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# Using Group Counseling to Implement a Career Development Program with High School Students

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Running head: GROUP CAREER COUNSELING

Using Group Counseling to Implement a Career Development Program

With High School Students

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### Abstract

Discusses the importance of implementing career development groups at the high school level. A study was conducted to determine if group career counseling is beneficial to students' growth in their career development. The methods used in this study were described, including the setting, participants, procedure, and evaluations. The findings were detailed along with a discussion about the implications of the results. Included in the literature review was the rationale for having career development in high school, as well as the educational system and counselor's role pertaining to career development. Using group work as a counseling technique was described, along with its effectiveness when working with adolescents. Finally, the advantages of combining group counseling with career development were introduced and explored.

## Using Group Counseling to Implement a Career Development Program

### With High School Students

#### Introduction

With the amount of career options for people to explore today, career development has become an increasingly popular tool for individuals to learn more about their career interests and possibilities. Career development is especially helpful when working with adolescents. The high school years are an important time for adolescents because of the transitions they will be facing and their decisions regarding further education and career (Maduakolam, 1999; Gullekson, 1995). High school counselors play an essential part in providing students with information about their future options (Gibson & Mitchell, 1995; Bloch, 1996; Barker, 2000). Unfortunately, counselors in a school setting usually carry a large caseload of students and may not have a large amount of time to devote to career development (Gullekson).

Gullekson (1995) found that when career planning activities were implemented, counselors would hold one-time seminars to a large group of students in order to provide information in a timely manner. Within these large group seminars, the school may provide information on post-secondary education and careers, but not necessarily help the students learn about their interests and values regarding careers. Career exploration can be helpful when counselors meet on an individual basis with students, however this is not always realistic with the amount of students counselors may have on their caseload.

One way to reach a number of students on a more individual basis is with small groups. Career counseling in small groups would provide the counselors the opportunity to meet with more students at once as well as providing individualized information.

Using groups would allow the students to explore their own self, hear others' fears and desires, and gain knowledge about the working world.

The goal of this study was to develop and implement a career development program by using small groups. The research describes the advantages of group counseling combined with career counseling in a high school setting.

### Review of Literature

The beginning of the literature discussed the importance of career development. This topic includes the meaning of work and the need for career development with all ages and specifically, adolescence. The next part explored was the educational system and career development. The failure of schools to address career concerns, the school counselors' role, and the educational systems' role towards career development was included. Career counseling in schools was addressed next, which included a definition and explored the implementation of career development programs. The final part of the literature discussed school counseling in a group setting. This addressed the advantages of group counseling and the reasoning for combining career development with group counseling.

### *Importance of Career Development*

In today's society, work and career are more than a means to earning a living. Career concerns occur throughout one's lifetime and their career choice can be one of the most important aspects affecting an individual's personal happiness (Sears, 1982). Career counseling has long been considered a significant area of the counseling profession (Blustein, 1992). In a society with increasing technology, a volatile global economy, and school-to-work programs, career counseling is necessary more today than ever (Blustein).

For most people, career development is a lifelong process that begins at an early age. Adolescence is a transitional period often marked by important decisions relating to their future. Determining what to do with one's life remains an important developmental task for graduating students (Maduakolam, 1999). To help students in making career decisions, school counselors have to locate the difficulties adolescents face and provide them with guidance on how to overcome, or at least minimize, these difficulties (Gati & Saka, 2001).

*Significance of work.* Work has been as part of society since human beings gathered together in communities. Their desire to thrive and survive led to a kind of "division of labor" where individuals with certain talents and skills became recognized for the work which they did. As this was studied more, it gradually became clear to many that people's occupations or work actually served four distinct functions (Morse & Weiss, 1955; Steers & Porter, 1979; Sverko & Vizek-Vidovic, 1995). First, labor serves an economic function, providing the individual with some financial return for his efforts in order to better his/her state in life. Second, it was found that work has a social function which allows people to interact with one another. A third function is that of giving the individual social status in the community: one's position in society is often a reflection of what he/she does for a living. Finally, work can have a psychological function, providing the individual with an "identity" and a source of self-esteem. While these four functions serve an important role regarding individual's work, the term "work" has evolved to incorporate much more meaning.

*The need for career development.* The concept of career and career development has been undergoing changes and has been defined in various ways throughout the

literature. Instead of being defined as a job or work, career is increasingly being defined as the combinations and sequences of life roles, the settings in which life roles unfold, and the planned and unplanned events that occur in people's lives (McDaniels & Gysbers, 1992). Sharf (1997) defined career as "how individuals see themselves in relation to what they do" (p. 3); while Sears (1982) defines it as "the individual's work and leisure that take place over her or his life span" (p. 138). Williamson (1975) believed that for most people their career is a basic way of establishing one's identity. This can be observed at most social functions where, commonly, the first question after an introduction is often, "What do you do?" There are many reasons why social status has long been associated with one's career. One's occupation generally determines where and how he/she lives and the community organizations in which one participates. Work provides the person, and often the family, with self-satisfaction, esteem, recognition, affiliation, and similar psychological and sociological products necessary for participation in society (Isaacson & Brown, 1993).

