increased deviant behavior and less success within peer group interventions.

Support for group therapy suggests that not only is it cost-effective, but provides youth with role-playing activities, modeling, and peer reinforcement – all of which can have a significantly positive impact on the participating youth (Mager, Milich, Harris, and Howard 2004). The argument Fishion (1999) makes, however, is that conducting a group with youth who are all “deviant” or exhibit signs of conduct disorder will lead to modeling inappropriate behavior and reinforce negative behaviors. Mager, Milich, Harris and Howard (2004) explored these claims by Dishion by conducting a study that
monitored the effects of group interventions on groups consisting entirely of youth exhibiting deviant behavior versus a groups consisting only partly of youth exhibiting such behavior. They hypothesized that the mixed group would be more effective in reducing deviant behavior that the group composed entirely of youth exhibiting deviant behavior. The researchers found, however, that the “pure” group (the group made up entirely of youth exhibiting deviant behavior) produced better results than the mixed group. They found that the “pure” group created a higher level of cohesiveness. The researchers also discovered that the participants behavior in the pure group was more positive that that of the mixed group. They concluded that, while conducting groups with youth exhibiting such behaviors will always be challenging, it is highly likely to be more effective when the group is made up entirely of youth experience the same issues.

Dodge and Sherril (2006) reviewed the literature and determined that interventions for “deviant youth” would actually be more effective in the form of individual therapy opposed to group therapy. They found that group therapy is one-third less effective that group therapy when working with deviant youth. Lipsey determined through his research that associations and interactions with deviant peers will lead to more poor behavior. He argues that by exposing youth who are dealing with antisocial behaviors, such as aggression, to a group of peers dealing with similar behaviors may actually increase these behaviors.

When working with aggressive adolescent boys, the effectiveness of group therapy can by limited not only by the interaction with peers who are exhibiting similar behavior problems, but also by their unwillingness to participate and “buy into” the
program. Sharry and Owens (2000) found in their case study of a group with adolescents dealing with aggression that often times the group members did not want to participate and did not want to acknowledge that there was a problem they needed to change. Sharry and Owens describe three difference types of clients. The customer client, who is the one who understand that there is a problem and are motivated to change. The complaintant customer, who thinks there is a problem, wants to change, but does not believe it is something within their control. Finally, the visiting client, who is one who has been forced into therapy and does not recognize that there is a problem and therefore does not see a need for change. Sharry and Owens found that adolescents who are in anger-management groups are often visitors, which means they have a decreased level of motivation to participate in the group and work on changing behaviors. They determined this to be one of the pitfalls of working with adolescents in a group setting and concluded that an emphasis should be placed on being highly aware of the social and cultural differences between the group leader and the adolescent participants and to not force or expect adolescents to adopt everything that is presented to them in group.

There are a variety of group therapy's that have been studied regarding dealing with aggression among adolescent boys, however little research has focused on approaching the group therapy from a constructionist perspective. Richmond and Levant conducted a group with adolescent boys in which they challenged the boys' ideas of masculinity and gender roles and encouraged them to view their choices through alternative lenses. These researchers found a great deal of reluctance by the boys to engage in such conversations. They found that in order for psychotherapy to be effective, participants must be willing to
expression their emotions and be vulnerable, but "boys' typical reluctance to seek and continue therapy relates to the discrepancy between the values and expectations of the male role and the values and expectations of psychotherapy" (Richmond & Levant, 2003).

Conclusion

Research is lacking in the field of social work that further explores the group therapy approach taken by Richmond and Levant (2003). As they state, “group therapy for adolescent boys offers a potentially effective method to facilitate ways of thinking and behaving that are outside traditional male social norms” (p. 1238). Because of the increasing levels of aggression among adolescent boys, it is worth it to seek alternatives to help them understand, express and communicate their feelings of frustration in ways that do not end in violence.

Upon review of the literature it can be suggested that not enough study has been done to support and or discourage the use of group therapy that utilizes narrative and constructionist theory to address aggression among adolescent boys. This researchers recommendation and conclusion is that further dialogue with social workers and other therapists engaging youth in group therapy treatment must be done to determine the effectiveness and or possibility of using such technique in a group therapy setting. This can be attained by interviewing social workers and other group therapy professionals to gain their insight, knowledge, and experience in this form of therapy and seek from them suggestions on how to develop an appropriate and hopefully effective group curriculum that addresses adolescent male aggression utilizing a narrative and constructionist approach. Such is the purpose and objective of this project.
Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY

This project involved creating a group therapy curriculum that addresses aggression using alternative theories to lay the groundwork for its creation. The group therapy curriculum targets adolescent boys who have a history of aggressive behavior. The alternative theories being used include narrative theory and social construction theory.

