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The Impact of Group Counseling on the Self-Esteem Levels of Students Who Have Been Identified as the Targets of Bullying Aggressors

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The Impact of Group Counseling on the Self-Esteem Levels of Students Who Have Been Identified as the Targets of Bullying Aggressors

Christine D. Reber

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to determine if group counseling would be an effective intervention in raising the self-esteem levels of 7th grade students identified as the targets of bullying aggressors. A literature review is presented, which discusses the definitions and various types of bullying, examines bullying as it relates to age and gender, bullying and self-esteem, and bullying in the school environment. It also looks at methods that have been utilized within the school environment to help reach out to and treat the targets of bullying aggressors—including group counseling. For this study, 12 students volunteered to participate in an 8-week counseling program—all of whom had reported experiencing bullying behaviors within the last year. Two counseling groups were developed—one comprised of six female students and the other of six male students. The participants completed a pre and post questionnaire for this study—the Rosenberg’s Self-Esteem Scale—in order to measure any changes in their self-esteem levels as a result of the intervention. Results are discussed, as well as the implications that this study may have on future school counselors and future studies related to bullying and self-esteem.
In early 2006, 13-year-old Megan Meier met a friend named “Josh Evans” on the popular social networking site, MySpace.com (Good Morning America, 2007). It was later revealed that Josh was a fictitious character—made up by the mother of a former friend of Megan—with the intention of humiliating Megan, in retribution for Megan allegedly spreading gossip about the mother’s daughter. “Josh” began sending Megan cruel messages and posting electronic bulletins, saying things like, "Megan Meier is a slut” and “Megan Meier is fat”. Shortly after Josh broke off communication with Megan, and just weeks before her 14th birthday, Megan committed suicide by hanging herself in her bedroom closet. Megan’s mother believed that the cyber exchange devastated Megan, who was unable to understand how and why her friendship with “Josh” unraveled. The stress and frustration was too much for Megan, who had a history of depression and low self-esteem and was under psychiatric for a period of five years leading up to her death.

Review of the Literature

Bullying is a challenge, and it affects individual students, as well as the entire community. Research of childhood bullying has expanded considerably over the past few decades and is now recognized worldwide as a problem (Camodeca & Goossens, 2005). Bullying occurs along a continuum, with students assuming bully, victim, and bully-victim roles (Espelage & Horne, 2008) and is believed to create severe and long-term mental and physical consequences (Hawker & Boulton, 2000; Lunde, Frisen, & Hwang, 2007; Rigby, 2003; Smith, Ananiadou, & Cowie, 2003; Stassen Berger, 2007). Over the past few decades, we have learned that schools are not necessarily safe havens for learning and achievement, but rather institutions where a substantial number of students are worried about getting physically attacked or harassed by their peers (Juvonen, Wang, & Espinoza, 2011).
**Bullying Defined**

Bullying can be defined as an act of aggression in which one or more children intend to harm or abuse another child who is believed to be unable to defend himself or herself (Glew, Rivara, & Feudtner, 2000). Bullying can also be described as recurring negative events, which over time are directed at specific individuals or groups of people, and which are carried out by one or several other people who are stronger than the victim or victims (Aluede, Adeleke, Omoike, & Afen-Akpaida, 2008). Perhaps the most widely used definition of bullying is that provided by Olweus (1991, p. 413): “A person is being bullied when he or she is exposed, repeatedly over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more persons. Thus, bullying is an aggressive act, which occurs frequently.” Olweus further proposed that bullying involves an imbalance of power, and that bullying can be verbal, physical, or indirect. Bullying can negatively impact upon a child’s life both physically and psychologically.

Not all researchers, however, agree that bullying needs to be repetitive. Guerin and Hennessy (2002) argued that an incident does not have to be repeated in order for it to be considered bullying, especially if one incident causes long lasting fear of repetition. Guerin and Hennessy also noted that some researchers have suggested that a behavior—which is not necessarily intended by the perpetrator to cause hurt or harm—may be considered bullying if it is taken as such by the victim.

Bullying may involve different forms of aggressive behaviors, from name calling, spreading rumors and saying nasty things, to taking a victim’s belongings and physical violence (Kaltiala-Heino & Frojd, 2010). The aggression is hostile and proactive and involves both direct and indirect behaviors (Elinoff, Chafouleas, & Sassu, 2004). Bullying may imply, therefore, physical attacks (hitting, pushing, shoving, kicking, etc.), verbal aggressions (threatening, teasing, name
calling, etc.) and relational aggressions or behaviors that try to harm social relations of the victim (gossiping or spreading rumors, ignoring someone, etc.; Craig, Henderson, & Murphy, 2000; Ladd & Ladd, 2001; Newman Murray, & Lussier, 2001). Bullying that involves exclusion from social interaction has been shown to be a typical form of bullying among girls (Kaltiala-Heino & Frojd, 2010). Regardless of which behavior is chosen, bullying is marked by intense intimidation that creates a pattern of humiliation, abuse, and fear for the victim (Roberts, 2000).