Krumboltz (1993) viewed career decision as being crucial to human happiness. A career affects the way someone spends most of the day. It can affect the kind of people with whom one socializes; it can determine vacation plans, family plans, and retirement possibilities. Career decisions can profoundly affect the way one lives; yet ironically people are not eager to spend time planning for their career, and often avoid it until the last moment (Krumboltz). Starting the career exploration process during adolescence is an essential part of their development. As youth strive to find places for themselves in the world of work, they are not only faced with considering what kind of job they will hold,

but also the kind of work environment which will provide them personal satisfaction and growth (Maduakolam, 1999).

*Rational for career development during adolescence.* People typically make their first career-related decisions during adolescence. Such decisions may have lifelong consequences for the individual's future, personally and professionally (Mann, Harmoni, & Power, 1989). At the end of one's high school career, an individual is expected to assume the responsibility for deciding the direction of their future personal and professional life. There is a need for serious planning and making important decisions as well as assessing values and determining interests (Campbell, Walz, Miller, & Kriger, 1973). These authors believed that with the immediacy of needs, multiple career and educational options, and the pressures put on an individual during high school, planning can result in productive and meaningful decisions or can lead to confusion, stress, and thoughtless decisions.

Barton (2002) found that many students, both high school graduates and dropouts, are deficient in career planning skills as they enter the work force or transition to post-secondary education. Many adolescents face difficulties before or during the actual process of their career development. Gati and Saka (2001) found that lack of information added to the difficulties in the career development process. This lack of information included; lack of knowledge about the steps involved in the process, lack of information about self, lack of information about alternatives, and lack of knowledge on how to obtain or research additional information. Gati and Saka believed these difficulties may lead adolescents to attempt to transfer the responsibility for making decisions to someone else, delay, or even avoid the decision all together. Taveira, Silva, Rodriguez, and Maia

(1998) found that adolescents reported fairly high levels of stress associated with career exploration and career decision making activities.

The development of the self-concept is a continuing, lifelong process that begins in adolescence (Isaacson & Brown, 1993). This is a time when adolescents are beginning to explore not only their personal self-concept but also their vocational self-concept, which refers to how their personal qualities relate to their role as a worker (Manuele-Adkins, 1992). Holland (1985) related vocational self-concept to one's vocational identity, which is the possession of a clear and stable pattern of one's goals, interests, and talents. Super, Starishevsky, Matin, and Jordaan (1963) believed working with discrepancies clients experience between their self-concepts is central to career counseling. These discrepancies may be between their ideal self-concept (how they think they should be), their perceived self-concepts (how they view themselves), and their actual self-concepts (how others view them) (Super et al.). One of the major tasks of a career counselor is to help clients articulate and develop their vocational self-concepts and identities (Manuele-Adkins). Commonly, adolescents have not yet explored their self-concepts or identities, which can lead to incongruent perceptions of themselves and the working world.

During the high school years many students will gain their first experience in the working world. Many of these jobs will be entry-level or service jobs which will provide valuable work experience that can be used when exploring career options (Isaacson & Brown, 1993). According to Maduakolam (2000), learning how to gather, understand, and apply information about self and the world of work is an important skill and basic to making informed career decisions, and therefore needs to be taught to students. Whether

programs involve decision making regarding choosing a college, continuing technical education, or transition to work, school counselors can provide valuable information, counseling, and educational placement services to high school students (Gibson & Mitchell, 1995).

### *The Educational System and Career Development*

*Failure of schools to address career concerns.* There have been many studies which have examined how well our educational system is preparing students for life after high school. Many of the studies indicate that the students are not prepared, as was noted by Gullekson (1995): “At no other time in history has there been more widespread concern over employment and education in our country” (p. 35). Many students know little about their career options, their talents and values, what it is like to work, and what preparation is needed for careers or higher education (Visher, Bhandari, & Medrich, 2004).

Career counseling in high schools has had a limited effect for some time, which has been reflected in student, parental and business satisfaction surveys (Gullekson, 1995). Kobylarz (1998) agreed that education has failed to keep up with the types of knowledge and skill requirements needed in the working world. One study found that 33% of the high school graduate’s who had been out of school for two years felt that job search and career focus should have been the primary focus of their high school education (Krahn & Lowe, 1991). O’Shea and Harrington (2003) added that over the past 30 years the most common complaint about school counseling services has been a lack of education and guidance in the career decision making process. Noeth, Engen, and Prediger (1984) used a group of 1,200 college-bound high school juniors and asked them

to rank who was helpful to them with their career decision making process. It was reported that in terms of providing the students with career development, counselors received the lowest ranking. These studies suggest that the career development process requires more attention in the school systems.

Public schools have long struggled with the demands between their academic and vocational missions (Visher, Bhandari, & Medrich, 2004). However, policy makers and school staff have started to realize that the goals of these missions are not mutually exclusive and can also be complementary. Visher, Bhandari, and Medrich believed that all students can benefit from more knowledge about career options and the skills and training required for different vocations, just as all can benefit from demanding academics. Although overwhelmed school counselors carrying a caseload of up to 350 students may feel as though they can only do so much, however they play a significant role in their students' career development.

