

THE BOY'S FORUM: AN EVALUATION OF A BRIEF INTERVENTION TO EMPOWER MIDDLE-SCHOOL URBAN BOYS

Programs for middle-school boys are needed because data suggests that young adolescent males have problems as they grow and develop. Few gender role interventions for boys have been evaluated or published in the professional literature. Conceptual justification for boy's programs is given using psychosocial theory, gender role transitions, multicultural aspects of masculinity, and positive/healthy masculinity. A short term, inexpensive intervention, "The Boy's Forum," was implemented for middle-school boys who were predominately Hispanic and African American. The Boy's Forum explained the hazards of growing up male (Goldberg, 1977) but also emphasized positive masculinity through empowerment, emotional awareness, and personal problem solving. The use of media, group discussions, empowerment themes, and adult self-disclosure to promote boy's psychosocial growth are described. Evaluation of the program occurred before the program, immediately after the program and three weeks later. Results indicate that a majority of boys attending the Boy's Forum reported that the programming positively affected their thinking, feelings, and to a lesser extent their behaviors over a three-week period. Limitations of the evaluation of this program, recommendations for future research, and the need for future curricular development for boys are discussed.

Keywords: *adolescent boy's programming, urban boys, middle-school boys*

Whether boys are in crises has been controversial in both the popular and professional media for over a decade (Hall, 1999; Hoff Sommers, 2000; Kindlon & Thompson, 1999; Pollack, 1998, 2006; Tyre, 2006; Von Drehle, 2007). Experts on boy's lives indicate that many male adolescents are vulnerable and at risk because of restrictive masculine norms (Horne & Kiselica, 1999; Kindon & Thompson; Levant, 2001; Pollack, 1998, 2006). Kindon and Thompson state that boys grow up in a culture of cruelty that significantly hinders

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their growth and development. How many boys actually experience cruelty has not been fully documented but statistical analyses dispel any illusion that all is well in boy's lives.

The statistical facts include: a) since 1966, of the 109 school shootings in the United States, 94% have been committed by males (School Shooting, 2011) ; b) five times as many 15-24 year old boys commit suicide compared to girls (Center for Disease Control, 2007); c) boys commit 85% of school violence (Katz, 1999); d) 80% of boys report being bullied (United States Census Bureau, 2005) ; and e) 12% of high school boys report being threatened or injured with a weapon on school property (Center for Disease Control, 2007). In terms of educational performance, the statistics indicate: a) boys are three times more likely to be enrolled in a special education class than girls (United States Census Bureau, 2005); b) three times as many boys are expelled from public schools compared to girls (National Center for Education Statistics, 2005); c) 14% of 18 to 24 year old males are high school dropouts (United States Census Bureau, 2005). These statistics are only reported cases and suggest that boys' problems are significant and need to be addressed in our society.

THE RELEVANCE OF GENDER ROLES AND BOY'S PROBLEMS

Whether socialized gender roles contribute to boys' problems is a critical question to be answered. Many experts over past decades have theorized that restrictive gender roles contribute directly to boys' psychological problems (David & Brannon, 1978; Goldberg, 1977; Levant, 2001; O'Neil, 1981, 2008, 2012; Pleck, 1981; Pollack, 1998). Six studies using the *Gender Role Conflict Scale for Adolescents (GRCS – A*; Blazina, Pisecco, & O'Neil 2005) have shown that boy's GRC significantly correlates with family stress, problems with conduct, anger, and negative emotions (Blazina & Jackson, 2009; Blazina et al., 2005; Cadenhead & Huzirec, 2002; Soublis, 2003; Watts & Borders, 2005). In a qualitative study, boys reported experiencing GRC as a developmental process beginning in early adolescence (Watts & Borders). Other studies and measures have found that restrictive masculinity ideology correlates with boys' problems (Chu, Porche, & Tolman, 2005; Levant, Graef, Smalley, Williams, & McMillian, 2008; Pleck, Soenstien, & Ku, 1993). This research supports increased discussion on whether special gender role programs are needed for boys.