A new form of bullying, coined “cyberbullying”, has emerged as a result of the growing availability and reliance on information and communications technology (ICT) among young people (Smith et al., 2008). Cyberbullying is defined as an individual or a group who uses ICT over a period of time to intentionally harm another person or persons (Belsey, 2006; Patchin & Hinduja, 2006; Smith, et al., 2008). The emergence of cyberbullying has created a concern and challenge for adults to protect young children and adolescents. Unlike other forms of bullying, cyberbullying often takes places around the clock and does not end when the child leaves the school grounds. Cyberbullying can include, but is not limited to (1) mean, nasty or threatening text messages; (2) instant messages, pictures, video clips, and/or emails that are sent directly to a person through the Internet or mobile phone, or sent to others about that person; (3) content publicly posted on the Internet through blogs or social networking sites about a person; (4) deliberately ignoring or leaving someone out over the Internet; (5) stealing or distributing passwords or personal information; (6) pretending to be someone else online to hurt another person or to damage their friendships or social status, and (7) harassing others through multi-user-domain gaming rooms (Patchin & Hinduja, 2006; Shariff, 2005; Smith et al., 2008; Willard, 2007).
**Gender and Bullying**

Bullying behaviors are typically attributed to boys, as opposed to girls. According to Olweus (1991), both sexes may equally be guilty of bullying—although males have been found to be more involved in physical bullying, while females use more covert forms (such as verbal and relational bullying). Olweus (2003) found a large percentage of girls reported being bullied by boys. Pellegrini and Long (2002), however, found that “boys least frequently aimed their aggression at girls” (p.275) and girls were most frequently were targeted by other girls. Researchers (Carney & Merrell, 2001; Olweus, 2003; Pellegrini & Long, 2002) confirmed that boys were the victims of bullying more often than girls.

Crick et al. (1999) suggested that different forms of aggression and gender were correlated. Girls exhibit the more subtle, nonphysical forms of behavior (i.e., verbal, relational), whereas boys exhibit more physical aggression than girls (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995; Cullerton-Sen & Crick, 2005; Salmivalli, Kaukianen, & Lagerspetz, 2000). Athanasiades and Deliyanni-Kouimtzs (2010) found that all students (50 boys and 45 girls), participating in their study, reported that girls were aggressive with “words” (meaning verbal or indirect bullying) and that boys were aggressive with certain “acts” (meaning physical bullying). For example, a ninth grade girl revealed that bullying exists everywhere, not only within boys’ groups. She stated that girls threaten to end friendships if another girl does not do something she is told by the group leader. Boys and girls attributed the bullying approach differences to boys’ physical strength and girls’ maturity. In other words, both groups claimed that boys are more short-tempered and aggressive because of their natural physical “superiority and that girls avoid intense quarrels or conceal them because they are not “strong” enough, because they talk more about their problems, and because such behaviors are not compatible with the female gender identity.
Sixty percent of 5th to 7th grade girls, whom Olweus (1993) reported as being harassed, said that boys bullied them. Similarly, the American Association of University Women Educational Foundation (2001) reported that 38% of girls, who experience sexual harassment, say that they first experienced it in elementary school. Unpopular, rejected-aggressive boys are most likely to harass girls (Rodkin & Berger, 2008), whereas socially connected bullies tend to demonstrate within-sex bullying and dominance against unpopular targets (Pellegrini et al., 2010).

Males are significantly more involved in bullying than females, with twice as many males identified as bullies (Seals & Young, 2003; Jankauskiene, Karedlis, Sukys, & Kardeliene, 2008). In regard to grade level, results indicated that seventh graders are more involved in bullying than were eighth graders (Seals & Young, 2003). Additionally, both male and female bullies who bullied alone tended to target victims of the same gender. More females than males, however, were involved in mixed-gender group bullying. Results also indicated that physical bullying did not decline in eighth grade, with more females in this grade reporting being hit, kicked, or shoved than those in seventh grade. Verbal name calling represented the most prevalent form of bullying experienced, followed by physical aggression. Students of the sixth and the eighth grades tended to be involved in teasing more than twice as much as eleventh graders (Jankauskiene, et al., 2008). The middle school-aged-students became victims more often and they bullied more often than the high school-aged-students. The number of victims and bullies decreased significantly by the eleventh grade.