*The school counselor's role towards career development.* Providing students with the information and guidance necessary to make well-informed career decisions is one of the main responsibilities of the school counselor (Bloch, 1996; Barker, 2000). Gullekson (1995) also stated that helping students to develop an awareness of themselves by exploring values, beliefs, and interests combined with the exploration process and how to research the job market is crucial to their future decisions. Barker believed that the success students have in career development is directly related to accurately assessing their skills, abilities, and interests, then relating these to the needs of the workplace. However, Barker found that counselors tended to overlook the need to implement career development process.

Barker (2000) asserted that it was common for school counselors to perceive career planning to be less important or less pressing than other responsibilities such as, class scheduling, academics, or crisis counseling. According to Gullekson, (1995) this lack of effectiveness in the area of career exploration should come as no surprise to anyone who has witnessed a high school counselor at work, where the ratio is often one counselor to about 500 students. He noted that they have “such loaded job descriptions” that they can give neither adequate attention nor time to their students' career planning needs. When counselors did address career development, Gullekson believed the concept of career education was generally misunderstood. He found that career planning activities, if implemented, were few and often treated as isolated events.

*The educational system's role towards career development.* As school reform efforts evolved, the American School Counseling Association (ASCA) set about revising their philosophy regarding school counseling programs (Dahir, 2001). According to Dahir, ASCA was concerned that in this era of increased educational accountability, school counselors should have a key role in preparing students to meet the increasingly complex societal demands that require significant knowledge and skills to succeed. As a result of the revisions, one part of the new school counseling definition states that school counseling programs should promote success by focusing on academic achievement, prevention and intervention activities, advocacy, and social-emotional and career development (Dahir; ASCA, 1984). In addition, ASCA's policy statement explains that career guidance is one of the counselor's most important contributions to a student's lifelong development (ASCA).

To achieve these goals, the National Standards for School Counseling Programs were developed to help school counselors focus on student development in three areas, with career development being one of the three national standards (Campbell & Dahir, 1997). Within the career development standard, there are three more specific standards that apply. Dahir (2001) detailed these and explained that the first standard states students will acquire the skills to investigate the world of work with relation to their knowledge of self. Second, students will utilize strategies to achieve future career success and satisfaction. The third standard states that students will understand the relationship between personal qualities, education, and the world of work (Dahir). These standards for career development can guide counselors as they implement school counseling program strategies and activities to help students acquire the attitude, knowledge, and skills needed to transition from school to post-secondary education and/or the world of work.

#### *Career Counseling in Schools*

*Definition.* Career counseling was defined as a one-to-one or small group relationship between a client and a counselor with the goal of helping the client integrate and apply an understanding of self and the environment to make the most appropriate career decisions and adjustments (Isaacson & Brown, 1993). They also defined career development as the “total constellation of psychological, sociological, educational, physical, economic, and chance factors that combine to shape the career of any given individual over the life span” (p. 13). Crites (1981) also noted the importance of facilitating career development as well as personal development during career counseling.

*Implementing career development programs.* “Studies show that whether they take the form of classes, workshops, individual counseling, psycho-educational groups, seminars, or an intentionally structured counseling group, career interventions make a difference in participants career decidedness and career maturity” (Dagley, 1999, p. 141). Visher, Bhandari, and Medrich (2004) conducted a study that provided evidence for the advantages of career exploration programs. First they found that students who participate in career exploration programs were more likely to take college entrance exams compared to the non-participants. Their findings showed that students who had participated in at least one career exploration program were slightly more likely than non-participants to take the SAT or ACT tests. Secondly, they found that participants were more likely to graduate from high school. Among the students scheduled to graduate in their study, a significantly larger percentage of those who had participated in at least one career exploration program completed high school than of those who had not participated. Lastly, they found that career exploration participants were more likely to go to college with a significant amount attending two-year schools rather than a four-year institution. Their findings showed that career exploration programs helped push students who otherwise might not have gone to college to enroll, with most enrolling in a two-year college rather than a four-year. Career exploration programs can play an important supporting role in raising academic achievement as well as a strategy for keeping students in school and preparing them for further study or training (Visher, Bhandari, & Medrich).

Campbell et al. (1973) discussed four goals of career development at the high school level. Supplying students with information which will inform them of the various

options available to them after graduation is the first goal. The next goal is to train students to be able to locate and use this information on their own. Their third goal is to educate students on how to interpret and evaluate educational or occupational information. Finally, the last goal is to assist the students in discovering their interests, needs, abilities, values and how they relate to their future decisions.

Career development programs are commonly presented to a large group of students in a classroom or seminar setting. With time being an issue, often counselors will organize a presentation on college and career information and present it in an auditorium type setting. In order to not disrupt the students' schedules, counselors will also go into classes and use the teachers' time to present the information (Greenberg, 2003).

Even though a school may provide career information in a class situation, it should not disregard out-of-class group activities led by the counselor (Isaacson & Brown, 1993). Class activities usually focus on general topics and needs of the students. Isaacson & Brown believed that for those whose needs are different from the majority, these special needs can be met more adequately by out-of-class groups. Greenberg (2003) also believed there were significant differences between classroom guidance and group counseling.

