At-Risk Adolescent Girls: Protective Factors and Effects of a Positive Youth Development Intervention

by

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ABSTRACT

Adolescence is a tumultuous time, and for those with risk factors, it can be even more difficult. This study examined the relationships among intrinsic and extrinsic protective factors such as high self-esteem, high self-efficacy, mattering to others, positive sense of identity, and healthy peer relationships in female adolescents. Additionally, the current study assessed the impact of a positive youth development intervention designed for this particular population. The potential sample consisted of adolescent girls who were students at an alternative high school in the Southwestern region of the United States. Of the 25 girls at the school, 12 participated in the study and completed pre-test instruments measuring self-esteem, self-efficacy, mattering to friends and parents, identity distress, and relational aggression. The instruments were administered before and after a positive youth development intervention of which 10 of the 12 participants attended.

The intervention, Girls Circle, consisted of activities designed to foster self-acceptance, identity formation, healthy friendships, and goal setting in adolescent girls. While the study's intervention did not result in significant changes over time, several important findings emerged. Self-esteem was positively related to both mattering to friends and mattering to parents. Likewise, a negative correlation was found between relational aggression and mattering to parents. Girls who felt they were more important to friends and family had higher self esteem and were less likely to engage in covert aggression tactics such as spreading rumors and maliciously excluding peers from their social groups. These

results support the literature and highlight the important interconnection of social relationships and subjective well-being. Teachers, counselors, social workers, and other helping professionals who work with adolescents need to understand these relationships and use this understanding to design and implement interventions that will best serve at-risk girls, such as those in this study.

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CHAPTER 1

THE PROBLEM IN PERSPECTIVE

Adolescence is a time of psychosocial transformations that include identity formation, individuation from parents, and connecting with peers in intimate friendships (Gerard & Buehler, 2004). Tension is normal during this time; however, many youth are at risk for adjustment difficulties, particularly if this time in their life is filled with multiple stressors (Call & Mortimer, 2001). One study defined risk as "an environmental condition within the youth's socialization context that increases the likelihood of negative developmental outcomes" (Gerard & Buehler, p.1833). The same study suggested that using a cumulative risk model is important because, theoretically, risk can be viewed as an accumulation of stressors and the number of risk factors that a youth has is more predictive of problems than any one risk factor (Gerard & Buehler). Some of the factors that place adolescents at risk include concentration problems, substance abuse, association with antisocial peers, and early aggressive behavior (Palermo, 2009).

Recently, an emphasis on increasing resiliency and building assets has been proposed to help protect youth from heading down a delinquent path. The developmental assets model is a framework that underlies the positive youth development movement (Benson, 1997). It provides a guide to which assets, once fostered, can help prevent delinquency; however, helping professionals must recognize that these assets do not exist in a vacuum, and the entire context must be considered for real change to occur. Exploring protective processes is needed

to get a clearer understanding of the mechanisms associated with each of the assets (Wolkow & Ferguson, 2001).

In order to understand how specific assets contribute to protecting at-risk youth, it is necessary to distinguish between internal and external assets as well as what factors contribute to the development of each. Only then can interventions be developed and evaluated for how effectively they foster these assets. The present study attempted to explore how certain assets (i.e., self-esteem, self-efficacy, sense of personal identity, and mattering to others) are related in adolescent females and how the same assets are affected by a positive youth development intervention.

Adolescents

Adolescent Development

Jean Piaget (1896-1980) described four stages of development: sensorimotor, preoperational, concrete, and formal operations. The final stage occurs during adolescence and is characterized by developmental advances such that a person is capable of thinking abstractly, and utilizes hypothetical and deductive reasoning (Piaget, 1972). In this stage, adolescents develop the ability to reflect on their thought processes and gain knowledge through new perspectives. In other words, adolescents are now able to think about their thinking and are better able to grasp abstract ideas such as identity, existence, morality, and friendship (Piaget).

Erik Erikson (1963) focused on psychosocial development and conceptualized development in terms of conflicts faced from infancy through adulthood with adolescence being a critical stage. Erikson proposed that from ages 12 to 20 years old, people engage in an identity versus role confusion conflict, emerging either successfully or unsuccessfully through this stage. If the person is successful, he or she will rely on earlier experiences to develop a coherent sense of identity and of how to relate to society. If he or she is unsuccessful, he or she may suffer from confusion about identity and roles to be performed as adults. In addition to Erikson's idea that achieving a sense of personal identity is a critical task of adolescence, four other critical tasks of adolescence have been identified: 1) gaining a new understanding of the self as integrated and continuous; 2) achieving a new level of closeness and trust with peers; 3) acquiring a new status in the family such as more equality; and 4) moving toward being more autonomous that includes subscribing to certain values and making independent choices (Sroufe, Cooper, & DeHart, 1992). Erikson described seven major conflicts during adolescence that need to be resolved before adolescents can develop a secure personal identity. Adolescents must master time, transition between self-certainty and self-consciousness, define new roles, explore different potential careers, develop a sex-role orientation, understand leadership as it relates to authority, and identify with values and ideologies (Erikson, 1968). If these conflicts are not resolved, the adolescent may not successfully complete this developmental stage and, therefore, potentially engage in internalizing or externalizing at-risk behaviors. The current study

targeted these conflicts in an intervention designed to address the unique issues adolescent females face such as those concerning self-esteem, self-efficacy and identity exploration.

At-Risk Adolescents

Some adolescents may have a number of aggravating circumstances (i.e., incarcerated parent, mental health issues) that interact with their development and places them at-risk for developing maladaptive patterns of behavior. Researchers have divided adolescent delinquent and problem behaviors into two different patterns based on onset, persistence, and desistance (Moffitt, 1993, 2006). The two different trajectories are: Life-course persistent (LCP), which describes youth whose behavioral issues start in early childhood and continue through adolescence; and Adolescent-limited (AL), which describes youth who began showing delinquent behaviors in adolescence and desist in early adulthood. Moffit suggested that LCP youth face more individual and family risk factors, while AL youth have a more moderate level of these same risks. Understanding adolescent risk factors is imperative now because modern adolescence is seen as being even more difficult than in the past. Furthermore, adolescents today are being exposed to risky behaviors much earlier than were adolescents in the past (Johnston, O'Malley, & Bachman, 2002).

Gender affects developmental trajectories with females less likely than males to demonstrate either the LCP or AL form of behavior problems, but when girls do demonstrate problems they are far more likely to be in the AL trajectory

(Edwards, Mumford, & Serra-Roldan, 2007). Some factors that contribute to at-risk status for females include chemical dependence, pregnancy, poverty, low self-esteem, school-related problems, eating disorders, depression, emotional and physical abuse, self destructive behaviors, and poor school performance (Gross & Capuzzi, 2004). Some of these factors that were explored in the present study were low self-esteem and poor school self-efficacy. While risks are important to discuss, researchers caution that it is more useful if at-risk adolescents are approached from a strengths-based perspective highlighting resiliency and competence.

Protective Factors

One framework that describes the relationship between protective factors for children and adolescents and outcomes in the environment is the Developmental Assets Model (Benson, 1997). Under Benson's direction, the Search Institute distributed more than 350,000 surveys to students in 6th to 12th grade in 600 communities between the years 1990 and 1995. This model proposes that there are 40 protective assets, including personal strengths of an individual as well as the environmental influences of community, school, and family. These protective assets are divided into two broad categories: 20 internal (i.e., personal characteristics) and 20 external (i.e. provided by families and communities) that conceptualize strengths and emphasize prosocial expectations in youth and their environments (Benson et al., 1998). The framework includes the following broad factors of assets: Commitment to learning; positive values; social competencies

and positive identity; support; empowerment; constructive use of time; and boundaries and expectations (Benson, 2003).

As a result of identifying assets, well-intentioned teachers may think that teaching resilient qualities in a vacuum is possible, but researchers caution that there are major challenges to actually influencing and establishing the processes that buffer children and teens against risk. Exploring protective processes is needed to get a clearer understanding of the mechanisms associated with each of the assets (Wolkow & Ferguson, 2001).

Internal Assets and Intrapersonal factors

As previously described, the developmental assets model describes 20 internal assets or personal characteristics that include self-esteem, self-efficacy, clearly defined values, and a positive sense of identity. These four intrinsic assets were explored in this study.