The group curriculum was developed based on the researcher’s experience facilitating anger management groups with adolescent boys in the school setting. The researcher observed that many of the curriculums utilized in school settings did not address the larger social context in which a child or adolescent observes and develops aggressive behavior. Upon careful and extensive review of the literature, which included journal articles and books, very little was discovered offering a comprehensive group curriculum addressing the larger social implications on adolescents of learned masculinity and aggressive behavior. Pollack (2006) writes, “Given the profound insights being uncovered about the social and emotional struggles of today’s girls, it is striking how scant research on boys has been over the last several decades” (p. 191).

In order to gather relevant information to help facilitate the creation of the group curriculum, school social workers were contacted and interviewed as experts in the field. This panel of experts was chosen based on their work with adolescent boys and experience facilitating anger management groups. Five school social workers from the Greater Sacramento Area were asked to participate in a conversation regarding group
work and received a $5 gift card from Starbucks for their participation.

The school social workers were asked a series of questions [Appendix A] in order to elicit feedback regarding their experience working with adolescent boys and facilitating anger management groups. They were asked for their input regarding the use of alternative theories such as social construction and narrative as possible approaches to the group experience. They were asked to offer suggestions for group activities that foster group cohesion, group discussion and group participation. They were also asked if they had ever addressed masculinity, construction of identity, and environmental factors as contributors to aggressive behavior within a group setting. These professionals were encouraged to identify what they believed to be the social challenges facing adolescent boys that often lead to aggressive and disruptive behaviors and how this can be integrated into an anger management group curriculum.

The information, suggestions and feedback received from the interviews with school social workers, as well as information obtained from extensive research regarding social construction theory, narrative therapy with adolescents, and group therapy, was compiled to facilitate the creation of the curriculum. Through the conversation with school social workers a number of topics and suggestions stood out. All five social workers mentioned the importance of incorporating variety into the curriculum in order to keep the group members engaged and interested. They felt that providing activities that incorporated teaching, role-play, group discussion, and visuals would help to enforce the themes of the group. A few of the social workers suggested using movie clips and music depicting stereotypical masculinity as a way to facilitate group discussions. One social
worker suggested having group members bring in their own music in order to deconstruct the messages found in it as it relates to men and masculinity. Another social worker suggested having group members identify and discuss the labels they feel are given to them. Each of these themes and suggestions were woven into the curriculum.

Just as in the conversations with the school social workers, the research also suggested identifying labels as a way of deconstructing the implications of masculinity in society. Additionally, the research discussed utilizing media as a way of identifying how boys learn masculinity. Another theme that was highlighted in the literature on narrative therapy was the telling of one's story and how that impacts the way one sees their world around them. This theme was incorporated into more than one session of the curriculum.

Based on the topics and themes gathered from a review of the literature and interviews with school social workers an eight-session curriculum was developed. The first three sessions focus on establishing group rules, developing a narrative around anger management, and identifying how each boy's family contributes to their learned behavior. Sessions four and five focus on examining the role media plays in establishing and defining boys' roles in society. Session six focuses on identifying the meanings behind words and labels and how those labels affect how boys express themselves. Finally, sessions seven and eight focus on reexaming the established narratives and tying together the themes of the group. Each of these topics invite group members to critically analyze the ways in which they view themselves and each other. The curriculum encourages members to re-evaluate how and why they handle their anger the way they do, as well as provides opportunities to create new ways of handling anger and
frustration.

The protocol for the Protection of Human Subjects was submitted and approved by the Social Work Department of California State University, Sacramento. The project exhibits no risk to the professional social workers contacted for the research and creation of the curriculum. The professionals interviewed were given a consent form to review and sign prior to the meeting, indicating the protection of their identity and the guarantee of confidentiality [Appendix B]. The social workers were informed that no risk was involved in participating in the information gathering interviews. Voluntary participation was articulated.