**Bullying in Schools**

Bullying represents a significant problem in our nation’s schools. The National School Safety Center (NSSC) called bullying the most enduring and underrated problem in U. S. schools (Beale, 2001). Schools provide an optimal context for bullying because the same children are
involved in social relationships on a daily basis over an extended time (Gendron, Williams, & Guerra, 2011). Bullying in schools is not a new concern, yet it was only relatively recently that it attracted systematic psychological research (Fox & Boulton, 2003).

School bullying occurs when an individual purposely inflicts or attempts to inflict harm to another student (Olweus, 1993). As previously described, bullying can be classified as physical, verbal, relational, or cyber (Jacobsen & Bauman, 2007; Shore, 2005). Physical aggression poses an immediate disruption in the school. Consequential procedures for physical aggression are often clearly documented in school policies and regulations. Conversely, until recently, verbal bullying and relational bullying were accepted as forms of playful and harmless teasing (Carney, 2008; Hoover & Oliver, 1996).

According to a study by Brown, Birch, and Kancherla (2005), about 1 in 5 elementary school students, and 1 in 10 middle school students in the United States were bullied. Another study showed that 20% to 54% of school children were repeatedly involved in bullying and/or as victims (Jansen, Ormel, Verhulst, & Reijneveld, 2011). Another study revealed that 39% of students reported that they had been bullied at some point during their school years (Frisen, Jonsson, & Persson, 2007). The age at which most students reported being bullied was between 7 and 9 years old, and few students reported being bullied during their high school years.

Seals and Young (2003) found, of 454 rural students, that 45% of the seventh graders and 42% of the eighth graders reported that bullying occurred "often". In addition, 24% reported direct involvement in bullying: 10% bullied others one or more times per week, 13% were victimized one or more times per week, and 1% both were bullied and bullied others on a weekly basis. These results indicate a lower rate of bullying than the 29% reported by Nansel et al. (2001) and Duncan (1999), but the lower rate may be due to the criteria used to designate bullies.
and victims (Seals & Young, 2003). Seals and Young’s findings revealed that rural schools are not immune to bullying; another study of rural students indicated that bullying and victimization were correlated with aggression and possessing attitudes that promote violence as a primary method of conflict resolution (Stockdale, Handaduambo, Duys, Larson, & Sarvela, 2002).

The school climate has the potential to increase or decrease bullying. School climate generally refers to the different aspects of a school, such as a student’s feeling of connectedness to their school or how teachers respond to bullying. School connectedness is defined as the extent to which a student experiences a sense of caring and compassion from their teachers and staff working within a school environment (Raskauskas et al., 2010). In a study by Raskauskas et al., students who bullied reported feeling less connected and less comfortable at school, revealing a correlation between connectedness to school and bullying.

**Self-Concept and Self-Esteem Defined**

In recent years, research on self-concept and self-esteem has been gaining relevance within the context of the identification of protective factors against psychological problems. Self-concept and self-esteem are considered to be linked to personal well being, mental health, professional success, social relationships, academic performance (Garaigordobil, Perez, & Mozaz, 2008). Self-concept is the total picture of how an individual perceives or understands him or herself, his or her attributes, and how an individual perceives others' perceptions of him or her (Meggert, 2004; Rice & Dolgin, 2005; Schunk, 2000). Self-concept can be thought of as a “multifaceted construct that is hierarchical in nature, with global self-concept at the top, and subcategories underneath that influence each other, as well as an individual's overall sense of self” (Marsh, 1990, p. 27). Examples of subcategories include academic, social, emotional, physical, and athletic perceptions of self. A subcategory, such as, academic self-concept, may be
further divided into subject-specific domains, including: math, science, reading, and social studies. These subject-specific self-concepts work together to inform an individual's overall sense of academic self-concept, which, in turn, is part of the larger global self-concept construct (Pajares & Schunk, 2001).

Self-concept and self-esteem are often used interchangeably in the research literature (Strein, 1993). Self-esteem, however, is a subcategory of self-concept that enables a person to establish a sense of value or self-worth (Rice, & Dolgin, 2005; Schunk, 2000). Self-concept develops as young children begin to see themselves as unique individuals. With growth and maturity, a child's self-concept gradually increases in complexity until, eventually, they begin to organize perceptions of their abilities (Rice & Dolgin, 2005; Schunk, 2000). An individual's global perceptions of self are fairly stable; however, domain-specific self-concepts can be influenced by self-assessments, idealizations, contextual experiences, and evaluations by significant others, such as parents, peers, and role models (Shavelson & Bolus, 1982). Susceptibility to influence is particularly prevalent during puberty, as young adolescents begin making thorough evaluations of themselves and their abilities through both self-assessments and intense social comparisons (Rice & Dolgin, 2005).