Self-esteem. The idea that self-esteem affects wellness has been extensively studied. There is ongoing debate focused on issues of definition and etiology of self-esteem, as evidenced by the fact that there are over 1000 published articles a year that refer to self-esteem (Emler, 2001). Like other constructs, researchers' definitions and understanding of self-esteem vary (Butler & Gasson, 2005). Self-esteem reflects one's feelings of self-worth that are shaped through personal experiences of success or failure, interactions with others and social learning (Meggert, 2004). One review summarized that high self-esteem has been shown to correlate positively with better mental health outcomes and has

also been associated with lower rates of depression in adolescents and adults (Birndorf et al., 2005). Meggert (2004) pointed out that many researchers believe that low self-esteem is one of the major causes of deviant behavior. This may seem counterintuitive, however, since low self-esteem has not been established as a predictor of risk behaviors such as drug use in adolescents (Birndorf et al.). The lack of understanding of self-esteem across time and between genders is a major limitation to conceptualizing how it relates to risk and health (Birndorf et al.). Further information on these constructs would help in understanding how communities, families, schools and clinician's ability to affect self-esteem positively and, therefore, to ameliorate negative outcomes of risk behaviors and emotional distress. (Birndorf et al.).

One review pointed out, that men and women may not differ in their self-esteem (Josephs, Markus, & Tafarodi, 1992). However, men and women may diverge in how they construct their self-concepts. Researchers theorized that women have a collectivist schema for the self, utilizing their relationships with others to build their self-concept, while men are more likely to develop an individualistic and independent schema for the self (Josephs et al.). In this sense, women with high self-esteem should differ from women with low self-esteem in how much they feel connected to others. Josephs et al. compared the results of three studies about gender and self-esteem. The samples for the studies were: 90 (43 men, 47 women) undergraduate students in an introduction to psychology class who filled out an "Abilities Survey" that measured their own estimates of uniqueness, and other abilities; 65 (30 men, 35 women) who were given words

and had to write a sentence about that word in a way that they felt they themselves, a group they are affiliated with, or Ronald Reagan would say; and 93 undergraduate psychology students who were told they were being evaluated on a beneficial fictitious trait while they completed hypothetical situations. All of the participants in these three studies were administered the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, and only those in the upper and lower quintiles were used in the final sample. The general findings were that while low self-esteem (LSE) women have not incorporated others into their self-concepts, high self-esteem (HSE) women relied on important others (e.g., best friends, highly affiliate groups) to answer questions that were coded with information for reference of others. These findings support the idea that women have a more collectivist schema for the self and rely more on other important people in their lives to influence their self-esteem.

In a 5-year longitudinal study of 16,489 (50.2% boys, 49.8% girls) teenage students (grades 8 through 12), at all grade levels fewer girls than boys reported high self-esteem but this disparity decreased as the cohort aged (Birndorf et al., 2005). Additionally, several developmental assets, including positive family communication and feeling safe at school, predicted higher self-esteem. The best predictor of having higher self-esteem in grade 12 was higher self-esteem at baseline survey (8th grade). In summary, there are differences across time, between genders for younger teens, and among ethnicity groups for the girls (Birndorf et al.). The study was only able to measure 16 of the 40 existing assets, and most were related to the community impact as it relates to positive developmental outcomes (Birndorf et al.). This study by Birndorf and her

colleagues did not examine the relationship of self-esteem and other internal assets to functional outcomes.

The National Counsel for Research on Women (1998) commissioned a national study on girls known as *The Girls Report & What We Need to Know about Growing Up Female that* examined self-esteem as well as other aspects of young girl's lives. The report found that girls, more than boys, have a decrease in self-confidence and positive feelings about themselves throughout adolescence.

In a review of clinical findings, Emler (2001) summarized that while those females with low self-esteem may treat themselves badly as a result of their low self-esteem, they tend not to externalize and treat others badly. Therefore, they are not more likely to commit crime or to abuse drugs and alcohol. Emler's summary seems to contrast with Meggert's (2004) point that lower self-esteem leads to delinquency, aggression and crime.

Researchers must keep in mind gender differences in construction of self-esteem as well as the development of self-esteem across the lifespan in designing and implementing interventions with adolescents. Additionally, researchers should also remember that self-esteem is shaped through personal experiences of success or failure, suggesting that self-efficacy may be a concept that is inextricably related to self-esteem.

Self-Efficacy. One concept that is related to self-esteem and often related to success in school is the belief that one can accomplish specific tasks, also known as self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977). Self-efficacy beliefs are malleable and

can be enhanced through mastery experiences (Bandura, 1997), which is why the development of such beliefs should be incorporated in interventions that promote positive youth adjustment. Self-efficacy beliefs have a pervasive influence on successful development of youth. Unless young people believe that they can get what they want through their actions, they have little incentive to persevere in the face of risks and adversity (Bandura, 1997). Self-efficacy beliefs have been suggested to promote prosocial behavior (Bandura et al., 2003) as well as to prevent internalizing and externalizing problems (Caprara et al., 2004) and engagement in transgressive behaviors (Bandura et al., 2001; Caprara, Regalia, & Bandura, 2002).

A study of 650 adolescents (317 boys, 333 girls) who were interviewed twice, five years apart, found that youths who initially scored high on the self-efficacy measures of regulating academic activities and managing interpersonal relationships had a higher level of life satisfaction when they were questioned five years later (Vecchio et al., 2007). The same study found that both girls' and boys' self-efficacy beliefs decreased over time, but that girls' scores on self-efficacy measures changed less than boys within the five year span (Vecchio et al.). Another difference between genders was that while boys' life satisfaction was strongly correlated with earlier higher self-regulatory self-efficacy beliefs, girls' life satisfaction was correlated with earlier higher social self-efficacy beliefs (Vecchio et al.). This is similar to the idea that women have a collectivist schema for the self and may gather strength from their perceptions of feeling connected to others (Josephs et al., 1992).

In a values-based career intervention program, 502 adolescent girls, ranging in age from 11 to 20, were assessed pre and post as well as three to four months after their involvement in the Talented At-Risk Girls: Encouragement and Training for Sophomores (TARGETS) program (Robinson Kurpius & Kerr, 2001). The program was designed to address the career behaviors, self-beliefs, and at-risk behaviors of teenage girls. This study found that after TARGETS involvement, girls' self-esteem, school self-efficacy, and future self-efficacy increased from pretest to the three to four month follow-up. The study's findings supported the idea that interventions that focus on strengths and dreams can positively impact career-related behaviors and attitudes about one's own abilities in adolescents.

Values and Identity. The internal assets of having positive values and a positive sense of personal identity and social competencies are central to interventions for at-risk adolescents. Values can be defined as customs, standards of conduct, and principles accepted by an individual or group or culture (Edwards & Allen, 2008). Values help people to make decisions. Destructive and self-depreciating behavior, however, does not necessarily reflect bad or deviant value systems but instead may be a result of an undefined or unclear value system (Edwards & Allen). One approach to ameliorating a poorly defined value system is values clarification, which refers to the process that people may go through to discover their values and then make an effort to adjust their behavior to align with their beliefs (Edwards & Allen). In other words, becoming aware of one's values can be one journey toward positive behavior change and could explain why so

many prevention programs such as the Girls Circle include values clarification in the curriculum (Lecroy & Daley, 2001).

Identity and values are fluid concepts and are also interrelated (Hall, 1973). As people mature in their personal identity, they may continue the process of values clarification (Hall). For decades, researchers have believed that although identity formation is a life-long process, adolescence and young adulthood are particularly critical periods of this development (Erickson, 1968). Developing a well-integrated personal identity has been described as a "premier developmental task" for adolescents (Arnett, 2006). Research suggests that positive self-identity and self-concept correlate with greater wellness (Dixon Rayle, 2005) and with more life satisfaction (Myers & Diener, 1995). Because an individual's evolving understanding of his or her identity is constantly interacting with his or her system of relationships as well as other contexts, this process of identity development and how it supports adolescents is vital to explore (Faircloth, 2009). Several researchers stressed that identity formation should be conceptualized as a process of person-context interactions and not as an intrapersonal attribute (Adams & Marshall, 1996; Bosma & Kunnen, 2001). Furthermore, Kroger (2004) suggested that identity in adolescence is the balance between self and other significant people in one's life which affirms the idea in the current literature idea that identity is not solely an internal concept.

For young female adolescents, identity formation may be particularly important. In the report by the National Council for Research on Women (1998), experts suggested that during adolescence, girls take their true selves

"underground" and experience a "loss of voice" (p. 8), which causes them to feel less confident and have more negative views of themselves. Self-esteem is related to this "loss of voice", but it is more complex than simply having high self-worth. The report suggests that social practice should be examined as it relates to this decrease in positive identity formation during adolescents for girls rather than only exploring the individual tendencies that diminish girls' confidence.