The potential benefits of this project to the field of social work, specifically social work with adolescent boys, is the addition of alternatives to traditional forms of group therapy for aggressive boys. The curriculum provides social workers with increased resources for approaching aggression in boys, a problem that is becoming more prevalent in society.
Chapter 4

THE PROJECT

Introduction

This group curriculum addresses aggression among adolescent boys by evaluating and deconstructing the ways in which boys learn how to become “men.” Using theories such as social construction and narrative as a foundation, the purpose of this curriculum is to challenge boys to rethink the ways they approach social situations and to provide them with the skills to critically analyze the messages they receive about being boys and men. The curriculum provides boys with strategies to effectively handle their aggression and learn alternative ways of expressing the emotions that they may have.

When developing the group, adolescents should be properly screened for appropriateness. Those facilitating the group should pre-screen each participant individually in order to determine whether they are up to the task of group work. Not all adolescents are willing or able to participate in a group setting and thus should be referred for individual or family therapy if necessary. When inviting adolescents, especially those between the ages of 10-14, into a group it is important to clearly state the defined goals and theme of the group. Adolescents of this age are more concrete thinkers and often need to understand the groups purpose and feel as thought it is relevant to their lives (Corey & Corey, 2006). Malekoff (2004) encourages the facilitator to include adolescents based on what the youth feels their needs and wants are and not solely on their diagnosis. It is important to promote the group as an opportunity to grow, learn, and
teach one another rather than identifying it as a group meant to “fix” delinquent behaviors.

This curriculum is designed for groups of 6-8 male members between the ages of 11-14 years. The ideal setting is a large space with a group table and chairs. The space should be large enough for group members to spread out when doing individual projects and for the group to stand up in a large circle for group activities. The group sessions are designed to be one-hour long; however, modifications can be made to reduce the time requirement. The format for the sessions contained in this curriculum have been adapted from Smead (1994) and include goals, materials, and group session (which includes review, working time, and process).

According to Corey and Corey (2006) there are four main stages to the group process once the group has been formed. These stages include the initial stage, the transition stage, the working stage, and the final stage of the group. While this curriculum jumps right into content and activities, the process of group cohesion and disclosure will typically follow these stages. It is important to understand that adolescents between the ages of 11-14 are typically more self-conscious and reluctant to participate in self-disclosure and self-awareness; thus providing a supportive, non-judgmental group environment will be key to its success.

Session one is designed to introduce the group theme as well as establish group norms. During this initial stage it is important to discuss confidentiality and group rules. Group members will have the opportunity to become familiar with one another and identify their expectations for the group.
Sessions two and three will focus on group members’ personal experiences and give the youth the opportunity to make connections among their lives. The youth will explore how they and their families handle anger and frustration. Group members may test the facilitator during these sessions to determine how safe it is for them to self-disclose. The facilitator should continually stress confidentiality and group rules and model effective communication within the group (Corey & Corey, 2006). During these sessions the facilitator should provide group members with enough control and maintain an environment of non-judgment to allow the youth to feel comfortable sharing personal experiences. Mutual aid and teaching moments will hopefully begin to occur as group members continue to establish cohesion and a sense of safety.

Sessions four and five will shift the focus to the role society plays in male adolescent development. Group members will have the opportunity to explore social constructs through a variety of lenses and mediums. It is during this working stage of the group process that a higher level of cohesion and trust will hopefully be established. Members may become more willing to participate in activities and group discussion as well as take risks. The facilitator should focus on identifying common themes that come up among participants in order to acknowledge universality in the experiences of the group members. This stage of the group process is a time for the facilitator to encourage some risk taking while being sure to maintain a supportive, non-judgmental environment (Corey & Corey, 2006). During this stage members may experience more feeling of empowerment as well as acceptance by the group.
Session six will incorporate the personal experiences covered in sessions two and three with the larger societal implications of male representation presented in sessions four and five. In this session group members identify the labels that get placed on them and replace them with strengths that they and others can see. In order to continue promoting group cohesion and mutual aid the facilitator should present the theme and activities of the group while encouraging the group to essentially run itself (Malekoff, 2004). Discovering common reactions to labeling will help group members become more comfortable with identifying and expressing their feelings.

Session seven will allow group members to reflect on the previous sessions and begin to re-script their narrative. During this process group members will be invited to role-play in front of the group. In order to maintain cohesion it is important for the facilitator to maintain and promote trust and safety within the group process.