Harter (1990) described self-esteem as how one likes, accepts, and respects oneself as a person. Harter asserted that there are two different theoretical views of self-esteem: (1) how a person perceives success with reference to the importance of success in that particular domain, and (2) how a person perceives himself/herself. Feshbach and Weiner (1991), however, claimed that self-esteem is a positive or negative value based on one’s own attributes. Essentially, self-esteem can be described as how an individual feels about himself or herself.
Self-esteem is among the most widely researched topic in psychology and counseling (Searcy, 2007). Self-esteem has been directly connected to individuals' social network, their activities, and what they hear about themselves from others (e.g., Kernis, 2003). Multiple studies have linked a positive sense of self-esteem to factors such as psychological health (González, Casas, & Coenders, 2007; Keyes, 2006), mattering to others (Marshall, 2001), and both body image and physical health (Kostanski & Gullone, 1998). Conversely, low self-esteem has been linked to outcomes such as depression (MacPhee & Andrews, 2006), health problems (Stinson et al., 2008), and antisocial behavior (Niregi, 2006). There is some disagreement in the literature as to whether self-esteem is a stable or changing characteristic; research of more than 326,600 persons, however, suggested that self-esteem changes over the life span and is particularly critical during adolescent development, when it is likely to decline (Robins, Trzesniewski, Tracy, Gosling, & Potter, 2002).

Early and more recent self-esteem theorists have also suggested that self-esteem is a dynamic, changing construct. For example, William James (1983) viewed self-esteem as the ratio of one’s successes to one’s pretensions. To increase self-esteem one must either increase one’s successes or lower one’s expectations. Similarly, Rosenberg (1979) referred to self-esteem as a positive or negative evaluation of the self. Combining these two perspectives, one may arrive at the following: a positive evaluation of the self stems from having more success than one expected, whereas a negative evaluation stems from having fewer successes than one expected. This interpretation suggests that one’s self-esteem is not constant over time, but instead is dynamic and changes depending on one’s successes and expectations. Thus, a person with high self-esteem who is successfully moving through life meeting all her expectations who is suddenly fired from a job will likely experience decreasing self-esteem.
Bullying and Self-Esteem

Studies have revealed that the experience of being bullied is correlated with anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem (Hawker & Boulton, 2000). Victimized students normally see themselves as socially incompetent, are generally unpopular among peers, and display little self-confidence (Khatri, Kupersmidt, & Patterson, 2000), as well as have lower levels of self-esteem (Austin & Joseph, 1996; Estevez, Martinez, & Musitu, 2006; Olweus, 1998). In a meta-analysis of studies published between 1978 and 1997, Hawker and Boulton (2000), found that victims showed more depressive tendencies, more anxiety, lower self-esteem, and a more negative social representation of the self than did uninvolved students.

Victims of bullying can suffer from various health problems including diminished levels of psychological well-being, poor social adjustment, psychological distress, and physical symptoms (Rigby, 1996, 2003). Victims exhibit a range of problems from social isolation and truancy to suicidal feelings and depression. Experiencing peer harassment has been linked to depression, loneliness, social isolation, and peer rejection (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995; Juvonen & Nishina, 2000). Victims of bullying may suffer from low self-esteem, fewer friendships, school absences, and even suicidal ideation (Meraviglia, Becker, Rosenbluth, Sanchez, & Robertson, 2003). Depression, loneliness, and social anxiety were predicted by being victimized by relational bullying (Crick & Bigbee, 1998) and also predict future social and psychological difficulties (Crick, Casas, & Ku, 1999).

Being a victim of bullying has been associated with a number of adjustment problems, e.g. depression (Neary & Joseph, 1994; Slee, 1995), anxiety (Olweus, 1978; Slee, 1994), and low self-esteem (Boulton & Smith, 1994). More recently, researchers employed prospective longitudinal designs and found that peer victimization predicts changes in adjustment over time.
For example, Egan and Perry (1998) found that victimization (e.g., being shut out from many experiences) led to lower self-regard over the school year. Victims of bullying have had a tendency to have lower levels of both self-esteem and self-responsibility, may be anxious, oversensitive, insecure and quiet (Olweus, 1994). They also are more worried, fearful, withdrawn and ashamed of new situations such as transition from sixth grade to seventh. Rigby (2000) found that victims are less happy at school and in the classroom, and are lonelier because of having fewer good friends. Victims of bullying are more likely to think about suicide repeatedly. According to a study by Smith and Shu (2000), students commit suicide each year as a result of bullying.