Lack of Gender Role Programming for Adolescent Boys

The frequency that gender role programs are implemented for boys is largely unknown. An extensive literature search was completed in PsycINFO and other data bases to determine the number of published male youth programs for adolescence boys and specifically minority boys. Two groups of general terms were used including: a) male adolescence/gender programs, and b) male adolescence urban/programs and male youth urban/school programs. The four key terms located 4,740 articles in PsycINFO, but only five manuscripts over a twenty-one year period had been published on male youth programs for minority boys. These five manuscripts were primarily focused on drug and violence prevention with boys. Based on the results of this search, it was concluded no psycho-educational programs have been published for middle-school urban boys about growing up male.

Resistance to Boy's Programming and Denial of Their Problems

There is an obvious discrepancy between the frequency of boys' problems and reported programs for them in the literature. The lack of programming may reflect the denial of boy's problems. The "boys will be boys" assumption is part of the denial or minimization of boys' problems and implies adolescent problems are normal and gradually get worked out as boys become men. This belief that a boy's gender role problems change with age and disappear may have some validity, but it is discrepant with the empirical research. For example, adult men's masculinity ideology and gender role conflict have been significantly correlated with depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, interpersonal problems, negative attitudes toward help seeking, and violent attitudes and behaviors toward others (Levant & Richmond, 2007; O'Neil, 2008, 2012). Hundreds of empirical studies document that men report GRC negatively affects their adult lives (see O'Neil, 2008). Limited longitudinal research exists on whether boyhood problems are experienced later in life, but GRC in childhood is very likely to have a developmental trajectory that extends into adulthood. Therefore, programming for boys has implications for men's lives over the lifespan.

Resistance to programs for boys may also occur in school systems. Administrators and teachers may believe that special programs for boys are problematic, irrelevant, or address problems that are inconsistent with the school's overall mission. The perception may be that addressing boy's gender role issues creates more problems, therefore administrators fail to recognize how prevention could improve the school environment. With these assumptions and attitudes, programming and services for boys face difficult institutional challenges and therefore "calls for action" have been made (O'Neil & Crapser, 2011; O'Neil & Lujan, 2009).

The importance of studying boys has been recognized with recent publications on gifted boys and adolescent masculine norms (Oransky & Fisher, 2009; Shepard, Nicpon, Haley, Lind, & Liu, 2011) adolescent gender role conflicts (Blazina, Piseco, & O'Neil, 2005), youth mentoring relationships (Spencer, 2007), and reclaiming kindergarten (Sax, 2001). No studies have been published that a) describe actual programming for boys on growing up male, b) report data evaluating a gender role program for boys, and c) describe a program for middle-school urban boys and evaluates its effectiveness.

Therefore, this study responds to this lack of program development by evaluating a psycho-educational intervention for middle-school urban boys on the dilemmas of growing up male. A short term, inexpensive intervention, "The Boy's Forum," was implemented for middle-school boys who were predominately Hispanic and African American. The Boy's Forum explained the hazards of growing up male (Goldberg, 1977) but also emphasized positive masculinity through empowerment, emotional awareness, and personal problem solving. Using a non-experimental design, the goal of this study was to assess whether a short-term, inexpensive program could encourage boys to think about their problems and take positive action with their gender related issues.

CONCEPTUALIZING AND IMPLEMENTING THE BOY'S FORUM: FOUR FOUNDATIONS

Obtaining permission to do boy programming in schools is unlikely without a conceptual rationale for how the program can help boys. Very few recommendations exist on what con-

tent to include and how to practically implement programs for boys. One exception is Feder, Levant, and Dean's (2007) recommendations for intervening with boys and violence. They recommend early intervention in schools with the involvement of fathers, mentors, and older adults. These recommendations guided our conceptualization and implementation of the Boy's Forum. Additionally, four conceptual foundations also guided our program planning including : psychosocial theory and development (Newman & Newman, 2011), gender role transitions (O'Neil, 2008, O'Neil & Egan, 1992) racial and ethnic identity development (Boyd-Franklin., Franklin, & Toussaint, 2000; Carter, Williams, Juby, & Buckley, 2005; Hammond & Mattis, 2005), and positive/healthy masculinity (Hammer & Good, 2010; Kiselica, 2011; Kiselica & Englar-Carlson, 2010; Kiselica, Englar-Carlson, Horne, & Fisher, 2008; O'Neil & Lujan, 2008). Each of these foundations is briefly discussed below.