Session eight will focus on providing closure for the group. This final stage of the group process is a time for the facilitator to reinforce the themes and information that were discussed in the group and allow the group members to process. The facilitator should remind the group once again of the confidentiality agreement they made at the beginning of the group. Facilitators should challenge the group members to begin thinking of ways they are going to incorporate their new skills and ideas into their daily lives without the support of the group.

Throughout the group process it is incredibly important that the facilitator provides a safe and trusting environment for participants. The ability to model effective communication and conflict management are also important characteristics of a good
facilitator (Corey & Corey, 2006). As adolescents begin to test and challenge the group facilitator, a nonjudgmental and non-defensive response will help the facilitator maintain control within the group, while still allowing the group members to confront the facilitator and exercise their need for independence.
The Curriculum

BECOMING A “MAN”: WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

An anger management psychoeducation group curriculum for adolescent boys

Session 1: Let’s Get Started!

Goals:

• To help group members get acquainted
• To introduce group members to the purpose and themes of the group
• To establish as a group the ground rules and to cover the importance of confidentiality

Materials:

• Soft, squishy balls or small bean bags for tossing
• Poster board
• Crayons, markers

Group Session:

Ice Breaker: The Ball Game

Organize the group in a standing circle. Inform group members that this game will help each of you learn each other’s names. Begin by having each group member introduce themselves. As the group leader, toss the ball to someone else in the circle (Note: They should not pass the ball to the person on either side of them). Inform the group that when you pass the ball to another group member you must first say their name. Have the group continue tossing the ball until each person has received the ball once.
Now inform the group that they must toss the ball to one another in the same order, remembering to same the group members name before tossing the ball to them. If the ball is dropped, it must go back to the leader, who begins the rotation again.

Once the group has completed two or three rotation successfully, introduce another ball into the rotation.

Note to Facilitator: This ice breaker is a great opportunity to observe how group members interact with one another, communicate, expression their frustration and display their emotions.

**Working Time**

1. Welcome the group members to group and discuss the purpose of the group. Explain to group members that they will be exploring their emotions, especially anger, by looking at where they learn anger and how they show anger. Inform group members that they will be exploring messages in media and in music during a few of the sessions and encourage them to start thinking of music they would like to bring to group to share with the rest of the members.

2. Define confidentiality and the limits to it within the group setting.

3. Discuss ground rules with the group. Encourage group members to contribute group rules that they feel would be appropriate and fair. Be sure to write down the ground rules on a large poster board that can be displayed during each session.

4. Finally, have group members break out into dyads and have each pair create a list of words, symbols, or pictures that they associate with the word “anger.” Have pairs present what they created on their list and make connections and
comparisons between each pairs list. These lists help the group begin to think about what anger means to them and will be used and referenced in future sessions.

5. Remind group members when they will be meeting again. Ask if they have any questions and thank them for their contributions.
Session 2: Creating a Narrative

Goals:

- Build group cohesion
- Develop stories that represent life experiences
- Identify similarities in group member experiences

Materials:

- 3x5 cards
- paper, pencils
- crayons or markers

Group Session:

Review

Review with the group the ground rules that were establish and cover the goals and themes of the group. Review the previous session in which a list of words, symbols and pictures were created to represent anger. Ask the group if they have anything else to add to the list. The list can be added to throughout the length of the group.

Ice Breaker: Who Am I?

Have each member write three things about themselves on a 3x5 card. Do NOT have them include their name on the card. Collect the cards and read each card, having the group guess who they think the card is referring to.

Group Work:

1. Have group members write or draw a time when they felt they had to solve a particular problem or respond to a situation in an aggressive way.
Prompt group members with the following questions adapted from Lennings (1996):

- What did your surroundings look like?
- What did your body feel like? Were your hands clenched? Were you sweating? How did your stomach feel?
- What were you wearing?
- What were some of the thoughts going through your mind?
- What could you hear around you? What could you smell?
- What was taking place around you?

2. Have group members get into dyads and share their stories. Once they have finished sharing ask if anyone wants to share their story to the group. Make connections between group member’s stories, looking for similarities in how they were feeling, what they were thinking, and how their bodies were responding to the anger and/or frustration inside of them.

