The Impact of Middle School Girls’ Support Group on Self-Esteem

Amanda Geiger

University of San Francisco – School Counseling Program

**Research Question**

This research proposal will focus on testing the effectiveness of a support group for 8th grade female students, specifically how it will impact self-esteem. The support group will be created by school counseling interns in San Jose, California and will run for a total of 8 weeks taking place one day a week after school. This research will answer the question: will the students participating in the support group show improved self esteem? Furthermore, it will seek to determine whether the group, overall, is effective in promoting positive strategies that lead to increased self-esteem in the participants.

**Rationale**

Self-esteem is defined as how one feels about themselves, how they judge their worth and it often impacts an individual throughout their entire life. Therefore, self-esteem should be considered, “a key construct of personality, [which] influences thoughts, actions, and feelings” (Lai et al., 2009). Having a healthy self-esteem can be the difference between success and failure. It can affect an individual’s thinking, confidence, self image, and happiness (Patera, n.d.). In order to face a challenge in one’s life they must believe that they can overcome it, in other words, they must have the confidence. Confidence in one’s abilities comes from having a positive or high self-esteem. Specifically, adolescents are often categorized as having problems related to their self-esteem and self-efficacy. Many teenagers (44% of girls and 15% of boys) have what is considered to be a “Thinking disorder” caused by low self-esteem (DoSomething.org, n.d.). It is defined as a, “disorder in which an individual views him/herself as inadequate, unlovable, and/or incompetent (DoSomething.org, n.d.). Once this occurs the negative thought pattern continues and produces “faulty assumptions” and often self-deprecating behavior. For example, The National Association for Self-Esteem has linked low self-esteem with the following behaviors: poor academic performance, dropping out of school, criminal behavior, alcohol and drug abuse, self-injury and, disordered eating (LaTour, n.d.). Additionally, 70% of adolescent girls ages 15-17 avoid normal activities (such as attending school) when they have low self-worth or feel bad about their appearance (DoSomething.org, n.d.). If there is a way to combat these negative thinking patterns that are associated with low self-esteem it could really impact and change the lives of the youth school counselor’s serve.

If the intervention in question is effective in increasing the overall self-esteem of the participants it will be proven to be a valuable use of resources for the school district. School counselors may be able to use the data to justify their participation in interventions such as this support group, in order to provide a better quality of care for their students who may be struggling with their self-esteem. Due to personal experience as a female who has suffered from low self-esteem, I am aware of the challenges it presents for youth. As school counselors, we often come across many situations where our students would benefit from a support group in order to improve relationships and build stronger connections. Specifically, girls are often finding themselves in the administrator’s or counselor’s office for engaging in fights or having disagreements with other girls on campus. An increased sense of community and a more positive self-esteem could lead to a more welcoming school climate for students and staff.

**Bias/Assumptions/Hypothesis**

Overall, I am aware of the bias I have just being a woman and working with girls who may have similar issues to the one’s that I have faced in my life. During the process, it will be a challenge to avoid transference due to my passion for the topic and my invested interest in the outcome of the research. I will work on keeping myself present and focus on obtaining accurate results even if they are not what I expect. Additionally, the participants are going to be from diverse cultural/ethnic backgrounds that may be different from my own. Therefore, precautions must be taken to ensure a multicultural perspective is taken within the group to address various concerns that may arise. My assumptions are that the participants will enjoy the group and will be impacted positively from the experience. This may not be the case for every participant depending on their personal preferences. Ultimately, I hypothesize that the participants’ self-esteem will improve after participating in the intervention and this will positively impact their school experience.

**Literature Review**

 Girls who may be struggling with their self-esteem in middle school are likely to be facing difficult life events that may also affect their academic and social life. Mann, Smith, and Kristjansson (2015) sought to determine the impact of the *REAL* *Girls* program on middle school girls who were struggling with their academic self-efficacy, school connectedness, and identity development. The *REAL Girls* program is designed to help girls build resilience that would lead to greater likelihood of success in school and life (Mann et al., 2015). This study used a mixed methods approach and a crossover design where 48 girls, age 12-14, were identified by researchers. The girls were chosen based on academic failure, school behavior problems, or truancy. The girls participated in a 3-day intervention and during that time, the program was implemented using the *12 Program Strategies for Promoting Resilience in Middle School Girls* (Mann et al., 2015).