Psychosocial Theory and Developmental Processes of Early Adolescence

Psychosocial theory provides a very useful framework to understand early adolescence from puberty through to high school (Newman & Newman, 2011). During early adolescence, boys simultaneously experience major developmental processes related to their physical, cognitive, and emotional development. These developmental processes involve major challenges for boys to relinquish childhood perspectives and face the new developmental tasks of early adolescence. Many of these psychosocial challenges involve gender role identity questions about becoming a man. Furthermore, during adolescence, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and gender roles become new social categories for boys cognitively and emotionally. This new awareness provides a very relevant context for doing gender role programming with boys. Conceptualizing adolescent boys using psychosocial theory can facilitate decision making about what program content to choose and how to make the intervention developmentally appropriate.

Gender Role Transitions: Understanding Boys' Gender Role Development

The boys in our program were experiencing gender role transitions (GRT) that made the Boy's Forum timely and relevant. GRT are defined as events and nonevents in gender role development that produce profound changes in gender role values and self-assumptions (O'Neil, 2008; O'Neil & Egan, 1993). GRT during early adolescence include: puberty and physical maturation, self-evaluation and evaluation of others, same-sex gender-role preferences, peer group identification, heterosexual antagonism, and interaction with female peer group (O'Neil & Egan, 1993). These GRT affect the social, academic, physical, sexual, psychological, and emotional areas of a boy's life. Navigating these transitions can produce stress, conflict, but also growth, development, and renewal can occur. Therefore, the Boy's Forum was designed to help students navigate their GRT and conflicts.

Programming Across Cultural Masculinity Boundaries: Racial and Ethnic Identity

No approach to boy's programming is adequate without considering racial, ethnic, and multicultural factors. Unfortunately, a coherent, multicultural approach to boy's diversity did not exist that could have guided our programming initiatives. The Boy's Forum was created

for boys from an urban community and therefore race, class, and socioeconomic status were relevant variables to consider in our program planning. Culturally based factors in achievement motivation processes with our ethnic minority boys were relevant to our preparation (Butler-Barnes, Williams, & Chavous, 2012). Furthermore, we assumed that racial and ethnic identity served as important functions in predicting mental health and academic achievement outcomes (Seaton & Gilbert, 2011). Yet, the development of ethnic and racial consciousness has many levels, is complex, and relates to awareness of racial and ethnic discrimination (Quintana, 1998). Given these issues, our program development process included consideration on how race, class, and ethnicity might interact with the boys learning about gender roles (Carter, Williams, Juby, & Buckley, 2005). Specifically, we asked, "How do middle-school age Hispanic and African American boys define gender roles?" and, "How should these definitions be incorporated into the Boy's Forum?" To explore these questions, a pre-assessment was implemented before the Boy's Forum to guide our programming processes.

Empowering Boys Through Positive, Healthy, and Affirmative Masculinity

The fourth conceptual foundation of our intervention focused on positive aspects of being male. We assumed that some boys might be defensive about their gender roles and not ready to face the middle-school transition. We believed that masculine gender roles might be a sensitive topic and that negative resistance could develop. Therefore, we concluded that healthy aspects of masculinity could give our program a positive thrust by emphasizing boy's strengths and their capacity to empower themselves (O'Neil, 2008; O'Neil & Lujan, 2009).