*Process:*

- Ask the group if they noticed that others in the group had similar reactions to frustrating or angering situations.
- Explain the idea of the “Boy Code,” which suggests that boys are required to act tough, stay cool, and hide vulnerable emotions in order to be a “real
man” (Pollack, 2006). Ask the group whether they sometimes feel as though they have to follow the “boy code”?

- Were they following the “Boy Code” in the scenario they described?

Let the boys know that they will revisit this narrative in the coming weeks.

*Note to facilitator:* Keep group members’ stories from this session to reference in session seven.
Session 3: Family Makeup

Goals:

- Identify how families handle anger differently
- Identify what youth learn from their families regarding anger
- Identify how group members handle their anger
- Learn to distinguish between passive, aggressive, and assertive behavior

Materials:

- Poster paper
- Markers
- Regular paper

Group Session:

Review

Review with students the discussion from the previous session regarding how our body and our minds respond to anger. Display the picture of the body that was used in the previous session to show where anger was felt. Remind students that the feelings they have in their body are trigger signs that are informing them that they are beginning to become angry.

Working Time

1. Begin with a discussion by asking group members about their family:
   a. How does their family handle anger?
   b. How are emotions expressed within their family?
c. Do they see family members expressing anger? Sadness? Frustration? Happiness? Is it acceptable for them to show these emotions?

2. Next, using an activity adapted from Stewart (2002), put three large poster papers up with the labels aggressive, assertive, and passive. Ask group members how they would define each of these terms. Write their definitions on the poster papers. Ask members to take turns writing examples of each: What is an example of being assertive? What is an example of being aggressive? What is an example of being passive? Show group members the Escape, Express, or Explore scale and have them identify where on they school they would find passive, assertive, and aggressive behavior.

3. Have group members draw a scenario within the home in which they or a family member handled a situation by being passive, assertive, and aggressive. Have each group member discuss with a partner the scenarios they have drawn and where the behavior would fall on the anger scale.

**ANGER SCALE**

| Escape | Express | Explore |

*Process Time*

End the session by asking students to once again define passive, assertive and aggressive behavior. Remind them that they can’t choose the environment that they grew up in but
they can choose their behaviors and have control over how they react to different situations.

Ask students to bring in music that they identify with to next class. Remind them that it must be appropriate to share (no inappropriate language).
Session 4: What is Masculinity? Part 1

Goals

- Explore messages that are found in music and movies
- Deconstruct messages regarding masculinity that is being seen and heard in media
- To critically analyze the ways men expression emotions, including anger, in music and movies

Materials

- A clip from a movie in which traditional masculinity is depicted
- Clips of music brought in by students

Group Session

Review

Ask group members if they had anything else to add regarding how their families express frustration or anger in the home. Had they been more observant of family members actions over the last week? What did they notice? Were their actions over the last week passive, assertive or aggressive?

Working Time

Explain to the group that you are going to be exploring messages about being a man in movies and music today. Begin by asking the group how they would describe a “Real Man.” Ask what characteristics make up a real man? Why are these characteristics important to them?
Next show a clip from the selected movie. While the group members are watching the movie clip ask them to write down what they notice about the character. Is he strong? Weak? Smart? Unintelligent?

After viewing the clip, ask students to reflect on the character that was present in the movie. Did they find him to be a “real man”? Why are why not? Ask group member if this character is representative of who or what they want to become?

Next, invite group members to share clips from the music they brought in. After each clip of music, ask group members what message they think the song or musician is sending to boys. How are men depicted in the song? Have them write down words to describe men as they listen to the music.

Process Time

After watching the movie clip and listening to the music introduce to the group Paul Kivel’s (1999) idea of the “Act Like a Man” box that boys often feel trapped in. Explain that some boys and men feel like they have to act a certain way, only express certain emotions, and be competent in certain areas in hopes of being viewed as a “real man.”

Discuss the following Questions:

- What were some of the words you used to describe “being a man” as you watched the video and listened to the music?

- Do you think this is an accurate representation of all boys or men?

- Do you think it is a fair expectation for boys or men to always be as the movie or music portrays them?
Do you think that the men in the movies or music find themselves trapped in the "Act Like a Man" box?

How do men show or express their emotions in movies or music?

Explain to the group that next week's session will continue with the same theme.

Ask them to bring in magazines that they like to read. Remind them that it must be appropriate to share with the group.