The quantitative data was collected used a “quasi-experiment” where they compared the impact of the intervention related to the constructs of self-efficacy, school connectedness, and identity. Additionally, qualitative data was collected in two focus groups which collected perception data, both groups were one hour long and consisted of 10 girls. Results showed that the *REAL Girls* program impacted participants by increasing their academic self-efficacy, school connectedness, and identity (Mann et al., 2015). This study shows that offering a program that is focused on self-efficacy improvement and resilience building is likely of positively increasing self-esteem in participants. This intervention proved to be effective but it would be very beneficial to be replicated in another setting in order to add more data to this growing field of study.

Additionally, Steese et al. (2006) conducted a study to evaluate the effectiveness of the Girls’ Circle support group created for adolescent girls developed by Beth Hossfeld and Giovanna Taormina. The Girls’ Circle sought to, “address the needs of girls by focusing on increasing connections, building empathic skills, and developing resiliency” (Steese et al., 2006). Specifically, the study focused on evaluating whether the ten-week long support group improved social support, body image, locus of control, self-efficacy, and self-esteem. Participants consisted of sixty-three girls (age 10-17) who were recruited to participate in the support group in nine different groups across the United States and Canada (Steese et al., 2006). Researchers used a pre and post test design using various surveys to assess participants in the areas previously mentioned. Results indicated that there was a significant increase in social support, body image, and self-efficacy after participating in the program. Results were not significant for self-esteem and locus of control. This study showed that more research needs to be done to determine the effect of support groups on self-esteem for adolescent girls. There was some variation in scores in regards to self-esteem and overall the scores did increase after the intervention. However, it is a very complex construct that may be affected by many variables in the environment.

The scale that will be used to measure the self-esteem ratings of participants is taken from the study completed by Heatherton and Polivy (1991). The study was designed to develop and validate The State Self-Esteem Scale (SSES) which includes 20 questions that seek to measure a participant’s self-esteem. SSES focuses on 3 components: performance self-esteem, social self-esteem, and appearance self-esteem; using a Likert scale 1=not at all to 5= extremely (Heatherton & Polivy, 1991). The scale, specifically, is intended to be “sensitive to manipulations designed to temporarily alter self-esteem” (Heatherton & Polivy, 1991). Researchers completed five separate studies that sought to determine the validity of SESS, results showed that the scale was indeed sensitive to manipulations. Overall, researchers determined that the scale was applicable for use in various settings including laboratory, classroom, and clinical (Heatherton & Polivy, 1991).

**Research Question/Hypothesis**

In conclusion, the research being conducted will seek to answer the question: will the students participating in the girls group have increased self-esteem? I hypothesize that after administering post-tests and interviews the girls’ self-esteem ratings will be higher than their initial scores.

**Methods**

**Sample**

 The sample will consist of 8th grade girls (ages 12-14) from a local middle school in San Jose, California. The group will consist of 7-10 students that will be selected by the counseling team, administration, and teachers. Participation in the group is not mandatory and is only allowed after consent from a parent or guardian.

**Procedures**

The support group is designed to increase the overall self-esteem of the participants as well as touch on issues related to body image, media pressures, conflict resolution, bullying, and social-emotional learning. Additionally, the curriculum will last 8 weeks and will include narrative, expressive art, and mindfulness therapies. At the first meeting, participants will fill out the pretest State Self-Esteem Scale (SSES) a 20-item questionnaire in order to determine their baseline self-esteem rating. The group will continue to meet once a week and at the finally meeting (week 8) the participants will be given the SSES again as a posttest. The pre and post test data will be collected and used as the quantitative data in the study. Secondly, in order to collect qualitative data, the participants will take part in individual interviews after participating in the group. The interviews will consist of 9 questions relating to their experiences in the group, their personal thoughts and suggestions for improvement.

**Examples of Survey/Interview**

**STATE SELF-ESTEEM SCALE (Heatherton & Polivy, 1991).**

This is a questionnaire designed to measure what you are thinking at this moment. There is of

course, no right answer for any statement. The best answer is what you feel is true of yourself at

the moment. Be sure to answer all of the items, even if you are not certain of the best answer.

Again, answer these questions as they are true for you RIGHT NOW.