Affirming, positive, and healthy masculinity are emerging concepts in the psychology of men (Hammer & Good, 2010; Kiselica, 2011; Kiselica & Englar-Carlson, 2010; Kiselica, Englar-Carlson, Horne, & Fisher, 2008; O'Neil & Lujan, 2008). Kiselica (2011) defines positive masculinity as emphasizing strengths and virtues over disease, weakness, and damage. Positive masculinity moves away from what is wrong with boys by identifying the qualities that empower them to improve themselves and society. Programming for boys can emphasize what constitutes "healthy masculinity" like telling the truth, taking responsibility, courage, altruism, resiliency, service, protection of others, social justice, positive fathering, perseverance, generativity, and non-violent problem solving. More importantly, programs on healthy masculinity change the common misperception that the psychology of men is about documenting problems with boys and men. Our program emphasized what constitutes "healthy masculinity" during this sometimes vulnerable transition from middle school to high school.

THE PRESENT STUDY

The four conceptual foundations provide a rationale for doing gender role programming for middle-school boys. The Boy's Forum was designed to empower 7th and 8th graders to understand their masculinity issues, psychosocial development, and gender role transitions. We employed a psycho-educational group format where the boys learned from older male role models who believed that students can empower themselves. Our evaluation included a pre-assessment, an evaluation at the end of the program, and a three-week follow-up fo-

cused on how the program affected their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. Using a non-experimental design, our program evaluation specifically assessed whether the Boy's Forum could impact boys immediately after the program and over a three-week period.

METHOD

Sample

Fifty-one boys, ages 13 and 14 participated in the two-day Boy's Forum in an urban school in the Northeast. There were 29 seventh graders and 22 eight graders. The boys were recommended to participate by their vice principal based on certain behaviors including, classroom behavior, poor attendance, poor grades, high disciplinary consequences, and rude behavior to females. The sample included 32 Hispanic, 11 participants of mixed ethnic background, 6 African American, 1 Caucasian; 1 did not identify race.

Pre-assessment of Boys' Attitudes

A pre-assessment of the boy's gender role attitudes was implemented to find out more about the boys' views on their emerging masculinity ideology. The pre-assessment had 14 items using a 5-point Likert scale of strongly agree to strongly disagree. Three questions assessed boy's knowledge about being a man. Twenty-six percent of the boys indicated that they knew all that they needed to be a man. Fifty percent of the boys were concerned about having the right qualities to grow to be a "good man." A high number (88%) of the boys reported that they felt confident about how to act as a boy. Only 28% indicated that boys should not cry, 22% agreed that showing emotions was not good and 26% agreed that being aggressive is what boys should do. Overall, the boys expressed a low level of restrictive masculinity ideology.

The boys reported information about their families and role models. Fifty-eight percent indicated that they had a male role model that they could share their concerns. A high percentage (78%) indicated that both mothers and fathers taught them how to treat women and adults. Seventy-two percent of the boys indicated that talking to and attracting women was usually on their mind. Regarding their personal appearance, 54% indicated that how they looked was on their minds. Only 8% compared their body type to other boys. Regarding school, 66% reported that their male issues did not affect their school performance but 56% reported concerns about transitions to high school.

Day 1: Description of the Boy's Forum Intervention

Boys Will Be Men: Growing Up Male in America documentary and discussion. Few examples of gender role programs for middle-school boys exist and even fewer exist for minority boys. Our approach was simple and straight forward. The two-day Boy's Forum encouraged the seventh and eighth grade boys to learn about the challenges of growing up male. The first day of the Boy's Forum lasted for 100 minutes. This session began with an introduction explaining the purpose of the Boy's Forum and what the boys could learn. As reported earlier, a 14-item pre-assessment questionnaire was filled out by each boy. Next,

information about growing up male in America was communicated through the film *Boys Will Be Men: Growing Up Male in America*, directed by Tom Weidlinger. The documentary focuses on the challenges, expectations, and contradictions boys face. In the first fourteen minutes, evidence is presented that there are perils growing up male in America from infancy to the teenage years. One of the central questions of the film is whether boys grow up in a “culture of cruelty.” The documentary draws from the work of many experts in the field of psychology of men, including Michael Thompson, co-author of *Raising Cain: Protecting the Emotional Life of Boys* and William Pollack, author of *Real Boys: Rescuing Our Sons from the Myths of Manhood*. In addition, the second part of the film shows constructive ways for boys to find themselves and develop a positive masculine self through an Outward Bound experience and the performing arts (i.e., poetry, storytelling, and self-expression). Overall, the film offers suggestions on how boys can successfully evolve into effective men.