When working with a large group of students, the counselor acts more as an educator and presenter. This does not allow for any personalized attention towards the students. Another disadvantage of large groups is that not all students participate in the discussion (Greenberg, 2003). In addition, given the ratio of students to counselors, career counseling in schools may only consist of one session. A result of this limitation is

that counselors may limit their strategies to testing, exploratory activities, and exposure to resource materials with little time to attend to the psychological aspects of career indecision and development (Manuele-Adkins, 1992).

### *School Counseling in a Group Setting*

In order to meet the many challenges of their profession, school counselors must be able to select from a variety of approaches and strategies to maintain a comprehensive counseling program (Greenberg, 2003). One of the many strategies to deliver comprehensive programs to students is with group counseling. Greenberg has found this technique to be effective when working with adolescents. Myrick (1993) believed that using group counseling with high school students is an excellent service that counselors can provide. Although group counseling is cited as an effective intervention with high school students, Ripley and Goodnough (2001) found that many counselors struggle to effectively plan and implement ongoing group counseling services.

*Advantages of group counseling.* Children usually grow up being exposed to socializing in group settings. Group's help children form common bonds, encourage peer interaction, provide them with a sense of belonging, and encourage them to share experiences (Greenberg, 2003). Gladding (1991) cited many advantages of using the group approach with adolescents. He viewed groups as a "natural" environment for adolescents to learn. Not only are adolescents given a sense of belonging, they are also given an opportunity to learn through direct interaction or observation. Lastly, he believed groups provide multiple feed back that can help students' growth and development. Aronson (2004) viewed groups to be a safe place for adolescents by having the mentality that "there is safety in numbers" and "we are all going through this

together.” Therefore, the natural predisposition for group relationships makes group counseling a practical and sensible technique to use when working with this age group.

Prochl (1995) stated some advantages of group counseling. He believed that counseling in a group setting benefits members through the distribution of information pertinent to the problem; provides emotional relief; promotes increased awareness of and enhancement of important social skills; and develops recognition that there is hope for the future. Campbell, et al. (1973) also believed there were significant advantages of group counseling: (a) group work allows the counselor to reach a number of students at once, (b) group counseling is less threatening to students because they are among their peers, (c) group work utilizes the social setting and peer identification, (d) the counselor acts as a role model, and (e) group work often encourages students to seek individual assistance.

*The importance of combining career development with group counseling.* The goal of a career guidance program is to provide students with the tools to integrate awareness about themselves, potential careers, and post-secondary education into informed decisions about their future (Henderson, 1999). Career counseling theorists are starting to abandon their preoccupation with helping individuals make a single career decision, as though it will be made once in a lifetime (McDaniels & Gysbers, 1992). In contrast, they viewed the current trend in career counseling as moving towards the “general and transferable” rather than the “specific and situational.” Therefore, career interventions need to be comprehensive and flexible to meet a wide range of changing career developmental needs, especially when working with adolescents.

Career counseling in groups provides students the opportunity to explore personal issues related to career development, to reflect upon and personalize information they have received, and to apply their findings to their education and career plans (Kobylarz, 1998). The recognition that their peers face similar problems and uncertainties may help student's obtain a different perspective on their own concerns, and may encourage more independence and initiative on their part in seeking information which ultimately can lead to more success in for their decision making (Isaacson & Brown, 1993).

Many scholars have long supported the importance of career counseling using small groups. One of the core characteristics of a small group is that there is a shared group identity; reflected by an informal interaction, interpersonal relationships, and a discussion directed towards achievement of an identifiable goal (Dagley, 1999). Pyle (1986) argued that group career counseling provides a number of specific advantages including cost and time effectiveness, increased opportunities for personalized feedback, augmentation of career counseling outcomes, decreased sense of isolation, promotion of affective and cognitive learning experiences, and increased member self-exploration.

Symes (1998) found that career group counseling provide individuals with the opportunity to learn information about themselves and acquire knowledge and skills about the occupational decision making process. In addition, he determined that the group members learned skills which will help them cope with other transitions and decisions regarding career throughout their lives. Finally he believed that the group career counseling affected the members outside of their career life and were able to apply the experience to other aspects of their life.

Drum (1990) asserted that career groups should be structured thematically. The group goals should be directed towards a predetermined developmental theme; they should be time specific, as opposed to ongoing; they should have a set enrollment, due to the goal progression; finally, they should cover a range of material that is on a level common to all the members. He also expressed the importance of having a structure that supports the achievement of both group process and content goals in order to produce the highest use of facilitative structure.

Structured groups provide for the acquisition of both knowledge and skills while allowing for the sharing of information and the practice of new behaviors in a supportive environment (Baruth & Robinson, 1987). Drum and Knott (1977) defined a structured group as a learning situation with a predetermined goal, as well as having a plan designed to enable each group member to reach this goal with the ability to transfer the new learning to a wide range of life events. McDaniels and Gysbers (1992) agreed with the above authors and stated that structured groups are ideal for the use of career information in counseling for career development.