Interpersonal Factors

Because values and personal identity are not purely internal, interpersonal constructs such as social competencies must also be explored. Social competencies are another broad category defined under internal assets of positive youth development (Benson, 2003). Although social skills competency is an internal asset, it is inextricably related to others outside of the individual and thus was considered an interpersonal factor in the present study. These social competencies can be operationalized by a few phenomena including mattering to others, relational aggression, and belonging to a community, be it family, friends or school.

Mattering to Others. Maslow (1968) theorized that the need to belong is a primary human motivation because humans are social beings who desire to be loved and accepted. The concept of mattering is composed of five aspects that relate to how individuals feel that significant others (i.e. family members) 1) view them as important, 2) show interest in them, 3) pay attention to them, 4) depend on them, and 5) are concerned with what happens to them (Rosenberg, 1985;

Rosenberg & McCullough, 1981). Two different types of mattering have been described by researchers: general mattering and interpersonal mattering. *Interpersonal mattering* represents an internal perception that one is important and that he or she matters to specific, important people in his or her life (Dixon Rayle, 2005; Marcus, 1991; Rosenberg & McCullough, 1981). *General mattering* focuses on the individuals' perceptions of being relevant in a broader sense such as to society, communities, or school settings (Fromm, 1941). These concepts of mattering are critical to identity formation (Erikson, 1963), and because identity formation is one of the premier tasks of adolescence (Erikson, 1968), mattering may be especially salient for adolescents (Dixon Rayle & Myers, 2004).

Identity formation and the expression of self-identity are important to explore as they relate to mattering. As one study found, mattering was positively correlated with psychosocial well-being, meaning in life, and relatedness to others (Marshall, 2001). Some theorists believe that the need to belong generally trumps the adolescent's (particularly girls) authentic voice and expression of self-identity, which can thwart girls' use of their full internal assets (Brown & Gilligan, 1992).

Perceived mattering is thought to vary by gender with adult females perceiving themselves mattering more to others than do adult males (Marshall, 2001). Consistent with this, findings from a study of 462 (229 male, 233 female) high school students found that females believed they mattered more in general and to their families than did males (Dixon Rayle, 2005). The same study found that mattering to family was the primary predictor of wellness in females but was not a predictor of wellness for males. Additionally, Dixon Rayle found that for

females, general mattering, interpersonal mattering, and wellness were significantly related; while for males, only general mattering and wellness were significantly related.

Gender differences were not found, however, in a recent study of 177 (125 female, 52 male) middle school students (Dixon, Scheidegger & McWhirter, 2009). Younger female and male adolescents did not differ on their perceptions of mattering as was suggested by earlier research on high school-aged adolescence (Dixon Rayle, 2005). This study was the first of its kind to explore perceptions of mattering to others in younger adolescents, and only recently has mattering been studied in high-school aged and college-aged adolescents and young adults (Dixon, et al.). Because it is relatively new, more studies are needed to further understand mattering with this population.

Relational aggression. Much of the current research on aggression has examined overt aggression, which can be defined as behaviors causing harm through physical means (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995). In the 1990s, the concept of aggression was expanded to include indirect and relational aggression. Although they are slightly different, they both appear to include similar behaviors such as excluding peers from the group, spreading rumors, or ignoring others when mad (Archer & Coyne, 2005). These two types of aggression may be distinguished by indirect aggression being a kind of social manipulation (Bjorkqvist, Osterman, & Kaukiainen, 1992) and relational aggression consisting of behaviors that are intended to harm friendships or feelings of inclusion (Crick, Bigbee, & Howes, 1996). Relational aggression, particularly for girls, can occur physically but more

commonly covertly (Olweus, 1993). The majority of relational aggression among girls occurs as relational tactics such as rumors, exclusion secrets, or gossip used to express anger or to gain social power (Olweus). One researcher argued that this type of aggression results because of a lack of genuine empowerment among girls (Brown, 2003).

Although in the past it was generally accepted that males were more aggressive than females, there is a growing body of research noting that gender differences in aggressive behavior are present, but the differences are smaller than once believed (Eagly & Steffen, 1986). While it has been suggested that boys have more externalizing problems such as violence or other disruptive behaviors (Kazdin et al., 1990) and that physical aggression seems to be consistently more prevalent in males (Archer, 2004), relational or other covert forms of aggression may be more prevalent in females (Archer). Research on the prevalence of relational aggression has been inconsistent, perhaps largely due to the variety of methods and diversity of settings in which it has been measured (Archer). Gender differences in relational aggression have been found in school-aged children, with a higher prevalence in females (Bjorkvist, Osterman & Kaukiainen, 1992; Crick & Grotpeter, 1995), but this difference appears to diminish in late adolescence with men demonstrating relational aggression at a similar rate as females (Archer & Coyne, 2005).

Relational aggression has negative social and psychological consequences not only for the victims of the aggression but for the perpetrators as well. In a study of 491 (235 girls and 256 boys) school-aged children, both the relationally

aggressive girls and boys reported feelings of peer rejection and depression (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995). Specifically, the relationally aggressive girls reported feeling lonely and isolated and felt that they were less accepted by their peers. Similar findings were found in a study of 225 (55% women) college undergraduates ranging from age 18 to 23 (Werner & Crick, 1999). The study found that relationally aggressive women reported lower life satisfaction as well as higher levels of depression, pessimistic future outlook, and negative affect. These findings seem to link relational aggression to increased psychosocial difficulties in its perpetrators. Because of these potentially harmful effects of these types of covert aggression, it is important that interventions focus on understanding the functionality of relational aggression and what may work best to ameliorate this phenomenon.

Interventions At-Risk Adolescents

Historically, there have been a multitude of different treatments for adolescents' issues, and the interventions are burgeoning. Adolescents may be targeted perhaps because of the tumultuous nature of their developmental stage as well as the fact that their behavior can be modified to prevent future consequences. These characteristics of adolescents have important implications for creating effective prevention programs. Interventions can range from being mandated and all-encompassing (i.e., incarceration) to less invasive and voluntary (i.e., prevention programs, and positive youth development programs)

Incarceration

The most common intervention seems to be incarceration. According to the 2009 Uniform Crime Report (UCR), in the United States, about 1.2 million juveniles were arrested and only approximately three percent were for serious crimes such as assault, rape, or homicide (UCR, 2009). Critics of the juvenile justice system hold that the system is unjust, ineffective, and counterproductive in terms of protecting the public from violent offenders (Dishion, McCord, & Poulin, 1999). Some researchers describe a phenomenon called "peer delinquency training", due to the fact that higher levels of substance abuse, delinquency, and violence in adulthood are found among juvenile offenders who were detained in congregated settings as opposed to alternative settings (Dishion et al.). Approximately 70 percent of the youth in detention centers are serving time for nonviolent offenses (Sickmund, Sladky, & Kang, 2004). The fact that these nonviolent offenders are being trained to be delinquent by peers may account for the finding that previous incarceration is the leading indicator for repeat offending, above gang membership and unstable family relationships (Benda &Tollet, 1999).

In addition to exasperating delinquency, incarceration can thwart normal cognitive and emotional development as it is often used as a "dumping ground" for youth who should be served by other mental health systems (Kids Count, 2008). Over the last 20 years, the juvenile justice system has become the primary referral for young people with mental health disorders (Kids Count).

Although females are the minority in numbers of arrests and prosecutions, female antisocial acts are increasing more than male acts (Snyder, 2006). Girls

are the fastest growing population in the juvenile justice system (UCR, 2009). In 2000, minor females made up about 38% of the arrests and in 2009, females under the age of 18 comprised approximately 44% of the arrests made. There was a 23% decrease in arrests from 2000 to 2009 for males under the age of 18, and a 13% decrease for females under the age of 18 (UCR, 2009). Because of these rising rates, researchers and helping professionals need to understand the causes and mechanisms of female delinquent behavior as well as the best ways to intervene.

Prevention Programs

Because of the criticisms of incarceration of juveniles, activists have come together to form a movement to end youth incarceration. The largest group is the Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative (JDAI) that supports credible alternatives to incarceration to reduce the number of youth who pass through the justice system (Sickmund, Sladky, & Kang, 2004). Some of the JDAI programs include diversion, mentorship, aggression replacement training, and multi-systemic therapy (Sickmund et al.). One meta-analysis of diversion programs indicated that although the effect is modest, these alternatives to incarceration prevent crime compared to traditional court processing of offenders (Aos, Phipps, Barnoski, & Lieb, 2001). The belief of why these programs are effective may be that counseling (instead of incarceration) would prevent adolescents from being labeled as delinquent and then behaving in ways that are congruent with this label (Aos et al.).