Note to facilitator: Keep the lists generated by group members for next week's group.
Session 5: What is Masculinity? Part 2

Goals

- To help the group members critically analyze the messages they receive from media
- To critically analyze the way men are presented in media
- To break down preconceived ideas about what it means to be a man

Materials

- A stack of magazines (sports, video games magazines, hobby magazines, health magazines, music and movie industry magazines)
- Paper
- Scissors, glue

Review:

Display the words and phrases that the group came up with in the previous group describing men as they listened to music and watched movie clips. Ask the group if they had anything they wanted to add to those lists since last week. Review their idea of what it means to be a “real man.”

Working Time:

Hand out a stack of magazines to the group members. Ask them to go through the magazines and cut out images that represent what they think it means to be a man. Prompt them by asking:

- How are men supposed to look?
- What emotions are men supposed to show?
- How are men supposed to act?
- What are men supposed to wear?

Have them each group member create a collage of what they thing represents a true man. 

Once the boys have completed their collages have members volunteer to share their 
collage and explain what they created. Invite members to reflect on each other’s 
collages, noting similarities and differences.

*Processing Time:*

Ask the boys whether it was difficult or easy to find images in the magazines of what 
they thought a man should be like. Ask them where they came up with their idea of what 
men should be like? Do they think men are accurately depicted in magazines? Is it 
realistic to expect men to look and act the way they are portrayed in magazines? Ask the 
boys if there is anything they would change about the way men are depicted in the 
media?
Session 6: Words and Labeling

Goals

- To identify labels and how they affect the way a person acts
- To identify strengths and positive attributes and compare them to the labels we receive
- To identify how negative labels can affect the way we behave and respond to others.

Materials

- Paper the size of soup can labels
- An empty soup can for each member
- Markers, crayons
- A can with the original label on it (canned carrots, for example) opened, drained and refilled with candy. Seal the lid back onto the can so that it can be reopened.

Group Session

Review

Review with group members the way that media depicts men. Ask the boys if they were more aware of the messages they hear and see in magazines and commercials. Ask the group if they feel men in magazines, movies and music are labeled incorrectly or unfairly?

Working Time

Begin this part of the session by asking the boys what labels are. Do they ever feel as though they receive inaccurate labels to describe who they are? Create a list on poster
paper of negative labels that are often used to describe them (lazy, hyper, dumb, aggressive, etc). Ask the group if we should always believe the labels given to people?

Demonstrate the inaccuracies of labels, an activity adapted from Tearing off Labels (2001):

Show the group your can of vegetables. Ask them to look at the can and tell you what they believe is in the can. Remind them that the label on the outside may not always be what is on the inside. Open the can and reveal the candy that is inside. Ask students if they feel as though the labels they sometime receives do not represent who they truly are.

Pass out the soup cans and labels to each student. On one side of the label have them write words or draw pictures that represent the labels they often receive in school, by their parents, or by friends. Once they have completed this ask them to start thinking about the following questions:

- What do I like about myself?
- What am I good at?
- What do I want to be when I grow up?
- What are my strengths?

Based on these questions, have the boys flip over their labels and write or draw pictures describing how they want to others to see them. Have the boys affix the labels to their cans.
Process Time

Discuss with the group the following questions:

- How might your family respond if you tore off your label?
- How might your friends respond if you tore off your label?
- How can labels be negative?
- What can you do to start removing some of the labels you have received?
Session 7: Retelling the Narrative

Goals

- Identify alternative ways of handling angering situations
- To process previous six weeks and apply it to their narrative from session 2
- Practice role-playing appropriate ways to handle anger

Materials

- Group members stories from session 2
- Paper
- Poster paper
- Markers, pencils
- Display group posters from previous sessions around the room

Group Session

Review

Begin the session by asking group members if they’ve thought more about the labels they have received and the labels they give each other. Have they tried to peel off any labels? How was that for them? Were they able to do it? Remind them that it can take a long time to remove the labels they have been given, but assure them you and their group members are there to provide them with support and encouragement.

Working Time

Group Discussion: Pass out the narratives to each group member from session 2. Ask each group member to review the stories they wrote or drew reflecting the actions they took in a situation that made them angry.
Ask the group to reflect on the previous sessions. Review the poster papers from the media and masculinity sessions and review the cans that illustrate the labels each boy thinks has been given to them. Ask the following questions to the entire group?