Drum and Lawler (1988) developed a conceptual model that describes four therapeutic factors necessary for successful leadership of theme groups, such as a career group. The first factor is “creating a therapeutic environment” for the group members. This involves building trust, role clarification, and providing encouragement. With this accomplished, Drum and Lawler believed that cohesion, respect, genuineness, and disclosure will emerge. The second factor is “management of the interpersonal group process,” which includes self-disclosure, feedback, resistance, and managing members. The third factor focuses on the “intrapersonal aspects” of the group. This involves

providing information, assessing the problem, and directing intrapersonal discovery in an attempt to facilitate change. Drum and Lawler's fourth factor "structuring procedures," involves developing activities, processing meaning, pacing the group, and focusing attention when needed. These authors believed the challenge of structured groups is to apply the proper amount of facilitative structure in order to accomplish the group's goals.

### *Conclusion*

Students at the high school level would benefit from an opportunity to explore career options and explore their own values, interests, and abilities regarding careers. Research indicates that school counselors have many responsibilities and therefore may not have time to address career development programs on an individualized basis. Often school counselors will provide information regarding career and college exploration to a large group of students once during high school. The research also indicates that counseling adolescents in a group setting is an effective technique to use when implementing a career development program. Therefore, when working with high school students, small career development groups will allow counselors the ability to access more students at one time and most importantly, provide a more useful and effective program.

A study was conducted to determine the benefits of career development in a group setting. The hypothesis is that students will gain more knowledge regarding their career development. First, it is expected that students will learn more about themselves, specifically their values and interests regarding careers. Second, the students will become more familiar with the exploration process and learn how to research prospective careers

and college information. Lastly, it is anticipated that the students will feel less anxiety and confusion regarding their career plans.

## Method

### *Setting*

This study was conducted in a suburban high school in Western New York. This high school consists of grades 10-12. The total student enrollment was 1,498, with 542 students in the tenth grade, 498 students in the eleventh grade, and 458 students in the twelfth grade. The school was composed of 51% male students and 49% female students. The ethnicity breakdown for the school was; 0.9% American Indian, 3.0% Hispanic, 6.7% Asian, 13.2% African American, and 76% Caucasian. This study was conducted with seniors, who are the graduating class of 2006.

### *Participants*

In the beginning of the school year, the twelfth grade school counselor asked every student their career plans for after high school. The students that had not made any decisions were noted as “undecided.” There were 70 students noted as having undecided career plans. This study pulled students from this “undecided” list of students. These students were asked to participate in a career development group. Many students that were approached did not want to participate in any career development activities. In total, there were 40 participants in this study. Twenty of the students were members of the career development group, while the other twenty were part of a control group.

*Control group.* The control group consisted of students that were not interested in participating in the career development group. Of the 20 participants, eleven were male and nine were female. Each student completed a pre- and post-test (Appendix A), which

were administered six months apart. They did not receive any individual or group counseling in school regarding career development during this time.

*Test group.* The career development group consisted of 20 participants, of which seven were male and thirteen were female. These students were broken up into four groups, allowing five members for each group. Each group met once a week for five weeks. The length of the sessions varied depending on the school and students' schedule. Once the group time was established, that particular group had the same time frame for each week, however each group did not have the same block of time. The length of the groups' sessions ranged from 30-50 minutes. The curriculum was the same for each group which will be described below. This test group and the control group completed the same pre- and post-test (Appendix A). They were, however, administered five weeks apart, at the beginning and end of each group.

#### *Procedure*

The career development group consisted of five sessions. These sessions were once a week and ranged from 30-50 minutes in length. The following is a breakdown of each session describing the specific goals for each week.

*Session one.* This session consisted of introductions, expectations, and ground rules. The group was informed of the tentative agenda for the following weeks. The students were given the opportunity to discuss if there were any topics not covered on the agenda that they would like to add. Nothing was added to the agenda for all five groups. The students established some basic ground rules. Confidentiality was stressed. Although confidentiality is hard to ensure in a group setting, the students agreed that as a group they would stick to the motto "what is said in here, stays in here."

Each group spent the remainder of time expressing their current thoughts, fears, and attitudes towards life after high school. Many misconceptions about specific jobs or careers were also discussed. The leader used this time to roughly ascertain the students' thoughts and attitudes with regards to their career development and career maturity.

*Session two.* In the beginning of this session, we spent a few minutes reviewing last week's group. The students shared any concerns, thoughts, or ideas they may have had from the previous week.

The main activity planned for this session pertained to researching jobs and occupations. First, the students were to think of at least three jobs they wanted to learn more about. The students were given a worksheet (Appendix B) which guided them to research information such as; job description, educational requirements, salary, and anything else they found interesting. They were provided reference books to use from the career center of their high school. The books were: *American Top Jobs for People Without a Four-Year Degree* (Farr, 1999); *Occupational Outlook Handbook* (U.S. Department of Labor, 2004); *America's Top Jobs for College Graduates* (Farr, 1999); and *The Guide to Your Career* (Bernstein & Schaffzin, 1998). When they had finished researching, the students discussed their findings with each other for the remainder of time.

The purpose of this activity was mainly for the students to learn a method of researching careers. The students were also able to gain knowledge about prospective occupations, as well as what their peers are interested in, and possibly learn about a career they may not have considered before.

*Session three.* The main activity for this session was regarding values, and how they affect one's life and career choices. This session was an essential part of the group. Discussing and exploring one's values is critical to their career development.