After the documentary, the boys engaged in a question and answer session with several male teachers who discussed their adolescent experiences growing up and transitioning into high school. The programming approach was balanced by telling the truth about the problems of growing up male but also providing encouragement to work hard on self-empowerment and positive masculinity activities.

Day 2: Description of the Boy's Forum Intervention

Guest presentation and wrap up. The second day of the Boy's Forum lasted for about 50 minutes. The first author, a white university professor gave the presentation entitled, “Things That Adults Didn't Tell Me When I Was 13 but I Wished That They Had.” A power point/personal disclosure presentation built upon the earlier *Boys Will Be Men* film but focused on the guest presenter's recollection of his boyhood problems when he was 13. Empowerment was the central message of the entire presentation. Several psycho-educational techniques were used in this presentation including personal self-disclosure, showing personal and family pictures, personal vulnerability, and honesty. Using his own experiences, the guest presenter shared his struggles with authority figures and the strained relationship with his father.

The presenter disclosed four problems areas: a) being misunderstood by adults, b) struggling with math and reading, c) feeling sad and angry at his father, and d) having ongoing problems with authority figures. He also disclosed the following specific problems: a) finding learning to be difficult, b) being delayed in reading, c) having a limited vocabulary, d) expressing fears about failing, e) lacking confidence, f) having difficulties concentrating and staying focused, g) feeling at times indifferent to learning, h) believing that everybody was smarter than him, and i) feeling small, inferior, and inadequate. The guest presenter disclosed that he was placed in a slow learner group in 7th grade that made him angry, sad, and hurt. The critical message to the boys was that he fought back from these negative emotions and empowered himself by: a) taking more responsibility for his learning, b) increasing hope by believing that it could get better, c) trying harder and seeking help from counselors and teachers, and d) becoming more disciplined; meaning more ordered and focused on a plan and personal dream. The presenter's honest self-disclosure modeled and encouraged a process of positive vulnerability for the boys as they explored their own lives.

Following this, the presenter discussed empowerment themes. Various recommendations were made that emphasized positive aspect of masculinity and personal empowerment. Table 1 enumerates 13 empowerment themes and lessons for the boys discussed by the guest presenter. These themes were the “take home messages” to motivate students to face their gender role issues and solve their problems. The PowerPoint lecture covered the following empowerment themes: a) Everyone Has Problems, b) Growing and Learning How to Learn is Difficult, c) Education is Very Important, d) Feeling Bad Ourselves Can be Changed, e) How to Deal With Change and Transitions, f) Finding Role Models, Mentors, and Positive People, g) How to Deal With Emotions, h) Dealing With Anger, and i) How to Learn Problem Solving Skills. He also discussed the impact of two homeroom teachers who helped him mobilize his empowerment and potential.

At the end of the presentation, there was a brief question and answer session. Numerous male teachers spontaneously disclosed their own childhood trials and tribulations to a “wide eyed” group of young boys. Finally, the program coordinator did a final wrap up of the Boys Forum and the boys filled out a seven-item evaluation of the program. Three weeks later each student was sent a 25-item follow-up questionnaire assessing how the Boy’s Forum had affected their thinking, feelings, and behaviors.

Analysis of the Evaluation Data

Based on the lack of documented programs with boys, we chose an exploratory and non-experimental design that directly assessed whether the boys found the Boy’s Forum useful.