- Looking at your story or drawing now, do you think that you are living up to one of your labels?
- Do you think you responded to the situation in a way that may be depicted in movies, music, or magazines? (Didn’t express your feelings, acted aggressively, used physical force or inappropriate language)
- Did you respond in a way you have seen others in your family respond?

Display poster paper and invite group members to suggest alternative ways to respond to anger that are not what is typically expected from them or boys and men in general. (i.e. walking away, expressing their feelings, problem solving, finding an adult, etc).

Once the group has generated a list of safe and appropriate ways of dealing with a frustrating or angering situation, have members rewrite or (draw) their narrative from session 2 using an one of the solutions discussed. Once each member has rewritten their narrative, invite members to come up in pairs and role play their new scenario, explaining to the group how they changed their narrative so that their actions a more appropriate and healthier way to deal with their anger.

Process Time

Ask students the following questions:

- Was it difficult to rewrite their narratives?
• Do they think that they will be able to follow their new plan?

• What might be difficult about reacting to anger in a new way (i.e. Concerns about what others might think of them, easy to live up to labels, habit)

• Can they commit to supporting each other as they try to change the ways they deal with anger?
Session 8: Closure and Saying Goodbye

**Goals**

- Reflect on the group experience
- Bring closure to group
- Review what members have learned

**Materials**

- Small balls or bean bags

**Group Session**

**Review**

Begin the session by reviewing the previous group. Ask group members if they’ve thought more about their narrative and remind them that it is an ever-changing process – as they learn more about themselves they can continue to change their narrative.

**Working Time**

The Ball Game

Organize the group in a standing circle. Remind the group members of the game they played when they met as a group for the first time. Inform that there will be a slight variation to the game this time around. As the group leader, toss the ball to someone else in the circle (Note: They should not pass the ball to the person on either side of them). Inform the group that when you pass the ball to another group member you must first say their name as well as one positive word they would use to describe that person (based on their experience with them in the group). Have the group continue tossing the ball until each person has received the ball once. Now inform the group that they must toss the ball
to one another in the same order, remembering to same the group members name and positive trait before tossing the ball to them. If the ball is dropped, it must go back to the leader, who begins the rotation again. Once the group has completed two or three rotation successfully, introduce another ball into the rotation.

*Process Time*

Once the game is over ask the group how this time playing the game may have been different from the first time they played it together. Did they have more patients? Were the calmer?

Begin to reflect on the group experience as whole:

- What have they learned about each other?
- What have they learned about themselves?
- Ask them what they might do or say to themselves if they are finding themselves trapped in the “Act Like a Man” box?
- How can they support each other to express themselves in healthy ways?

Thank the group for their genuine participation in the group process. Distribute certificates of group completion.
Chapter 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

The purpose of this project was to create an anger management group curriculum to be used with adolescent boys. An alternative approach was taken in the creation and design of this curriculum by utilizing social construction theory and narrative therapy to guide the group process. Based on extensive conversations with school social workers and a review of the existing literature regarding group therapy and anger management curriculum, key elements were incorporated into the curriculum. The curriculum utilizes movies, the media, music, journaling, artwork, and guided discussions to thoroughly address the themes of masculinity, social constructs, acts of aggression, and expression of emotion.

Implications

My hope upon completing this curriculum is that social workers working with adolescent boys will begin having a conversation about how boys are being socialized and the potential repercussions this socialization process is having on them and on society as a whole. I hope that this curriculum will inspire social workers to look at boys and their behaviors through a new lens and empower them to start questioning the ways we approach boys and the expectations we as a society place on them. Through this curriculum social workers will hopefully begin to empower and educate boys so that they can break through the social constrictions placed on them and begin to express themselves in a more wholly representative way.
The implementation of this curriculum will help social workers facilitate a conversation with adolescent boys about the implications of growing up in a society driven by masculinity. It will hopefully open the door for further curriculum development that focuses on the effects of masculinity on boys’ social and emotional development. By providing boys with a space in which they feel comfortable to open up and explore their emotions, we are releasing them from the emotional constraints they are so often bound by.

I think that the implications of this curriculum and others like it can be profound. It can develop a new generation of boys who solve problems, not through physical aggression, but through effective communication. When boys are not taught how to effectively communicate what they need or how they feel their skills to handle conflict are limited. If we can begin showing boys that they do not need to live up to the labels placed on them or become the masculine men glorified in the media, then we can begin raising and supporting boys who have the capacity to identify their emotions in a healthy way.