Values are an integral part to the career development process, especially when working with adolescents. Hodson (1985) viewed adolescence as a crucial transition stage in the formation of lasting attitudes, aspirations, and values. It is important for schools and school counselors to help students understand the relationship between their values and the development of their career (Vondracek, 1992).

Work values are one part of an individual's value system. Brown (2002) defined them as the values that individuals believe should be satisfied as a result of their participation in the work role. Financial prosperity, recognition, security, and independence are examples of work values. Other life values, such as family, influence the career development process as well. According to Brown, cultural and work values are the primary factors that influence the occupational choice making process, deriving satisfaction from, and advancing in the chosen career. Providing students with opportunities to explore and identify their own values may permit the development of a realistic and future-oriented set of career and life expectations, with an increased satisfaction with one's life (Hodson, 1985).

First, the group discussed the meaning of values and how they affect one's life. The group also explored the difference between work values and personal values, and how they affect career decisions. The students were then given a worksheet with a list of 26 values (Appendix C). They were asked to pick ten values from the list and rank them in order of importance. The group discussed the ease or difficulty they had picking only

ten values. The group members also took turns talking about some of their high and low ranked values and the reasoning behind their ranking.

*Session four.* This session consisted of exploring themselves and college interests. The students completed a self and college audit (Appendix D). The questions in the self section varied, but generally pertained to their interests in and out of school and how they perceive themselves. The questions in the college section revolved around the type of college of which they are interested. Size, location, and cost were some of the demographics for them to explore.

After the students were done answering the worksheet, the group discussed their reactions. The group talked about any surprises they had in their answers and how their answers might have changed from the past years. The reasons for exploring these questions were also discussed.

With the time remaining, the group was provided college reference books to research colleges that would fit their profile. The books were: College Board Book of Majors (2004); College Board College Handbook (2006); and The Four Year College Admissions Data Sourcebook (2004).

*Session five.* This last meeting included summarizing the past weeks, discussing what they have learned, and how they will apply this information now and in their future. The students discussed their thoughts and fears regarding careers or post-secondary education. They also revealed the degree to which those thoughts and fears changed if at all during this process. The group wrapped-up with completing a post-test (Appendix A).

*Measure*

The measure used to evaluate the group members was a self-created pre- and post-test (Appendix A). This measure was self-created and included nine statements. The participants answered according to the degree to which they agreed or disagreed with the statement. A Likert type scale was used, with the numbers 1 through 5. The rating went as follows: “1” represented strongly disagree, “2” represented disagree, “3” represented feeling neutral, “4” represented agree, and “5” represented strongly agree.

*Statement 1.* This item pertained to the degree of nervousness one feels when considering their career plans. For rating purposes, the scale was reversed for the responses to this question.

*Statement 2.* This item was related to their thoughts about career development. The statement established the degree to which one believes that the career exploration process can help in career related decisions. The scale was reversed for rating purposes because this question was written in a negative form.

*Statement 3.* This item stated that personal values and interests are not important when considering careers. The scale was also reversed for this question.

*Statement 4.* There were two parts to this statement. First, it stated whether or not one knows which career they want to pursue. Second, there was a space provided to fill in the name of the career.

*Statement 5.* Career values and their importance when making career decisions was the focus of the next item. There were also two parts to this statement. A list of five values were provided and stated to rank them in order of importance on a scale of 1-5, with 1 representing most important and 5 representing least important.

*Statement 6.* This item determined the degree to which one is aware of their interests and the impact they will have on career decisions.

*Statement 7.* This statement pertained to how capable one feels exploring and researching career information on their own.

*Statement 8.* There were five parts to the last item. Each part related to post-secondary school. First, the statement asked whether or not one is planning to attend college. Second, there was a space provided to write which major they are planning on declaring. The third and fourth part related to whether or not the participant knows what is important to them when researching and considering colleges. Lastly, there was a space provided to write the name of the college they want to attend.

### *Summary*

In summary, this study was conducted with 40 participants. Twenty participants were part of a control group, receiving no career development intervention. The other twenty participants were part of a test group, which received group career counseling. The career group followed a self-created five week curriculum. Both the control group and test group were evaluated by completing a pre- and post-test.

### Results

The following are the results obtained from the evaluation administered to the control group and test group. The data was compiled and averaged to produce a mean score for the pre- and post-test for both the control and test group. Again, the scales for statements 1-3 have been reversed for rating purposes which the data reflects. The differences of the mean scores were noted and will be discussed further in greater detail.