Seals and Young (2003) conducted a study to examine the self-esteem levels of bullies, victims, and nonbullies/nonvictims. Of the three groups, bullies had the highest level of self-esteem, followed by nonbullies/nonvictims. The victims had the lowest levels of self-esteem. These findings are consistent with those presented by Rigby (1996), who found that bullies were generally more popular in school and had high levels of self-esteem, while victims viewed themselves as less popular and had the lowest self-esteem. Victims also experience negative long-term effects as a result of childhood bullying. Because victims tend to miss many days of school, their achievement level tends to be lower than their peers and many do not achieve their academic potential (McNamara & McNamara, 1997). In addition, at age 23, former victims tended to be more depressed and had poorer self-esteem than non-victimized young adults (Olweus, 1993).

**Intervention Strategies**

According to research, the sooner targets and aggressors are treated through reliable therapeutic techniques, the better the chances of changing their behavior and maintaining their
self-esteem and reducing feelings of shame, depression, and/or anger (Sheras & Tippins, 2002). Fried and Fried (1996) stated that assertiveness training, which promotes nonviolence and uses language responses that begin with “I” messages should be used when simply ignoring the bully does not work. Assertiveness training could be incorporated in a support group and would teach children to stand up for their rights, give them a sense of security, as well as a sense of control, power, and optimism, especially when entering new situations (Ross, 2003). Besag (1989) claimed that a support group would be ideal for the targets of bullying and teasing as an emotional support for these children. Ross (2003) stated that one goal of the support group is to introduce behavior changes that would provide targets with protection against bullying and teasing.

**Classroom lessons.** Pearce et al. (2011) hypothesized that students would benefit from education about bullying, including empathy training. Some students, who are regularly bullied (Bradshaw et al., 2007; Cowie & Olafsson, 2000; Rigby, 1997; Whitney & Smith, 1993) or cyberbullied (Li, 2010) do not report the bullying, maybe due to a lack of awareness about what constitutes bullying. Researchers (Gini, Albiero, Benelli, & Altoe, 2007; Gini et al., 2008; Lodge & Frydenburg, 2005; Nickerson, Mele, & Princiotta, 2008; Rigby & Johnson, 2006; Salmivalli & Voeten, 2004) suggested that students’ empathy and antibullying attitudes increase the likelihood of them defending a student being bullied.

Contrary to the hypothesis asserted by Pearce et al. (2011), Ttofi and Farrington (2011) found in a meta-analysis that curriculum materials about bullying were not among the significant program elements related to a reduction in being bullied or bullying others. They found the use of videos to raise student awareness about bullying was significantly associated with a decrease
in students being bullied, which suggests that education materials may need to be more engaging for students.

Young et al. (2009), however, conducted a study, over a 3-year period, and found that psychoeducation did significantly reduce bullying in one school. The purpose of their investigation was to determine: (a) the extent of bullying at the middle school level, (b) teacher perception of the extent of bullying at this middle school, (c) the effectiveness of school counselor facilitated bullying and harassment guidance lessons, and (d) student awareness of strategies to resist bullying. Data collected during the first year of the study indicated that 94% of seventh graders and 48% of eighth graders had been bullied at the middle school, suggesting bullying was a schoolwide issue. Ninety five percent of seventh graders and 72% of eighth graders reported that they possessed limited or no strategies to use if bullied. As other researchers (e.g., Bradshaw et al., 2007; Cowie & Olafsson, 2000; Li, 2010; Rigby, 1997; Whitney & Smith, 1993) hypothesized, 85% of seventh graders and 82% of eighth graders would not tell an adult, including parents, if they were being bullied. Data collected during the last year of the study indicated that continued schoolwide bullying prevention interventions were working. Eighty-seven percent of seventh graders and 83% of eighth graders had strategies to use if bullied. Eighty percent of seventh graders and 67% of eighth graders would tell an adult if they were bullied.

The bullying prevention program was delivered through a comprehensive systemic approach and required support from the entire staff, including school counselors (Young et al, 2009). At the onset of the program, specific bullying prevention and intervention goals were created and added to the school improvement plan. Administrators and teachers then identified specific work plans to address the issue and measure its effectiveness, including noting a reduction in
discipline referrals. They also established an anti-bullying website that allowed students to report bullying incidents anonymously. The contents of the website were monitored by an administrator and proved extremely valuable. Furthermore, school counselors interviewed students to determine if the modified bullying lessons were effective. The findings suggested a decrease in the number of students reporting bullying. It was encouraging to note that students became empowered and responded to bullying situations in healthy ways. Anecdotal evidence supported the positive effectiveness of the lessons as reflected in fewer conflict mediation referrals, fewer suspensions for fighting, and fewer teachers' referrals regarding students' dispositions.