However, one caveat to alternatives to incarceration is that some programs (e.g. “Scared Straight”, boot camps, and the “Job Training Partnership Act”) have a deleterious effect on reducing crime (Aos et al., 2001). For example, “Scared Straight” increased offending by 13% and lead to $6,572 per student in added costs to justice system involvement; additionally, boot camps significantly increased offending by 10% as compared to incarceration (Aos et al.). Several researchers recommend moving away from interventions targeting single problems such as substance abuse and adolescent pregnancy (Elliott, 1993; Johnson & Roberts, 1999). The reason these broader interventions are particularly relevant is because problem behaviors are better understood as interrelated and do not exist on their own, so interventions should not just aim to ameliorate symptoms and problems (Masten, 2001). In addition to being sensitive to the unique characteristics of the adolescent population and to the multidimensional nature of resilience, interventions that focus solely on one behavior (e.g. substance abuse) may be too narrow and should, instead, cut across behaviors to be most effective (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005). However, despite the call for broader prevention models, practice is lagging. Researchers and helping professionals must develop and implement more programs that address the broad range of issues that adolescents face. One model that attempts to do this is positive youth development movement.

Positive Youth Development Programs

One increasingly popular approach that embraces a holistic approach and focuses on the importance of resiliency is the positive youth development

movement. This paradigm follows recommendations to focus on strengths while systematically promoting competency in young people and moving away from the traditional focus on problem behaviors (Apsler, Formica, Fraster, & McMahan, 2006). Positive youth development can be described as an ecological, asset-based theory that promotes change through supportive environments and community involvement (Hamilton, Hamilton, & Pittman, 2004). Some key aspects of positive youth development programs are: An emphasis on inclusiveness, promoting resilience, building relationships, and engaging youth as active participants instead of passively receiving services (Hamilton et al.). The overarching goal of positive youth development is increasing youths' internal and external assets (Benson, 1997). Some examples of interventions that encompass the goals of the positive youth development movement are the Life Skills Training program, the Go Grrrls program and the Girls Circle program.

Life Skills Training (LST) is a tobacco, alcohol, and drug abuse prevention program for middle or junior high school students (Botvin, Eng & Williams, 1980). LST is arguably the most effective of its kind. It has been evaluated in over a dozen studies at Cornell University Medical College and has been shown to reduce the prevalence of tobacco, alcohol, and illicit drug use by as much as 87% (Botvin, Griffin & Nichols, 2006). Some of the material covered in the Life Skills Training program include: Common beliefs about smoking and drug use, self-image, decision making, relaxation techniques, and aggression (Botvin, Eng & Williams). These themes reflect the idea that the best interventions for teens are

universal and broadly address issues that adolescents face instead of only focusing on decreasing one particular behavior.

Go Grrrls incorporates the holistic approach of positive youth development (LeCroy, 2004). The curriculum consists of six critical developmental tasks: Gender role identity, establishing a positive self-image, gaining independence, making and keeping friends, using resources, and planning for the future (LeCroy & Daley, 2001). Two sessions were assigned for each of the six tasks resulting in 12 sessions. In the comparisons of Go Grrrls participants and a control group, girls in the Go Grrrls curriculum significantly improved on body image, assertiveness, self-efficacy and self-liking scales (LeCroy). Because there is substantial research on prevention programs for adolescents, what constitutes successful programs is well-known. One review of research on adolescent development identified physical and psychological safety, structure, supportive relationships, opportunity to belong, supporting efficacy, and mattering as well as integration of school and family as important for prevention programs (Eccles & Gootman, 2002). LeCroy and Daley emphasized the need for interventions to be developmentally appropriate and gender-specific (2001). LeCroy (2004) evaluated the empowerment program, Go Grrrls, for early adolescent girls for how it addresses healthy psychosocial development tasks such as gender role identification, positive self-image and achieving independence. Other researchers recommend programs be holistic and strength-based to best view girls as capable of living successful and healthy lives (Hartwig & Myers, 2003).

Girls Circle. The Girls Circle Curriculum is a structured intervention that integrates resiliency practices and skills training to increase personal and collective strengths and competence in girls (Hossfeld & Taormina, 2006). It is designed to be implemented in school settings by a trained facilitator. Facilitators of the curriculum must have had training in group counseling. Each of the eight curriculum is targeted towards specific age groups focuses on the specific challenges that girls face. In general, the Girls Circle model aims to reduce risk factors by increasing protective factors including self-acceptance, identity formation, healthy friendships, and goal setting in adolescent girls (Hossfeld & Taormina). For these reasons, the Girls Circle was chosen as the intervention for the current study.

Summary and Purpose of This Study

Adolescence is a stage of development that focuses on identity formation and defining the self. If successful at these tasks, adolescents will ideally become a healthy adults. If they are unsuccessful, they may suffer from confusion of identity in the roles they perform as adults. This stage of development is tumultuous for all, but particularly for adolescents who have risk factors.

In the last few decades, a paradigm shift for conceptualizing risk and resiliency in adolescents has occurred. Instead of looking at delinquency from a deficits model, there is a call for interventions to be strengths-based and to focus on increasing youths' competencies, increasing developmental assets, and understanding how some youth can thrive in the face of risk. The current study

examines the relevant assets of positive self-esteem, increased self-efficacy, strong sense of personal identity, perceptions of mattering to important others, and high levels of interpersonal competencies (i.e., low levels of relational aggression).

A plethora of interventions have been designed to either punish (i.e., incarceration), remedy (i.e., alternatives to incarceration), or prevent (i.e., Life Skills Training) adolescents' delinquent behaviors. Researchers state that interventions for adolescents need to be universal, holistic, developmentally appropriate and gender sensitive. Girls Circle is an intervention that attempts to address a broad range of difficulties teen girls are facing from a strengths-based model. The primary purpose of this research was to assess the impact of the Girls Circle intervention on girls' self-reports of self-esteem, self-efficacy, mattering, identity distress, and relational aggression.

Four hypotheses were posed:

H1: At pre-test, self esteem, self-efficacy, and mattering will be positively interrelated, and self-esteem will be negatively related to identity distress.

H2: At pre-test, self-esteem and mattering will be negatively related to relational aggression.

H3: There will be significant improvement in self-esteem, self-efficacy, and mattering among female adolescents after participation in the Girls Circle curriculum.

H4: There will be a significant decrease in identity distress and relational aggression among female adolescents after participation in the Girls Circle curriculum.

CHAPTER 2

METHOD

Participants and Recruitment

Participants for this study were female students at an alternative high school in the southwestern United States. The total number of female students at the high school was 25 (making up about 25% percent of the student population). The female population of the school was approximately 56% Caucasian, 24% Hispanic, 12% Native American, and 8% African American. Eight percent of the

girls at the school were 19 years old, 28% were 18, 8% were 17, 24% were 16, and 32% were 15. During the three month recruitment, researchers went to the lunchroom to tell the girls about the groups and had them sign a sign-up sheet. All 25 female students at the school were given a parental consent form during their lunch period (Appendix A). Announcements were also made in their classrooms, and students were told to speak to the intervention specialist at the school if they were interested in participating. Participation was voluntary, and participants were asked to sign the youth assent form at the initial meeting (see Appendix A).

A total of 12 girls brought back parental consent forms or agreed to participate. For these girls, their mean age was 17.17 years (SD = 1.27). Of these 12 girls, nine (75%) self-identified as Caucasian, two (16.7%) as Latina, and one (8.3%) as Native American. Eight (67%) participants identified as high school seniors, two (16.7 %) as juniors, one (8.3%) as a sophomore, and one (8.3%) as a freshman. All of the girls stated that they planned to go to college. Six (50%) reported high-school or GED as their father's highest level of education, and seven (58.7%) reported the same for mothers. Four (33%) reported college or graduate school as their father's highest level of education and three (25%) reported the same for mothers. Complete data on parental educational level are presented in Table 1 in Appendix B.

Instrumentation

Demographic questionnaire. Participants completed a demographic questionnaire indicating their age, ethnicity, and favorite and least favorite school

subjects. They also reported on information about who lived in their homes and parent's completed level of education. Several instruments were administered pre and post-test to assess the effects of the intervention on the variables of interest, self-perceptions and peer relationships (Appendix C).

Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSE). The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale is a 10-item scale designed to measure one's feelings of self worth and was specifically designed for high school students (Fischer & Corcoran, 1994). Items are rated on a 4-point scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree. A sample item is "At times I think that I am no good at all." After reverse scoring five items, responses are summed to form a total self-esteem score that can range from 10 to 40, with higher scores indicating higher self-esteem. For the 502 girls in the Talented At-Risk Girls: Encouragement and Training for Sophomores (TARGETS) program, the Cronbach's alpha was .84 at pretest (Robinson Kurpius & Kerr, 2001). For the 131 girls at post-test, the alpha coefficient was .87. At the first and second follow-up, it was .83. This indicates that scores on the RSE are stable for teenage girls. For the 12 girls in the present study, the Cronbach's alpha was .79 at pretest and .83 at post-test.

Identity Distress Survey (IDS). Berman et al. (2004) modeled the IDS after the DSM-III and III-R criteria for Identity Disorder and claim it can be used to assess identity problems. Participants are asked to rate ten statements on a five point Likert-type scale (Not at all, Mildly, Moderately, Severely, Very Severely) on the degree to which they have been distressed or worried over the following identity issues: Long-term goals, career choice, friendships, sexual orientation and

behavior, religions, values and beliefs, and group loyalty. Scores on this scale were summed and averaged to obtain a total score for identity distress. Internal consistency has been reported as .84, with a test-retest reliability of .82 (Berman et al.). The IDS is useful for identifying youth experiencing significant difficulties in developing an identity and for exploring links between identity problems and other areas of psychological functioning. For the present study, Cronbach's alphas were .74 at pre-test and .75 at post-test.

Mattering to Others Questionnaire (MTOQ). The MTOQ (Marshall, 2001) is a 9-item scale that has three versions-mattering to mother, to father and to friends. Respondents answer based on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = Not much to 5 = A lot. For the present study, the five mattering to friends and four mattering to parents questions were separated, summed and averaged to obtain two different scores. Higher scores reflected greater perceived mattering to friends and to parents (Marshall). When the Cronbach's alphas were calculated for the four items comprising the mattering to parents scale, the internal consistencies were .81 at pre-test and .83 at post-test; and for the five items of the mattering to friends scale, the internal consistencies were .76 at pre-test and .72 at post-test for the girls in the current study.

Relational Aggression measures. Little et al. (2003) created two six-item scales to assess both instrumental and reactive relational aggression (see Appendix C). The questions on these scales have a four point Likert-type response format ranging from "not at all true" to "completely true." A sample instrumental scale item is, "I often tell friends to stop liking someone to get what I

want." A sample reactive scale item is, "If others upset or hurt me, I get my friends to stop liking them." Responses for each scale are summed separately, and total scale scores range from 6 to 24 with higher scores indicating higher instrumental or reactive relational aggression. Little et al. reported internal consistencies of .63 and .78 (for reactive relational aggression subscale and instrumental relation aggression subscale, respectively) in a sample of 1723 German students. For the present study, Cronbach's alpha were calculated for these subscales combined and was found to be .86 at pre-test and .79 at post-test.

Educational Self-Efficacy-Adolescence (ESEA). Developed by Robinson (1992), the ESEA measures an individual's confidence in being able to accomplish various education related tasks. Participants rated themselves on a 7-point Likert scale from Not Sure to Very Sure they can complete a task. The ESEA is comprised of four subscales: (1) Job Self-Efficacy assesses efficacy for completing education/training for 30 different occupations; (2) School Self-Efficacy assesses belief in one's ability to do well in 13 basic high school courses; (3) Grade Self-Efficacy is belief that one can get an A or B in eight school subjects; and (4) Future Self-Efficacy, consisting of 21 items, assessed one's feelings about statements concerning the future. Responses within each subscale are summed and divided by the number of items to produce scores that can range from one to seven, with higher scores reflecting greater self-efficacy. Internal consistencies for these four scales for the girls in the TARGETS program at pretest were .96 for Job Self-Efficacy, .93 for School self-Efficacy, .90 for Grade Self-efficacy, and .77 for Future Self-Efficacy. These coefficient alphas were

stable across the post-test and the first follow-up, varying no more than .02 (Robinson Kupius & Kerr, 2001).

For the current research, the 13 items of the school self-efficacy and the 21 items of the future self-efficacy were assessed. Cronbach's alphas for the present study were .91 at pre-test and .89 at post-test for the school self-efficacy. For the future self-efficacy scale, five items were recoded and then responses were summed and averaged for each participant. The Cronbach's alpha for all 21 items was .45 at pre-test and .89 at post-test; after four items were removed, the Cronbach's alpha for the remaining 17 items increased to .74 for pre-test and .92 for post-test for the present study. The 17 remaining items assessed opinions about topics such as: graduating from high school, going to college, life plans after school is over, and getting a career that they would enjoy.

Intervention

Girls Circle Group. In this study, the eight lesson plans of Girls Circle curriculum (Hossfeld &Taormina, 2006) were administered in one hour sessions held approximately biweekly for five weeks. While the goal was to meet twice a week, some sessions were rescheduled because of conflicts with important school activities such as standardized testing days. During the sessions, girls were given the opportunity to talk and listen to each other about their concerns and interests. Focused activities such as role-playing, journaling, and drawing helped address gender-specific themes such as being a girl in today's society, accepting themselves, friendships, and goals (Hossfeld & Taormina, 2006). For the present

study, the “Who I am” curriculum was chosen because of its focus on identity formation.

Day 1: Trust and Group Bonding. First, the icebreaker known as two truths and a lie was done followed by a check in. Most girls reported that they felt comfortable in group. The girls were divided up into small groups and given discussion topics such as: accepting compliments, being “harder” on themselves than others, comparing themselves to other people, and never feeling “good enough”. This discussion addressed the self-esteem variable. Additionally, rules were established that included confidentiality and respecting each other.

Day 2: Journaling and Self disclosure. The group made journals that were used in subsequent groups for self-reflection activities. During the journal making, the girls talked about dating, friends, and telling secrets. Other topics that were discussed were things such as body image seen in the magazines. The variables addressed during this session included self-esteem, mattering to friends, and relational aggression.

Day 3: Song about me, Who I am. The girls chose to play their favorite songs and explain why they liked it. Most of the songs were chosen because they reminded the girls of their boyfriends. One song titled “Butterfly Kisses” was about fathers and daughters, and this made most of the other group members cry. This activity addressed mattering to parents and mattering to friends.

Day 4: Friendships, How I relate. The participants did a “free write” in their journals about what makes a good friend, what makes them a good friend.

During this discussion some of the girls started gossiping about one of the girls at school. One participant asked the girls to stop and to think about how the girl they were talking about must feel. The facilitator reinforced this and did a free-write in which the girls had to think of strengths of their "enemies" aimed at fostering empathy for others. Other topics brought up were trust, humor, and finding friends who are "not drama". In other words, it was important to the girls to find friends who do not spread rumors about them. This group session addressed the mattering to friends and relational aggression variables.

Day 5: Personal growth, Assertiveness. We talked about aggressiveness, passivity and being assertiveness. Some knew what being assertive meant but could not describe it. Some were not sure what it meant and definitions were provided. The girls were asked to come up with a scenario in which they either acted aggressive or passive, how their actions affected themselves and others. Then, the group discussed alternatives ways each could have been more assertive. Next, the girls talked about fighting with boyfriends, and found that they all recently had intense fights with boyfriends. Research variables addressed included mattering to others and identity distress.

Day 6: Life goals, Personal goals. The group began by talking about the weekend, fights with boyfriends, and the difference between forgiveness and being taken advantage of. The group talked about goals and discussed a handout on goals. The girls were asked to circle the top five goals, then rank order them. The group went around circle and everyone shared. Girls then picked one and

wrote “baby steps” to reaching this goal and what they needed to do, thereby addressing the self-efficacy variable of the current research.

Day 7: Where I’ve been & Where I’m going. The group started off with a meditation about self-acceptance then the girls made mandalas. The participants then went around the circle and explained what it meant to them and how it reflects their life goals. This lesson plan addressed self-esteem, self-efficacy, and identity distress.

Day 8: Appreciation ceremony. The group started with a compliment circle. The girls were then given certificates of completion. These were passed around so that others could sign the back with messages of encouragement. After this activity, the girls were given time to talk about what they learned from and things they enjoyed about the group.