Table 1

*Evaluation Results for Control and Test Groups*

Statement	Control Group			Test Group		
	Pre-test	Post-test	Difference	Pre-test	Post-test	Difference
	Mean Score			Mean Score		
1. I am not nervous about career plans	2.7	2.8	+0.1	2.5	3.5	+1.0
2. Something can be done regarding career plans	4.0	4.0	0	4.2	4.8	+0.6
3. Values and interests are important regarding careers	4.2	4.1	-0.1	4.4	5.0	+0.6
4. I know which career I want to pursue	3.0	3.1	+0.1	2.4	3.0	+0.6
5. Career values are important when deciding careers	3.6	3.8	+0.2	3.8	4.4	+0.6
6. Aware of interests and their influence on decisions	3.7	3.8	+0.1	3.7	4.2	+0.5
7. I feel capable to research career information	3.2	3.3	+0.1	3.2	4.0	+0.8
8. I plan to attend college	3.8	3.9	+0.1	3.7	4.5	+0.8
8a. I know what is important when choosing colleges	3.5	3.4	-0.1	3.3	3.9	+0.6
<b>Total Mean Score</b>	<b>3.5</b>	<b>3.5</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>3.5</b>	<b>4.1</b>	<b>+0.6</b>

*Statement 1*

The difference for the control group produced an increase of .1. For the test group, however, there was an increase of 1.0.

*Statement 2*

This statement produced no change for the control group. The pre- and post-test scored a mean of 4.0. The test group produced a positive change of .6.

*Statement 3*

The difference for the control group was a decrease of .1. There was a positive change for the test group of .6.

*Statement 4*

This statement produced a positive change of .1 for the control group. There was a positive change of .6 for the test group.

*Statement 5*

The difference for the control group was an increase of .2. The test group's difference was an increase of .6.

*Statement 6*

For this statement, the control and test group both started with a mean of 3.7. However, the control group had a difference of +.1, while the test group had a difference of +.5.

*Statement 7*

Again, both groups started with the same mean of 3.2. The control group resulted in a positive change of .1, while the test group resulted in a positive change of .8.

*Statement 8*

The difference for the control group was a negative .1. For the test group, however, there was a difference of positive .6.

*Statement 8a*

This statement yielded a difference of -.1 for the control group and a +.6 for the test group.

## Discussion

The purpose of this study was to determine if career counseling in a group setting is beneficial when working high school students. Typically, one's first career related decision occurs during adolescence. Many authors agree that there is a need for serious planning and decision making, as well as assessing values and determining interests related to one's career development (, et al., 1973; Maduakolam, 1999; Krahn & Lowe, 1991; Gullekson, 1995).

More specifically, it was expected that students gained knowledge regarding career development in three specific areas; first, did students learn more about themselves and their values and interests regarding careers; second, did the students become more familiar with the exploration and research process for careers and college information; third, did the students' anxiety level and indecisiveness decrease regarding career and post-secondary education possibilities.

The results from this study indicate that career development administered in small groups can benefit students in a number of ways. The results from the control group were compared to the test group and the findings will be discussed further in more detail.

### *Statement 1*

This statement related to the students' degree of nervousness regarding career plans. Both groups responded fairly similar on the pre-test with a 2.7 for the control group and a 2.5 for the test group. There was, however, a substantial difference between the control group and test group's post-test. The test group scored .9 higher than the control group. This indicates that the group that received career development was less

nervous and anxious about their career decisions than the group that received no career interventions.

*Statement 2*

For the pre-test, the students in the control and test group responded to this statement with a mean of 4.0 and 4.2, respectively. This indicates that they agreed with the statement about career interventions and development being useful. For the post-test, there was no change for the control group. There was an increase of .6 for the test group, suggesting that after the group they strongly agreed that interventions can be useful in their career development.

*Statement 3*

This statement pertained to values and interests being an important part of career decisions. For the pre-test, the control group responded with a 4.0, and the test group responded with a 4.2. For the post-test, the control group had a decreased mean score of 4.1. The test group scored a 5.0, which is an increase of .6. These findings imply that after the group was implemented, the test group agreed more that interests and values are important when making career plans, while the control group agreed less with the statement.

*Statement 4*

For the pre-test, the control group responded with a mean of 3.0. The test group responded lower, with a mean of 2.4. This statement related to the degree of which one knows which career they want to pursue. For the post-test, the control group only had an increase of .1, while the test group responded with an increase of .6. This implies that

although more of the control group knew which career they would like to pursue, the test group had more of a significant change after receiving career information.

*Statement 5*

This statement pertained to career values and their importance in career decisions. The control and test group scored similar on the pre-test with a mean of 3.6 and 3.8, respectively. There was, however, a difference on the post-test. The control group responded with an increase of .2, while the test group responded with an increase of .6. These findings suggest that the test group gained knowledge from the career group and agreed more at the end of the implementation that career values are important in career decisions.

*Statement 6*

For the pre-test, the control and test group responded the same with a mean of 3.7, suggesting that they slightly agreed with that they were aware of their interests and the impact they have on career decisions. On the post-test, the control group scored a mean of 3.8 and the test group scored a 4.2. The control group only had an increase of .1, while the test group scored an increase of .5, suggesting that they agree more that interests can impact career plans.

*Statement 7*

This statement related to the degree to which they felt capable researching career information on their own. For the pre-test, the control and test group had the same response of a mean of 3.2. There was, however, a significant difference between the control group and test group's post-test responses. The test group scored .8 higher than

the control group. This indicates that after receiving career counseling, the test group felt more capable to research career information than the control group.

*Statement 8*

For the pre-test, the control group responded with a mean of 3.8, while the test group responded with a mean of 3.7. This implies that the control group agreed slightly more that they planned to attend college. However, the post-test showed that the control group only increased by .1 while the test group increased by .8, suggesting that more students plan to attend college after receiving career counseling.