**Bullying Curricula**

**Olweus Bully Prevention Program.** The Olweus Bully Prevention Program, developed and evaluated over a period of almost 20 years, builds on four key principles derived chiefly from research on the development and identification of problem behaviors, especially aggressive behavior (Olweus, 1999). The principles involve: (1) creating a school environment characterized by warmth, positive interest and involvement from adults; (2) firm limits on unacceptable behavior; (3) consistent application of nonpunitive, nonphysical sanctions for unacceptable behavior, and (4) adults who act as authorities and positive role models.

**Bully Busters.** Bully Busters: A Teacher’s Manual for Helping Bullies, Victims, and Bystanders was a psychoeducational intervention implemented by Newman et al. (2000) and was instituted at the request of middle school counselors, teachers, administrators, and parents. The program was intended to address the increase in aggressive behaviors occurring in the school by facilitating the teachers’ acquisition of skills, techniques, and intervention and prevention strategies specifically related to problems of bullying and victimization, as well as to enhance
teachers’ self-efficacy for confronting bullying and victimization in the classroom. The program was implemented in the form of a staff development training workshop. The contents of the program included information pertaining to bullying and victimization, prevention and intervention strategies, stress-management techniques, and classroom activities. The training program was a composite of seven modules, each focusing on specific goals (Newman et al., 2000): (1) increasing awareness of bullying; (2) recognizing the bully; (3) recognizing the victim; (4) taking charge: interventions for bullying behavior; (5) assisting victims: recommendations and interventions; (6) the role of prevention, and (7) relaxation and coping Skills. Each teacher was provided with a manual containing the seven workshop modules, including classroom activities and worksheets for each module. The supervision/team meetings served as an ongoing resource for classroom teachers to: (a) share their success or failure stories, (b) seek advice from other teachers and the supervisor, (c) obtain additional classroom activities, (d) dispel fears and feel supported, and (e) develop collaborative problem-solving skills.

Among the most common suggestions were serious talks with the students involved and improvement of victims’ coping strategies. Rigby (1996) proposed that one of the main conditions, if the bullying problem is to be tackled, is that people in the school environment need to be optimistic about the effect that different anti-bullying strategies may have on reducing the problem.

**Bullying and School Counseling**

In addition to teachers, school counselors may take action in cases of bullying. It is possible that the training and education of school counselors leads school counselors to view bullying differently from teachers and to respond to bullying in different ways. Jacobsen and Bauman (2007) found that school counselors displayed more empathy for victims of physical and
relational bullying than teachers. They also perceived relational bullying to be more serious than teachers did, and were more likely to intervene in relational bullying. Also, counselors proposed more involved interventions for bullies in relational bullying. These findings by Jacobsen and Bauman (2007) suggest that school counselors may be more perceptive and more sensitive to issues of bullying than teachers.

In addition to the negative psychological effects of bullying on students, school counselors should also be aware of how bullying can impact the physical health and academic performance of students (Baht, 2008). Nishina, Juvonen, and Witkow (2005) noted that when victims of bullies internalize feelings of depression, anxiety, and loneliness resulting from victimization experiences, they are likely to withdraw mentally from school and ultimately their academic functioning and performance suffers. Victims may be more susceptible to illness due to the increased levels of cortisol in combination with a suppressed immune system and reduced powers of concentration (Hazler, Carney, & Granger, 2006).

**Impacting schoolwide interventions.** School counselors have the advantage of being able to intervene when necessary. Specifically, school counselors can serve as leaders within their educational communities in order to promote systemic change that will remove barriers to student success (Davis, & Kruczek, et al., 2006). The importance of school counselors as leaders is evidenced in the ASCA National Model (American School Counselor Association, 2005), where leadership is indicated as one of the four major themes of school counseling along with collaboration and teaming, advocacy, and systemic change. Beyond being leaders in the design, implementation, management, and evaluation of comprehensive school counseling programs, school counselors play an important role in leading the education mission and process for the development of student academic, career, and personal/social growth.
One way for school counselors to assert themselves as educational leaders is to use the collaboration and teaming skills that they already possess. Professional collaboration can take many forms, and one of the easiest is to reach out to teachers, faculty, and administration. School counselors can also collaborate with parents and with members of the community to help combat bullying concerns.

Once school policies are established and reporting procedures are in place, school counselors can address awareness and intervention strategies for school personnel, students, and parents (Chibbaro, 2007). In some cases, school counselors may not be qualified to provide training for faculty and staff, but they should be able to bring about a heightened awareness of different types of bullying that exist in the school, including cyberbullying. Limber (2004) suggested that bullying prevention and intervention best practices include training school personnel about the nature of bullying and its effects, how to respond if bullying is detected, and methods of reporting bullying incidents. Possible intervention strategies may include teaching students how to identify bullying both at school and away from school, discussing school policy with students, providing students with methods of reporting bullying, and increasing supervision in areas of schools where bullying is likely to occur. School Counselors may also inform decision-makers of programs, such as, the Olweus Bully Prevention Program and the Bully Busters Program. They can also discuss the benefits and challenges of addressing bullying through classroom lessons.