1. I feel confident about my abilities.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 1 Not at all  | 2 A Little Bit  | 3 Somewhat  | 4 Very Much  | 5 Extremely  |

1. I am worried about whether I am regarded as a success or failure.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 1 Not at all  | 2 A Little Bit  | 3 Somewhat  | 4 Very Much  | 5 Extremely  |

1. I feel satisfied with the way my body looks right now.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 1 Not at all  | 2 A Little Bit  | 3 Somewhat  | 4 Very Much  | 5 Extremely  |

1. I feel frustrated or rattled about my performance.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 1 Not at all  | 2 A Little Bit  | 3 Somewhat  | 4 Very Much  | 5 Extremely  |

1. I feel that I am having trouble understanding things that I read

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 1 Not at all  | 2 A Little Bit  | 3 Somewhat  | 4 Very Much  | 5 Extremely  |

1. I feel that other respect and admire me.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 1 Not at all  | 2 A Little Bit  | 3 Somewhat  | 4 Very Much  | 5 Extremely  |

1. I am dissatisfied with my weight.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 1 Not at all  | 2 A Little Bit  | 3 Somewhat  | 4 Very Much  | 5 Extremely  |

1. I feel self-conscious.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 1 Not at all  | 2 A Little Bit  | 3 Somewhat  | 4 Very Much  | 5 Extremely  |

1. I feel as smart as others.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 1 Not at all  | 2 A Little Bit  | 3 Somewhat  | 4 Very Much  | 5 Extremely  |

1. I feel displeased with myself.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 1 Not at all  | 2 A Little Bit  | 3 Somewhat  | 4 Very Much  | 5 Extremely  |

1. I feel good about myself

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 1 Not at all  | 2 A Little Bit  | 3 Somewhat  | 4 Very Much  | 5 Extremely  |

1. I am pleased with my appearance right now.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 1 Not at all  | 2 A Little Bit  | 3 Somewhat  | 4 Very Much  | 5 Extremely  |

1. I am worried about what other people think of me.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 1 Not at all  | 2 A Little Bit  | 3 Somewhat  | 4 Very Much  | 5 Extremely  |

1. I feel confident that I understand things.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 1 Not at all  | 2 A Little Bit  | 3 Somewhat  | 4 Very Much  | 5 Extremely  |

1. I feel inferior to others at this moment.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 1 Not at all  | 2 A Little Bit  | 3 Somewhat  | 4 Very Much  | 5 Extremely  |

1. I feel unattractive.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 1 Not at all  | 2 A Little Bit  | 3 Somewhat  | 4 Very Much  | 5 Extremely  |

1. I feel concerned about the impression I am making.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 1 Not at all  | 2 A Little Bit  | 3 Somewhat  | 4 Very Much  | 5 Extremely  |

1. I feel that I have less academic ability right now than others.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 1 Not at all  | 2 A Little Bit  | 3 Somewhat  | 4 Very Much  | 5 Extremely  |

1. I feel like I’m not doing well

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 1 Not at all  | 2 A Little Bit  | 3 Somewhat  | 4 Very Much  | 5 Extremely  |

1. I am worried about looking foolish

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 1 Not at all  | 2 A Little Bit  | 3 Somewhat  | 4 Very Much  | 5 Extremely  |

Scoring:

Items 2, 4, 5, 7, 8, 10, 13, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20 are reverse-scored.

Sum scores from all items and keep scale as a continuous measure of state self esteem.

The subcomponents are scored as follows:

Performance Self-esteem items: 1, 4, 5, 9, 14, 18, 19.

Social Self-esteem items: 2, 8, 10, 13, 15, 17, 20.

Appearance Self-esteem items: 3, 6, 7, 11, 12, 16.

**Post- Intervention Interview Questions**

1. Did you enjoy participating in this group? Why/why not?
2. What was your favorite activity/day of the group?
3. What part(s) of the group were the most challenging for you (if any)?
4. What were your expectations for this group? Were they met?
5. What do you think was the purpose of this group?
6. How has this group impacted your school life?
7. Would you recommend this group to other students?
8. What can the group facilitators do better or improve upon?
9. Would you participate in a group like this again?

References

DoSomething.org. (n.d.). 11 facts about teens and self-esteem. Retrieved from https://www.dosomething.org/us/facts/11-facts-about-teens-and-self-esteem

Heatherton, T. F. & Polivy, J. (1991). Development and validation of a scale for measuring state self-esteem. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 60, 895-910.

LaTour, A. (n.d.). 8 common causes of low self-esteem. Retrieved from http://www.goodchoicesgoodlife.org/choices-for-young-people/boosting-self-esteem/

Mann, M. J., Smith, M. L., & Kristjansson, A. L. (2014). Improving academic self-efficacy, school connectedness, and identity in struggling middle school girls. *Health Education & Behavior*, *42*(1), 117-126. doi:10.1177/1090198114543005

Perera, K. (n.d.). The importance of self esteem and self worth. Retrieved from http://www.more-selfesteem.com/importance.htm

Steese, S., Dolette, M., Phillips, W., Hossfeld, E., Matthews, G., & Taormina, G. (2006). Understanding girls' circle as an intervention on perceived social support, body image, self-efficacy, locus of control, and self-esteem. *Adolescence*, *41161*, 55-74.