Table 1

Boy Empowerment Themes and Lessons To Be Learned Presented By the Guest Presenter

Empowerment Themes	Lessons to Be Learned
1 Telling the truth, being real, and disclosing is healthy.	It is good to be honest with myself, self-disclose, and accept who I am.
2 Everyone has problems in living.	Knowing this makes it easier to face my problems.
3 Growing up and learning is difficult for everyone.	Knowing this takes some of the pressure off me.
4 Taking personal responsibility is required.	It is my life and I have to direct it.
5 Education predicts personal and career success.	This puts school in a different light.
6 Feeling bad about self and life can be changed.	My negative emotions and moods can be turned into positives.
7 Change and transitions are inevitable and challenging.	I can learn to adapt and change.
8 Seeking help is critical to success and not a failure.	I can get help without feeling bad about it.
9 Dealing with human emotions is critical.	Emotions can positively guide my thoughts and behavior.
10 Anger can guide us.	Anger can have positive outcomes.
11 Trying harder may be necessary.	I need to motivate myself.
12 Learning problem solving skills is possible.	I need to learn these skills to solve my life problems.
13 Discipline is required to achieve goals.	I need to organize my life to deliver on my contributions to life.
14 Having hope is always an option.	I can believe that things will get better.

Two self-report questionnaires were created to assess the boys' immediate reaction to the program and their reactions three weeks later. The evaluation at the end of the Boy's Forum had seven items that used a five-point likert scale ranging from 1, strongly disagree to 5, and strongly agree. Percentage agreement for each item was calculated by adding the fours (agree) and the fives (strongly agree) together into a single percentage of agreement.

The follow up questionnaire assessed the boys' thoughts, feelings, and behaviors three weeks after the Boy's Forum. Twenty-five questions were prefaced by the following stem, "*Because of the Boy's Forum.*" Therefore, the responses to each item were directly related to the boy's self-report on how the Boy's Forum influenced them. All questions were answered using a Likert scale of strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). Percentage agreement for each item was calculated by adding the fours (agree) and the fives (strongly agree) together into a single percentage of agreement score. Fifteen items asked the boys about how the Boy's Forum affected their thinking processes over the three-week period. Five items assessed how the Boy's Forum affected their emotions and four items assessed their actual behavior over the three-week period.

There were unequal numbers of minority boys in the Boy's Forum. The lack of equal numbers of Hispanic, African American, and mixed-race boys prohibited doing any comparisons based on race. We did calculate grades differences by comparing the seventh and eighth graders reactions to the program immediately after the program and three weeks later. *T*-tests between the seventh and eighth graders responses to each item of the questionnaires were calculated to determine if grade level made any significant difference in terms of their reactions to the Boy's Forum.

RESULTS

Evaluation Immediately After the Boys' Forum

Immediate reactions to the two day Boy's Forum indicated that a majority of the boys evaluated the program positively and that the curriculum helped them. Over 60% of the boys indicated that because of the Boy Forum they: a) had a better sense of direction about being a boy, b) believed their feelings and worries about being a boy were normal, and c) had a better sense about being a boy. Additionally, over 60% of the boys indicated that a) the Forum helped them, and b) the guest speaker's presentation helped them with their feelings about growing up male. Eighty six percent of the boys reported that it was a good idea to talk about male topics. Finally, only 29% of the boys reported that they had a better understanding of the issues boys face today. This suggests that the Boy's Forum did not fully address all aspects of being a boy.

Evaluation Three Weeks After the Boy's Forum: Boy's Thinking, Feelings, and Behaviors

Thirty-two boys or 63% of the sample completed the three-week follow-up questionnaire that assessed thoughts, feelings, and behaviors because of the Boy's Forum. Table 2 shows the percentage of students who agreed to the statement for each follow-up question. A brief summary of the data is given below.