**Direct interventions.** As the research suggests, one intervention that has been shown to be effective in improving the academic and personal/social welfare of children in schools, is group counseling. Group counseling can be an effective and powerful way for School Counselors to help reach students who have been bullied (ASCA, 2005). Youth spend the majority of their time, aside from the time they spend with their family, in school interacting with teachers,
counselors and other students. (Fydenberg & Lewis, et al, 2004). Schools are an ideal setting for school counselors to provide intervention and prevention services (classroom guidance lessons, individual, and group counseling [ASCA, 2005]) to students because of the relationship and daily contact that school counselors have with students (Hains, 1994).

The professional literature suggests that group counseling is particularly effective and helpful to students (Whiston & Quinby, 2009). First, group counseling is an efficient intervention when compared to individual counseling, as the school counselor can see multiple students simultaneously. Group interventions are believed to be as successful as individual counseling and much more cost effective (Hoag & Burlingame, 1997; Shechtman & Ben-David, 1999); Second, from a developmental and perspective, students often learn best from each other. Group counseling provides an excellent forum to promote student-to-student learning and is often experienced by students as an enjoyable and meaningful aspect of school (Whiston & Quinby, 2009); it is thought to be more efficient than individual psychotherapy because of social learning through insight, peer modeling, problem solving and validation (Bemak et al., 2005). The development of these aforementioned skills is less available to students who are involved in individual counseling. Group work offers the opportunity for students to solve problems together. Working together increases critical thinking and problem solving skills (Hall, 2000). Through group work, students are provided an opportunity to work collaboratively to uncover solutions to common problems and practice skills in solving their concerns (Hall, 2000). Group members also tend to learn they are not alone in their experiences. Suddenly, a world in which they felt alone and abandoned now is put into perspective. Because the group is made of peers, no hierarchy exists. The group members can turn to each other for support. Students learn effective coping skills from one another through modeling, as what may work for one group
member can certainly work for another. Finally, groups are a microcosm of society and as such provide real-life settings in which students can work out issues and problems (Gladding, 2008; Greenberg, 2003).

In recent years, school counselors have begun using group counseling more frequently in their work with students (Crepeau-Hobson et al., 2005). Group work is supported by a collection of research (Gladding, 1995; Rosen & Bezold, 2001; Rosenthal, 1993; Shechtman & Gluk, 2005; Whiston & Sexton, 1998; Yalom, 1995; and Zinck & Littrell, 2001) concluding that counseling groups are an effective means of intervention and prevention (Rosen & Bezold, 2001). Providing effective group counseling experiences to students requires leadership, specialized knowledge and skills, and the ability to advocate effectively for the inclusion of a program of group counseling within schools. Planned, purposeful, and effective counseling is available to greater number of students through group work (Becky & Farren, 1997; Phillips & Phillips, 1992).

The power of the peer group can be used for positive growth and development and has often been the treatment of choice in successful interventions to improve social acceptance and behavior (Bemak et al., 2005). Group work has been shown to increase self-esteem levels (Hlongwane & Bason, 1990), friendship skills (Rosenthal, 1993), and friendship intimacy (Shechtman, 1994), which are important factors in a child’s wellbeing and academic success (Bemak et al., 2005; Shechtman, 1993; Shechtman et al., 1996; and Shechtman et al., 1997). Through group work, students have reported moderate to strong progress in achieving personal goals. They also reported a significant reduction in the severity of problems, and experienced meaningful changes in attitudes and in relationships with others (Zinck & Littrell, 2001). Finally, group interventions have also been found to improve students’ academic performance and attendance (Bemak et al., 2005).
**Group types.** Group counseling in schools exists on a continuum from being primarily didactic and psychoeducational in nature, to being primarily therapeutic experiences. Most groups have some elements of each, and some vary from session to session (Perusse et al., 2009). Therefore, providing psychoeducation to students in all types of counseling groups is common in schools, and fits in well with the culture of K–12 education, as the students learn new information. Typically, the provision of psychoeducation leads students to apply information to themselves. As they do this, they often need assistance. Such processing leads into the second aspect of group work in schools: counseling. When students process information, they often reveal confidential information about themselves, thus opening themselves up to psychological risk. Group members experience the benefits of group dynamics much more intensely in process groups than in strictly cognitive based and psychoeducational groups. Process groups develop a broader and deeper understanding of relationships through group interactions (Rosen & Bezold, 2001) and develop a sense of empowerment through their interactions (Bemak et al., 2005).