*Statement 8a*

This last statement related to the degree to which the students know what is important when considering colleges. The control group scored a mean of 3.5 and the test group scored a mean of 3.3 on the pre-test. For the post-test, the control group's responses decreased, producing a mean of 3.4, a negative difference of .1. The test group, however, produced a mean of 3.9 on the post-test, a positive difference of .6. This suggests that the test group became more definite about what is important to them when considering college search, while the control group became less definite.

*Analysis*

With respect to this study's expectations as stated above, the results indicate that all three expectations were met. The first expectation was for the students to gain knowledge about themselves, values, and interests regarding career decisions. Statements 3, 5, and 6 pertained to this expectation. The test group, that received the intervention, had a cumulative mean increase of 1.7, whereas the control group had a cumulative mean

increase of .2. This shows that the career group helped students to understand their values and interests and how they relate to career decisions.

Manuele-Adkins (1992) believed that a major task of a school counselor is to help students explore their vocational self-concept and identity. Brown (2002) and Hodson (1985) viewed cultural and work values as primary factors that influence one's occupational choice. The findings from statements 3, 5, and 6 reflect these author's views, in that the students who received group counseling agreed with these authors more than the students who did not receive any counseling.

The second expectation was for the students to become more familiar with the research process for career and college search. Statements 7 and 8a pertained to this expectation. The control group produced a difference of +.1 for statement 7 and -.1 for statement 8a, which equals a cumulative mean of 0. The test group, however, produced a cumulative mean of +1.4. This is evidence that the group intervention helped students learn how to research and explore career and college information, therefore meeting the second expectation.

These findings from statement 7 and 8a relate to the goals, et al. (1973) discussed about career development. These authors stated that informing students of the various options available to them after high school is the first goal. Their second goal was to train students to be able to locate and use this information on their own. Maduakolam (2000) also believed that learning how to research, understand, and apply information about self and the world of work is a basic skill that students need in order to make informed career decisions. With regard to this study, the group that received the career development intervention had a significance increase towards feeling capable to research career and

college information on their own. The group that did not receive the intervention had no change at all.

The last expectation of this study was for the students to decrease their anxiety level and indecisiveness regarding career and post-secondary education options. The statements that pertained to this expectation were statements 1, 2, 4, and 8. The cumulative mean score for the control group was an increase of .3, whereas the test group's cumulative mean score was an increase of 3.0. This strongly shows that after the group received the career intervention they felt less nervousness and less indecisiveness about their career and post-secondary plans.

Students' lacking information about the career development process often delay or even avoid the decision all together (Gati & Saka, 2001). Many students have reported high levels of stress associated with the career exploration process (Taveira et al., 1998). Campbell et al. (1973) believed that the pressures put on an individual during high school can lead to confusion, stress, and thoughtless decisions. These authors indicate that students do feel stress towards career decisions and that there is a need to reduce anxiety by providing information and career counseling. The findings from statements 1, 2, 4, and 8 prove that by implementing career development groups, the students' stress level towards career planning significantly decreased.

### *Limitations*

Working in a high school setting can be challenging and unpredictable. One limitation to this study was the setting. Although the purpose of this study was to implement career groups in a high school, it still proved to be a challenge to organize.

There were difficulties with finding a room to hold the groups in on a consistent

basis. Students' absences (sickness, personal, school affiliated) also affected the group. There were a few mandatory field trips that some members attended while others were not involved. Re-scheduling the group's meeting time and place was difficult.

### *Implications*

This study explored the effects of career counseling in a group setting. The findings indicate that using groups is an effective way to administer career development programs. The literature states that career development is critical to an adolescents' high school education. Knowing that school counselors have large caseloads, implementing career development programs like the one in this study may not always be a realistic or reachable goal. However, it is important for School Counselors to stay current and educated with regards to group career counseling.

The National Career Development Association (NCDA) and Association for Specialists in Group Work (ASGW) are two professional associations most directly related to the topic of career counseling groups. However, Dagley (1999) noted that there is little mention in each of the documents about the content of the other. Dagley found that the NCDA made almost no distinction between individual and group counseling competencies. Similarly, he found only a brief reference to career development in the ASGW document. These are two major associations of which many counseling professionals are members. There is a need for these two associations to explore and promote the use of group career counseling.

### *Conclusion*

The overall findings from this study coincide with the literature from Pyle (1986) which stated the advantages group career counseling can provide. He discussed the time

and cost benefits, the opportunities for more personalized feedback, decreasing the feelings of isolation, and increasing self-exploration among the members. This study found that by using small groups it was possible to successfully counsel a number of students at once, which is more time effective than individual counseling.

Gullekson (1995) found that career planning activities implemented in high school were often one-time seminars to a large group of students. Although the school may provide career information, the students will not learn about their interests and values regarding careers. The findings from this study suggest that the members who received the intervention learned more about themselves as well as their interests and values. In conclusion, this study has proposed that group career counseling is beneficial to high school students in their career development and post-secondary decisions.

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Appendix A

Pre/Post Test

Appendix B

Career Research Questions

Appendix C

Value Sort

Appendix D

Self/College Audit