Table 2

Three-Week Follow-up: Thoughts, Feelings, and Behavior Agreement Percentages

Because of the Boy's Forum	% Agreement
Thought more about my problems as a boy	72
Thought more about myself	75
Thought about my family problems	63
Thought about the video "Boys Will be Men"	72
Thought more about my problems at school	78
Thought about how valuable education is to me	94
Thought about how useless education is	16
Thought more about my issues with authority	66
Thought more about guest presentation	81
Thought more about the guest presenter's personal disclosures about being	65
Thought about how to deal with my next transition (high school, into 8th grade)	91
Thought about how to deal with my anger	59
Thought about reaching out for some help with my problems	41
Thought about finding a role model or mentor	66
Thought about how to develop my problems solving	65
Had positive feelings about the Boy's Forum	84
Had negative feeling about the Boy's Forum	6
Felt better about myself	66
Felt worst about myself	9
Talked with my parents about being a boy and my problems	38
Talked with another student about being boy and my problems	38
Talked with a teacher/ or another adult about being a boy/my problems	25
Reached out for some help to someone with my problems	47
Wish the Boy Forum would continue in the future	72

The boys reported considerable thinking over the three-week period about the Boy's Forum. Because of the Boy's Forum, over 90% of the students a) thought about how to navigate the transition to eight grade or high school and b) thought about how valuable education is for them. Only 16% reported that education was useless to them. Over 80% of the boys thought about the guest presenter's presentations of his boyhood problems over the three-week period. Over 70% of the boys thought more about themselves, their problems as boys in school, and the film "Boys Will Be Men." Over 60% of the boys reported that they thought more about a) their family problems, authority issues with adults, how to develop problem solving skills. The same percentage of boys reported thinking about the guest presenter's personal disclosures and finding a role model or mentor over a three-week period. Finally, fifty-nine percent reported that they thought about how to deal with their anger and 41% thought about reaching out to someone for some help with their problems.

In terms of emotions over the three weeks, 84% had positive feelings toward the Boy's Forum. Sixty-six percent indicated feeling better about themselves because of the Boy's Forum but 9% of the boys felt worst. Over 70% of the boys wished the Boy's Forum would continue in the future. Four questions assessed actual behaviors because of the Boy's Forum. Forty-seven percent of the boys reached out for help from someone. Thirty-eight percent of the boys talked with their parents about their problems about being a boy and the same number discussed their problems with another student. Twenty-five percent of the boys talked with a teacher or another adult about their problems.

Grade Differences in Reaction to the Boy's Forum

Psychosocial theory suggests that not every boy matures at the same pace, therefore age and grade differences in response to the Boy's Forum could exist. Therefore, grade differences in reaction to the Boys Forum were assessed immediately after the program and three weeks later. There were no significance differences between the seventh and eighth graders on the 7 items assessing the boy's immediate reactions to the Boy's Forum. *T* tests on the 24-item follow-up questionnaire indicated that four questions showed significant differences with how the seventh and eighth graders reacted to the Boy's Forum over the three-week period. Eighth graders compared to seventh graders reported significantly more thought about a) the film "*Boys Will Be Men*," b) the presentation and disclosures of the final guest presenter, and c) their problems at school. All other *t* test comparisons were not significant.

DISCUSSION

The Boy's Forum positively affected the boys immediately after the program and over a three-week period. The evaluation immediately after the program indicated that almost two thirds of the boys reported the Boy's Forum helped them and over 85% reported talking about male topics was a good idea. The three-week follow-up indicated that eighty-four percent of boys reporting positive feelings toward the Boy's Forum and the 70% wanted it to continue.

These results indicate that gender role programming for urban adolescent boys can be successfully implemented. The results represent some of the first evidence demonstrating that boys can positively engage in masculinity issues at an early age. The three-week follow-up evaluation specifically assessed whether the program was cognitively internalized by the boys over time. The evaluation revealed that this brief program did stimulate thoughts about the boys' problems over a three-week period. Also, the data indicate that a single video with subsequent discussion can activate boy's thoughts about growing up male. Furthermore, all but 10% of the boys reported that because of the Boy's Forum, they had positive thoughts about education and actually reflected on the transition from eighth grade to high school. From these results, it appears that this program activated the boy's positive values about education and how to deal with change.