Limitations

This curriculum is limited to the information gathered by my research and the information obtained from interviews with five school social workers. If I were doing this project over, I would have talked to more professionals working with youth, including teachers, coaches, and parents. This would have allowed me to gather more insight into how they feel boys view themselves and the suggestions they may have in order to challenge these beliefs.
When interviewing the school social workers to gather information for this curriculum, I found that they focused mostly on what they knew and were comfortable with. It was a challenge getting some of them to think outside of the box and move beyond the traditional cognitive behavioral group curriculum approach used to address adolescent male aggression. While I obtained a great deal of wonderful information, many had difficulty visualizing potential group sessions that focused less on an individual’s “anger issues” and on more on the issues caused by society’s construction of masculinity. Many questioned boys’ capacity to have these conversations and felt like a more structured, activity-based approach would be appropriate. I think this points to one of the challenges this curriculum faces in being utilized. Many school districts and agencies require the use of evidenced-based only, posing a challenge for many social workers who want to explore alternative practices.

This curriculum has not been used so its validity is not yet known. From here, it will be important to have the curriculum used in a group setting to determine its validity. If I were doing this project again, I would have tried to make the time to actually run a boys group using the curriculum and document the outcomes based on pre-tests and post-tests.

Recommendations

I would recommend using this curriculum in a school setting, though it could be used in other settings as well. Aggression “problems” are most often identified in schools and using this curriculum in a school setting would allow students to immediately apply what they’ve learned within group to their social context. Practitioners are able to
more closely monitor the success of and response to the curriculum when done on a school campus because of their immediate access to the students as well as the school staff.

I would also recommend that social workers who used this psychoeducational group curriculum, elicit the feedback of the participants. This curriculum has not yet been used and would benefit from the input and feedback of the clients it is being used with. After completing the group, boys may have invaluable suggestions and insight into what may be appropriate to add or alter within the curriculum.
APPENDIX A

Interview Questions

Questions asked of school social workers in order to explore the use of narrative therapy and the application of social constructionist theory to/in group therapy with aggressive adolescents:

1. Do social workers/therapists utilize narrative therapy in group work with aggressive adolescent boys?

2. Do they address masculinity, construction of identity, environmental factors as contributors to aggressive behavior?

3. Are boys encouraged to discuss their interpretation of what it means to be a man and is this deconstructed?

4. Would social workers who work extensively with adolescent boys be willing to approach aggressive behavior in this way in a group setting?

5. What value, if any, do they see in that?

6. Currently, how would they define the anger management group they run?

7. Based on these experiences, have those anger management group approaches been successful?

8. What suggestions do social workers have in developing a curriculum that utilizes narrative and deconstruction?

9. Suggestions for group activities that use these themes?
APPENDIX B
Consent to Participate in Research

You are being asked to provide information for developing a group curriculum through interviews by Jessica Kurtz, graduate student in the Social Work Department at California State University, Sacramento. The purpose of this project is to create an anger management curriculum that uses a narrative and constructionist approach.

You will be asked to respond to questions concerning your experience with conducting anger management groups and your feedback regarding the possibility of developing a group curriculum that approaches anger management from a constructionist and narrative perspective. Information obtained from the interview will be utilized to create an anger management group curriculum.

There is no risk associated with participating in this interview. Upon completion of the interview and creation of the project hopefully you will be able to utilize the curriculum in your practice as a social worker.

Your feedback, comments and suggestions obtained during the interview will not be connected to your name. Your participation in this information gathering session will be kept confidential. However, the results of the project as a whole may be shared with the social work community and become a matter of public record.

You will receive a $5 gift card from Starbucks for participating in this interview. If you feel
as though you have been psychologically injured as a result of the interview or wish to speak further to a mental health specialist, please contact Sacramento Adult Mental Health Services through the Adult Access Team at (916) 875-1055.

If you have any questions about this interview, you may contact Dr. Joseph Anderson by e-mail at joseph.anderson@csus.edu.

You may decline to be a participant in this interview without any consequences. Your signature below indicates that you have read this page and agree to participate in the research.

________________________________________
Print Name

________________________________________
Signature of Participant Date

Sincerely,

Jessica Kurtz
REFERENCES


Their Pain. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice.* 37(2) 190-195.