Procedure

The first group meeting was held in an empty classroom at an alternative high school on March 22, 2010. At this first group meeting, the participants were asked to fill out a demographic questionnaire and then administered a questionnaire packet to be used as the pre-test that took 45 minutes to complete. The research packets included a demographic sheet, the Rosenberg Self-Esteem scale (Rosenberg, 1965), the Identity Distress Survey (Berman, Montgomery, & Kurtines, 2004), the Mattering to Others Questionnaire (Marshall, 2001), self-efficacy scales (Robinson-Kurpius, 1992), and the relational aggression scales (Little, Jones, Henrich, & Hawley, 2003) (see Appendix C). Students were asked to complete the research packet and return it to the school psychologist who

remained in the room during the pre-test and post-test as well as all group discussions. The group meetings occurred approximately two times a week for five weeks throughout March and April of 2010. Attendance was taken at every meeting and girls were included in the study if they did not miss more than two session. Some weeks the meeting was cancelled due to scheduling conflicts at the school. The cancelled meetings were pushed to the following weeks in order to ensure that no days were missed. On April 21, 2010, the post-test questionnaire packet was administered following the same procedure as the pre-test and took 45 minutes to complete. After all questionnaires were collected, there was a pizza party.

CHAPTER 3

RESULTS

Prior to analyzing the study hypotheses, the Cronbach's alphas were calculated for each scale used to assess the outcome variables (self-esteem, identity distress, mattering, relational aggression, and educational self-efficacy). These are reported in Chapter 2: Method. The scale means and standard deviations are reported in (see Table 2 in Appendix B). The correlations among the dependent measures were calculated at pre-test and post-test (see Table 3 in Appendix B).

The first hypothesis predicted that self esteem, self-efficacy, and mattering would be positively related and that self-esteem would be negatively related to identity distress at pre-test. A series of Pearson Moment correlations were used to test this hypothesis. At pre-test, self-esteem was positively related to mattering to friends ($r = .59$, $p < .05$). No other correlation was significant (see Table 3 in Appendix B).

Hypothesis two predicted that, self-esteem and mattering would be negatively related to relational aggression at pre-test. A series of Pearson Moment correlations were used to test this hypothesis. At pre-test, mattering to parents was negatively related to relational aggression ($r = -.67$ $p = .01$). Neither self-esteem nor mattering to friends was related to relational aggression at pre-test (see Table 3 in Appendix B).

Hypothesis three predicted that there would be significant improvement in self-esteem, self-efficacy, and mattering among female adolescents after participation in the Girls Circle curriculum. To test the third hypothesis, repeated measures analyses of variance were conducted. Means and standard deviations can be found in Table 2 in Appendix B. When self-esteem was examined, it did not significantly change from pretest (M = 30.61, SD = 4.38) to posttest (M = 29.42, SD = 4.36), Wilks Lambda F (1, 11) = 1.57, p = .236. Mattering to parents did not significantly change from pretest (M = 3.04, SD = .80) to post-test (M = 2.90, SD = .84), Wilks Lambda F (1,11) = .33, p = .576, nor did mattering to friends significantly change from pre-test (M = 3.47, SD = .56) to post-test (M = 3.37, SD = .57), Wilks Lambda F (1,11) = 1.44, p = .256. When school self-efficacy was examined, it did not significantly change from pretest (M = 4.40, SD = 1.46) to post-test (M = 4.89, SD = 1.37), Wilks Lambda F (1, 11) = 1.67, p = .223. Finally, like the other variables, future self-efficacy did not significantly change from pretest (M = 6.23, SD = .68) to post-test (M = 5.91, SD = 1.28), Wilks Lambda F (1,11)= 1.18, p = .301.

The final hypothesis predicted there would be a significant decrease in identity distress and relational aggression among female adolescents after participation in the Girls Circle curriculum. To test the forth hypothesis, repeated measures analyses of variance were conducted. When identity distress was examined, it did not significantly change from pretest (M = 17.33, SD = 5.88) to post-test (M = 18.17, SD = 5.33), Wilks Lambda F (1, 11) = .19, p = .675. Additionally relational aggression did not decrease from pretest (M = 1.45, SD =

.52) to post-test (M = 1.30, SD = .33), Wilks Lambda F (1, 11) = 2.10, p = .176. Neither hypothesis three nor four was supported by the data.

CHAPTER 4

DISCUSSION

This study explored the relationships among intrapersonal (self-esteem, self-efficacy and identity) and interpersonal (mattering and healthy peer relationships) protective factors as well as the impact of a positive youth development intervention on these factors. The literature indicates that assets such as self-esteem, self-efficacy, having a positive sense of identity, and feeling like one matters to her parents and friends can serve as protective factors to at-risk teenage girls (Benson, 2003). Furthermore, the presence of these protective factors can impact girls' social behaviors (i.e., relational aggression) and beliefs about their future.

Summary of findings

At pre-test, a significant positive relationship was found between self-esteem and mattering to friends, suggesting that adolescent girls who feel that

they matter to their friends have higher self-esteem. This finding illustrates Erikson's (1963) idea of adolescents' emerging view of the self as integrated, as well as achieving a higher level of closeness with peers. These two undertakings are critical tasks of adolescence, serving to help one evolve through the psychosocial stages of development. According to Josephs, Markus, and Tafarodi (1992), females construct their self-concepts based on their relationships with significant people in their lives, which supports the present study's finding of positive correlations between self-esteem and mattering to friends.

Additionally, a positive relationship between self-esteem and mattering to parents approached significance, which suggests that girls who feel more important to their parents may also have higher self-esteem. These findings corroborate the current literature's descriptions of relationships among self-esteem, mattering, and health. As Dixon Rayle (2005) pointed out, mattering to family was a primary predictor of wellness in females. Furthermore, higher self-esteem has been shown to correlate positively with mental health (Birndorf et al., 2005). During the time of the intervention, many of the girls in the Girls Circle group disclosed that there was conflict in their households and with family members outside of their household. Burns and Dunlop (2002) and Kirk (2002) suggested that family conflict has a negative impact on girls' self-esteem and relationship competence. Perhaps family conflict creates a negative, judgmental, and hostile environment that is then internalized resulting in a lowered self image. Furthermore, Kirk (2002) proposed that having quality friendships was not a significant moderator of the negative impact of family conflict on self-esteem.

That is, relationships with family are still the foundation from which the adolescent builds the concept of one's self. One factor that was not explored in the present study was the relationship between presence of father or stepfathers in the home and self-esteem, although this is a topic that has been researched. Some researchers propose that it is not necessarily the absence of a parent from the home that affects self-esteem (Amato & Rezac, 1994), but rather the amount of actual time spent with fathers that positively correlates with self-esteem (Yeung, Duncan & Hill, 2000) and the quality of the relationship that matters (Carr-Jordan, 2008). This is an area that needs to be addressed further in research as it relates to both self-esteem and mattering to parents.

Another significant finding of this study, and the strongest relationship, was the negative correlation between relational aggression and mattering to parents. In other words, adolescent girls who feel that they matter to their parents are less relationally aggressive. There may be several explanations for this finding. First, perhaps the idea that feeling like one matters to significant others such as parents predicts wellness in females (Dixon Rayle, 2005), especially considering that relational aggression is positively correlated with mental health issues (Werner & Crick, 1999). This could explain why adolescent females who feel like they do not matter to their families tend to be more relationally aggressive. Secondly, feeling like they matter to their parents and having a good family relationship may provide a stronger sense of personal values and positive identity formation, which is related to a person's interactions with other people (Kroger, 2004). According to Erikson's (1963) psychosocial developmental

theory, the conflict that occurs between the ages of 12 and 20 years old is one of identity versus role confusion. Erikson further noted that if a person successfully completes this stage of development, he or she would utilize relationships experienced early in life (e.g., the parents) to develop a coherent sense of identity as well as information on how to relate to others. In other words, feeling like one matters to parents, which is the first bonding relationship, influences how one treat others and in this study, how relationally aggressive one is. Finally, perhaps having a secure relationship with one's parents fosters genuine empowerment, which one researcher suggested may protect against covert aggression (Brown, 2003).

The current study did not find a significant relationship between relational aggression and self-esteem as noted in previous research. One reason for not finding a significant relationship may be because of the limitations of the current study. Werner and Crick (1999) found that relationally aggressive women reported lower life satisfaction and more mental health issues such as depression. Furthermore, some researchers suggested that mental health issues are related to low self-esteem and that self-esteem is one contributor to deviant behavior such as aggression and violence (Meggert, 2004). The current study's failure to find a relationship between self-esteem and relational aggression agrees with other researchers' inability to establish self-esteem as a predictor of risk behaviors (Birndorf et al., 2005). This potential relationship appears to be complex, and further research is warranted.