The program also stimulated in two thirds of the boys thoughts about authority issues, anger, problems-solving skills, and role model/mentors. A majority of the boys also reported thinking about the guest speaker's presentation and self-disclosures over the 3-week pe-

riod. These results indicate that when boyhood stories are told to middle-school boys by an adult, the disclosure can have cognitive impact over a three-week period. A limitation to this finding is not assessing exactly what kind of thinking occurred after the program. Future research should assess the nature of this thinking since this information could be vital in helping boys.

In the affective and behavioral domains, the Boy's Forum also had some positive effect. Because of the Boy's Forum, a majority of the boys reported feeling better about themselves. The unanswered question is why did this happen? Did the positive feelings occur because nearly 60% of the boys reported thinking about their anger over the three-week period? Speculating further, did this thinking about anger help them release some of it, providing space for good emotions? Anger awareness and management could be an important area for future programming. Lower but still significant percentages of boys actually reported actual behaviors because of the Boy's Forum. Almost half of the boys indicated that they reached out for some help with their problems. Almost forty percent disclosed they sought help from a parent or another student. These results suggest that a brief program like this can actually motivate students to seek help when they are encouraged to do so. Future programs should be developed that increase the percentage of boys who seek help with their problems. Negative attitudes toward seeking help in adult men have been consistently correlated with GRC (O'Neil, 2008). Therefore, boys need to learn at an early age that seeking help is strength not a masculine weakness.

Only a few differences were found between the seventh and eighth graders on their reactions to the Boy's Forum. Over a three-week period, eighth graders compared to seventh graders, reported significant more thought about their problems at school, the video, and the personal disclosures of the guest presenter. These differences suggest that future research should assess grade differences in terms of the efficacy of different treatments. Furthermore, future research should assess diversity variables to determine which treatment is more effective with different groups of boys with what expected outcomes.

More than half of the boys did not take action after the Boy's Forum ended. Another unanswered question is why these boys did not act on the information in the Boy's Forum. Could it be that the Boy's Forum was not powerful enough to motivate these boys? Could anger or other emotions like fear inhibited these boys from processing the information cognitively and taking action? Maybe more content was needed on positive masculinity to help these boys through their gender role transitions. Did psychosocial immaturity limit these students' ability to process the information and their emotions? Speculating further, maybe these boys had already internalized powerful stereotypes that a short program could not touch. If this is true, then maybe gender role programs for boys need to be offered in earlier grades before masculine stereotypes are fully embraced. Overall, the findings suggest that more powerful interventions may be needed to capture the minds of students and activate them behaviorally. Future research could assess which positive empowerment themes (See Table 1) can positively stimulate boy's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors.

These results should be considered in the context of its limitations. This evaluation research was exploratory in nature and not designed to prove experimental effects of our gender role curricula. The simple goal was to see if a gender role program for middle-school urban boys could be designed and positively received. An experimental design was not employed with this research and was considered premature. Future experimental studies are

recommended to understand what curriculum is most effective with different students based on race, ethnicity, age, grade, and cognitive levels.

Another limitation of the research was using self-report questionnaires that assessed the boys' thinking, feelings, and actual behaviors. As always, the use of self-report questionnaires can be affected by social desirability and subjective responses and therefore the positive results may be inflated. Moreover, the three-week follow-up questionnaire produced a lower than desired return rate. No attempt was made to find out why some students did not return their questionnaire after numerous tries. Future research should better manage return rates or determine the reasons why students do not provide follow-up data. Lastly, the follow-up period was quite short and did not allow us to know whether the program had long-term effects.

Even with these limitations, this study is one of the first to evaluate a program for middle-school urban boys related to growing up male. The results suggest that programming for boys can be implemented with positive outcomes. Evaluation data indicates that boys can positively engage this kind of programming and it can help them. We hope this research activates other professionals to become involved in preventive programming for boys and young men in public and private schools and in our college and university settings as well. These results are encouraging that short term, inexpensive, and simple interventions can make a difference and empower boys.

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