Impact of the Intervention

Means and standard deviations were calculated for each variable for pre-test and post-test data. While the analysis of variance tests did not show any significant differences in scores from pre to post, the findings should still be addressed. Identity distress slightly increased from pre to post-test, and an explanation for this might be the nature of the intervention that required the girls to engage in self-reflection, which is difficult to do. Self-esteem scores slightly decreased from pre to post-test. One explanation for this could be related to the increase in identity distress, because the girls were asked to evaluate themselves and their behaviors, some of which the girls were ashamed. Relational aggression slightly decreased, possibly due to the fact that a few of the girls in the group were from rival cliques and had a chance to sit down and get to know one another in a different way than their normal interactions. Both mattering to parents and mattering to friends decreased. Explanations for these findings include intervention topics that required the girls to examine their friendships and family dynamics, including the weaknesses. Additionally, during the course of the intervention multiple girls had family issues arise such as one father leaving, a sister running away, and a physical altercation between one girl and her mother. Finally, school self-efficacy slightly increased and future self-efficacy slightly decreased. An explanation for the slight increase in school self-efficacy may be the fact that a majority of the group was either graduating or transferring back to their original schools, resulting in a feeling of accomplishment in school. The reduced future self-efficacy could be explained by the abnormally high scores on

the pre-test that after the intervention asking the girls to set concrete goals resulted in more accurate scores on the future self-efficacy scale.

Limitations of this Study

There are several limitations to this study that must be mentioned. First and foremost was the fact that there was no control group. Of the 12 students who originally signed up for the program, only 10 were able to make it to the group meetings. The 10 girls were to be split into two groups (Girls Circle and a yoga group), with the yoga group serving as a control group. However, due to scheduling conflicts and small number of girls who agreed to participate in this study, this design was unable to be implemented and the girls were all included in one group. Another limitation was the setting of the study, a very small alternative high school. At this high school, there were approximately 100 students and only 25 females.

Many factors influenced who was willing to sign up for the group and who refused due to conflicts with girls who had already signed up. Some girls reported that they would not participate if they were not placed in a group with their friends. When random assignment was briefly explained to them, this deterred some girls from signing up.

Additionally, only paper-pencil self-report instruments were used to assess the study variables, and judging by the measures of internal consistencies, they may not have validly assessed the constructs studied. Furthermore, with regards to the measurements, confidentiality was not assured as all of the girls sat in the

same classroom when they filled out the questionnaire. The researcher was not in the room; however, the school psychologist reported that they were talking to each other while filling out the questions and asking each other what they wrote. Also, due to the small size of the alternative school setting and the fact that there were "rival cliques" in the group, a few girls admitted to being hesitant to disclose about certain topics because of the fear of it "getting around" the entire school.

Once the curriculum began, issues such as missed days due to standardized testing, tardiness, and absences from school disrupted the timing of the group meetings. The timing of the assessments and the curriculum were at the end of the school year when students are often restless and ready for summer vacation. During some of the sessions, male teachers and other male students would enter the classroom and distract the participants in the group.

Future Research

While the present study highlights the relationships of mattering to both friends and parents with adolescent girls' self-esteem, future studies should investigate the relationship between relational aggression and mattering to parents. Perhaps it would be interesting to measure mattering as it applies to each parent individually and to assess mattering with regards to other family members such as step-parents, aunts, uncles and grandparents. Future studies could expound on the finding of mattering in general to friends and parents to the quality of these relationships. One topic that continually was addressed in group sessions were the girls' romantic relationships, and it would be interesting to

measure the quality of these relationships and mattering to one's romantic partner with feelings of self-esteem, identity distress and relational aggression. More studies that utilize group interventions that focus on empowerment, identity, self-acceptance and relationships would greatly benefit this population.

Conclusion

This study illustrates the need for appropriate interventions for adolescent females in spite of the lack of demonstrated effectiveness of the intervention in this study. Self-esteem was shown to be positively correlated to mattering to friends at both pre and post-test, confirming the idea that females define themselves by their relationships with other people, in this case their peers. Relational aggression was shown to be inversely related to mattering to parents, illustrating that girls who felt they were important to their parents were less likely to spread rumors and use covert tactics to manipulate their peers. In their stage of development, adolescents form their identities by their relationships with others, reiterating the importance of quality relationships and feeling secure with themselves and their self-worth.

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APPENDIX A

CONSENT FORMS

Guardian Consent Form

My name is Dr. Sharon Robinson Kurpius a professor in the Counseling program at Arizona State University. I am supervising Kate Kincaid and Tember Graves who are currently students in the Master of Counseling at ASU. We would like to include your child in a research project about her self-perceptions and peer experiences at Sierra Vista.

Girls will be asked to complete a short survey packet. Then participants will volunteer to participate in an eight-week wellness program that meets for one class period each week. Girls will be involved in either an activity-based discussion group or a yoga-based discussion group. After the eight weeks are over, girls will fill out the short survey packet again. Results will be published in aggregated form (e.g. all high school girls) as part of a thesis and in a research journal so others can better understand how these self-perceptions and peer experiences affect adolescents' well-being. **The information that is obtained during this research project will be kept strictly confidential and anonymous. The identity of all participants will be protected. No names will be attached to surveys or appear in any published documents.** All surveys will be stored in a locked faculty office at ASU.

Participants may experience slight discomfort when reporting their self-perceptions and peer experiences. However, they are free to withdrawal from the study or to stop answering questions at any time without any negative consequences. If any participants become upset as a result of their participation, they will be immediately referred to the school counselor.

Participation in this research project is completely voluntary. Participants will be informed that their participation will have no impact on their grades at school or treatment by teachers or other school staff. Girls will also be asked to give their consent to be involved in this project.

If you have any questions about this research project, please contact me (Dr. Sharon Robinson Kurpius at 480-965-6104) or Kate Kincaid at kjkincai@gmail.com or Tember Graves at tember.graves@asu.edu. Please keep the second copy of this form for your records.

___ I give permission for my child to participate in the research study described above.

___ I do NOT give permission for my child to participate in the research study described above.

Girl's name

Parent/Guardian Signature Date

Youth Assent Form

My name is Dr. Sharon Robinson Kurpius and I am a professor in Counseling at Arizona State University. I am supervising Kate Kincaid and Tember Graves who are both students in the Master of Counseling program at ASU. We would like to invite you to participate in a research project that will help you explore how you see yourself and your relationships with other students at Sierra Vista Academy.

If you agree to be involved with this research project, you will be asked to complete a short survey packet during one of your classes in the Spring 2010. Your participation will also include an eight-week wellness program that meets once a week for an hour. You will either be part of an activity-based discussion group or a yoga-based discussion group. After the eight weeks are over, you will be asked to fill out the short survey again. **The information obtained during this research project will be kept strictly confidential and anonymous. Your name will not be attached to the surveys or appear in any published papers. No one including your teachers, staff at the school, or your parents will ever see how you answer the questions.** The results of the surveys, however, will be used to evaluate the two parts of the wellness program and may be published.

Your participation in this project is completely voluntary and you are free to withdrawal from the study or to stop answering questions at any time without any negative consequence. Some teenagers may feel upset when talking about themselves and their peer relationships. There are on-staff counselors at Sierra Vista that you can talk to should you feel upset.

If you have any questions about this research project, please contact me (Dr. Sharon Robinson Kurpius at 480-965-6104). You may also contact Kate Kincaid at kjkincai@gmail.com or Tember Graves at tember.graves@asu.edu.

I have read and understood the contents of this form, and I voluntarily agree to participate in this project.

Signature Date

APPENDIX B

TABLES

Table 1

Demographic Data for Girls

Variable	*n*	%
Grade Level		
9th	1	8.3
10th	1	8.3
11th	2	16.7
12th	8	66.7
Race/Ethnicity		
Latino	2	16.7
Native American	1	8.3
White	9	75.0
Father's live in home	3	25.0
Mothers live in home	6	50.0
Father's Education		
Unknown	2	16.7
Some Grade	0	0
High School/GED	6	50.0
Some College	0	0
College	2	16.7
Graduate School	2	16.7
Mother's Education		
Some Grade	1	8.3
High School/GED	7	58.3

Some College	1	8.3
College	1	8.3
Graduate School	2	16.7

Table 2

Pre and Post-test Means, Standard Deviations and F Tests

Variables	Pre-test		Post-test		
	M	SD	M	SD	F
Self-Esteem	30.61	4.38	29.42	4.36	1.57
Identity Distress	17.33	5.88	18.17	5.34	.19
Relational Agg	17.42	6.22	15.58	3.90	.18
Mattering to Parents	7.83	3.22	8.42	3.37	.33
Mattering to Friends	7.67	2.81	8.17	2.82	.56
School Self-Efficacy	57.17	18.99	63.50	17.79	.22
Future Self-Efficacy	105.92	11.58	100.42	21.77	.30

Table 3

Correlations among Self-Esteem, Identity Distress, Mattering to Others, Relational Aggression, Educational Self-Efficacy at Pre-test and Post-test

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Esteem	--	.08	-.10	.23	.59*	.19	.51
2. Identity	.30	--	.00	.00	.00	.05	.17
3. Rel Agg	.05	.00	--	-.67*	-.10	.00	.00
4. Matter Parent	.47**	-.26	-.05	--	.09	.08	-.18
5. Matter Friend	.49*	.00	-.22	.02	--	-.24	.15
6. School Self-eff	-.22	-.35	.00	.14	-.31	--	.35
7. Future Self-eff	.30	-.37	.00	.32	.15	.47**	--

*Note: *p<.05, **<.06; Correlations above diagonal are for pre-test and below are for post-test data*

APPENDIX C

INSTRUMENTS

Demographic form

1. Age:______ 2. Grade:__________

3. What is your ethnic background? ____African American
_____Asian ____Hispanic/Latino

____ Native American (Tribe?________________)

____Caucasian ____Other (please specify)___________________________

4. Household Information:

A. Does your father live in your home? ____Yes ____No

B. Does your mother live in your home? ____Yes ____No

C. Do any other adults live in your home? ____Yes ____No
If yes, what is their relationship with you _________________

D. Number of children in your family, including you: _______________

E. Do you have a brother who has attended college? ___Yes ___No

F. Do you have a sister who has attended college? ____Yes ____No

5. Is your father currently employed?____Yes ____No If yes, what does he do?____

6. What is your father's level of completed education? ___ some grade school

____8th grade ____high school/GED _____some college or technical training

____2-year College ____College _____Graduate School

7. Is your mother currently employed? ____Yes ____No If yes, what does she do?____

8. What is your mother's level of completed education? ____ some grade school

____8th grade ____high school/GED _____some college or technical training

____2-year College ____College _____Graduate School

9. What is your religion? ___Catholic ____Jewish ____Mormon ____Protestant

____Tribal Religion (which one?) __________________________________

____Other (which one?) ____

10. Do you work? ____Yes ____No   If yes, how many hours per week? ______

11. Are you active in extracurricular activities? ____Yes ____No   If yes, which ones?

ROSENBERG SELF-ESTEEM QUESTIONNAIRE

INSTRUCTIONS: The following statements refer to you. Please indicate to what extent you agree/disagree with each by circling the appropriate level.

1. I feel that I am a person of worth, at least on an equal basis with others.			
Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1. I feel that I have a number of good qualities.			
Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1. All in all, I am inclined to feel I am a failure.			
Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1. I am able to do things as well as most people.			
Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1. I feel that I do not have much to be proud of.			
Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1. I take a positive attitude toward myself.			
Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1. On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.			
Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1. I wish I could have more respect for myself.			
Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1. I certainly feel useless at times.			
Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1. At times I think I am no good at all.			
Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree

Identity Distress Scale

To what degree have you recently been upset, distressed, or worried over any of the following issues in your life?

1 = None 2 = Mild 3 = Moderate 4 = Severe 5 = Very Severe

1. Long term goals? (e.g., finding a good job, being in a romantic relationship, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5
2. Career choice? (e.g., deciding on a trade or profession, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5
3. Friendships? (e.g., experiencing a loss of friends, change in friends, etc.	1	2	3	4	5
4. Sexual orientation and behavior? (e.g., feeling confused about sexual preferences, intensity of sexual needs, etc.	1	2	3	4	5
5. Religion? (e.g., stopped believing, changed your belief in God/religion, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5
6. Values or beliefs? (e.g., feeling confused about what is right or wrong, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5
7. Group loyalties? (e.g., belonging to a club, school group, gang, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5
8. Please rate your overall level of discomfort (how bad they made you feel) about all the above issues as a whole	1	2	3	4	5
9. Please rate how much uncertainty over these issues as a whole has interfered with your life (for example, stopped you from doing things you wanted to do, or being happy)	1	2	3	4	5
10. How long (if at all) have you felt upset, distressed, or worried over these issues as a whole? (check below) ___(1-3 months) ___2 (4-6 months) ___ 3 (6-12 months) ___ 4 (more than 12 months)					

Mattering to Others Scale

Please respond to the following questions by circling the best answer.

1. How *important* do you feel you are to your parents			
very much	somewhat	a little	not at all
1. How much do you feel your parents pay *attention* to you?			
very much	somewhat	a little	not at all
1. How interested are your parents in what you have to *say*?			
very much	somewhat	a little	not at all
1. How much do your parents *depend* on you?			
very much	somewhat	a little	not at all

1. How *important* do you feel you are to your friends at school?			
very much	somewhat	a little	not at all
1. How much do you feel these friends pay *attention* to you?			
very much	somewhat	a little	not at all
1. How much do you feel these friends would *miss* you if you went away?			
very much	somewhat	a little	not at all
1. How interested are your friends in what you have to *say*?			
very much	somewhat	a little	not at all
1. How much do your friends *depend* on you?			
very much	somewhat	a little	not at all

Relational Aggression Scale

Please read the following statements and indicate the degree to which they are reflective of your behavior.

1=Not at all true
4=Completely true

1. I often tell my friends to stop liking someone to get what I want 1 2 3 4
2. I often say mean things about others to my friends to get what I want 1 2 3 4
3. I often keep others from being in my group of friends to get what I want 1 2 3 4
4. To get what I want, I often tell others I won't be their friend anymore 1 2 3 4
5. To get what I want I often ignore or stop talking to others 1 2 3 4
6. To get what I want, I often gossip or spread rumors about others 1 2 3 4
7. If others upset or hurt me, I often tell my friends to stop liking them 1 2 3 4
8. If others have threatened me, I often say mean things about them 1 2 3 4

9. If others have hurt me, I often keep them from being in my group of friends 1 2 3 4
10. When I am angry at others, I often tell them I won't be their friend anymore 1 2 3 4
11. When I am upset with others, I often ignore or stop talking to 1 2 3 4
12. When I am mad at others, I often gossip or spread rumors about them 1 2 3 4

Relational Aggression Scale

The following statements refer to you. Please indicate to what extent each statement is descriptive of you, with

1 = Not descriptive to 4 = very descriptive

1. When I am angry I give others the "silent treatment."	1 2 3 4
2. When I am mad, I try to damage others' reputations by passing on negative information.	1 2 3 4
3. When I am mad, I retaliate by excluding others from activities.	1 2 3 4
4. I intentionally ignore others until they agree to do something for me.	1 2 3 4
5. I make it clear to my friends that I will think less of them unless they do what I want.	1 2 3 4
6. I threaten to share private information with others in order to get them to comply with my wishes	1 2 3 4
7. When I am angry with a friend, I try to steal their dating partner.	1 2 3 4

School Self-Efficacy

Instructions: For each of the school subjects listed below, circle the number that shows how confident (sure) you are that you could do well in that course or subject area.

How confident (sure) are you that you could finish each of these courses with an A or a B?

Course	Not sure		Moderately sure			Very sure	
1. General math	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2. Business math	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3. Algebra	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4. Geometry	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
5. Advanced math (trigonometry, calculus)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
6. Earth science	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
7. Life science	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8. Biology	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
9. Chemistry	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
10. Physics	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
11. American History	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
12. US Government	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
13. English	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Future Self-Efficacy

Instructions: Please circle the number that best reflects your feelings about each statement.

Course	Not sure		Moderately sure			Very sure	
1. How sure are you that you will have a job when you get older?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2. If you plan to work, do you know what you would like to do when you get older?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3. How sure are you that you will graduate from high school?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4. How sure are you that you will go on to college or some other type of training after high school?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

What is your favorite school subject? ______________________________

What school subject do you like least? ______________________________

Instructions: Please circle the number that best reflects your feelings about each statement.

How much do you agree or disagree with each of these statements?

Statement	Disagree A lot		Not sure			Agree A lot	
5. Finish high school will help me get a good job.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

6. Finishing my high school education is very important to me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
7. Going on to college is very important to me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8. Finishing high school probably will not make much difference in the kind of job I get.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
9. Finishing college will help me get a good job.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
10. Finishing college will help me get the job I really want.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
11. I haven't really thought much about what job I really want.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
12. I will not have to work when I get older.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
13. How I do in school really doesn't matter very much.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
14. How well I do in school will make a lot of difference in what kind of job I get.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
15. I have no idea what I want to do when I get out of school.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
16. I have been thinking a lot about what I want to do when I get out of school.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
17. Getting a good job is very important to me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

18. Getting a job I really like is very important to me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
19. Getting a job that pays well is very important to me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
20. I like school a lot.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
21. How well I do in high school will make a lot of difference in my life.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7