**Conclusion**

Problem behaviors, such as bullying, continue to plague the nation’s classrooms. The current trend in education places a strong emphasis on teacher accountability and increased standardized test scores, but deemphasizes the importance of adolescent social development and mandates regarding problem behaviors and violence prevention (Fleming et al., 2005). Yet, involvement in bullying includes the overwhelming majority of the nation’s adolescents and can maintain lifelong consequences for victimized youth (Sullivan, Cleary, & Sullivan, 2004).

The literature suggests that many students, especially at the middle school level, have experienced at least one form of bullying. It also suggests that students who have experienced
bullying may suffer from issues of depression, isolation, and low self-esteem. School counselors play an important role in addressing bullying concerns within schools and implementing intervention strategies for school personnel, students, and parents. There appears to be a lack of sufficient research however, in regards to how group counseling has specifically helped increase the self-esteem levels in students who have been bullied. It is crucial that school counselors utilize interventions, such as implementing group counseling, to help students who have been impacted by bullying. By increasing the self-esteem levels of students who have experienced bullying, there will be a decrease the likelihood that these students will experience depression, anxiety, isolation, and personalization of bullying incidents, and it will increase their ability to cope with difficult situations and confront bullies in a more assertive manner. School counselors can play an important role in directing school policies addressing peer victimization and developing strategies to foster more positive and healthy peer relationships.

The purpose of this study was to utilize group counseling as an intervention and to determine if the counseling program would be an effective means of increasing the self-esteem levels in 7th grade students who were identified as being the targets of bullying aggressors. The researcher sought to answer the question, “Will group counseling be effective in increasing the self-esteem levels of students who have experienced bullying?” Therefore, the hypothesis is stated: If students who have experienced bullying participate in a counseling group, then they will experience an increase in their self-esteem levels. The null hypothesis is stated: If students who have experienced bullying participate in a counseling group, then there will be no effect on their self-esteem levels.
Method

A paired-samples t-test was conducted to determine if the counseling group had a statistically significant impact on the self-esteem levels of the participants. T-scores, degrees of freedom, and level of significance were determined for each of the 10 pairs of questions. The confidence interval was set at 95% which means that the difference in numbers is expected to arise by chance less than 5% of the time.

This study was conducted in a middle school setting with 12 students in the 7th grade, utilizing group counseling as the intervention. The researcher developed and facilitated two, 8-week long counseling groups—one comprised of six girls and the other of six boys. The students met for group sessions one time per week—each session lasting 45 minutes in duration—for a total of eight weeks. The group curriculum contained a series of psychoeducational and discussion-based lessons, games, and activities aimed at helping the students build and strengthen assertiveness skills, learn how to identify and effectively express feelings, work together as a team, identify and utilize a support network, practice role playing, etc.

Students were administered the Rosenberg’s Self-Esteem Scale at the start of their first group session, and again during the last group session—to measure any changes in self-esteem levels throughout the course of the counseling program. The Rosenberg questionnaire was scored using a “likert” scale ranging from 1-4 (with 1 being the number that represented the highest self-esteem level).

Participants

There were 12 participants in this study—six males and six females—all of whom were 7th grade students enrolled in a suburban/rural middle school located in upstate New York. Each of the participants were 12 years of age at the time the study was initiated, and all of the members
reported personally experiencing at least one form of bullying within the past year. Of the 12 participants, 10 of them identified themselves as Caucasian, one as Hispanic, and one as African-American.

The participants involved in this study were recruited utilizing a variety of methods. First, an email was sent to teachers, counselors, and other staff members, explaining the schedule and purpose of this study and asking school personnel to identify (through anonymous means) students who may benefit from and be willing to participate in this study. Next, the researcher sat in on team meetings with faculty to verbally explain the study in further detail and to gather names of possible participants from staff members in a smaller, more personal setting. Lastly, researcher was given permission by one of the 7th grade social studies teachers to enter four of his classes—15-20 minutes per period—to facilitate a brief educational presentation on bullying and also to explain the group counseling program directly to the students. Approximately 50% of the 7th grade class was reached through this method. One benefit of the class presentation approach was that it allowed the students the opportunity to volunteer for the study on their own.

Students who were either recruited for the study by faculty or volunteered on their own then met with the researcher for a brief, individual session to be interviewed and screened for the study. During the screening process, participants were asked to share about personal experiences with bullying, were informed about the group process, confidentiality, etc., and were given both participant and parent/guardian consent forms to return to the researcher upon signing. Following the initial/screening session, a parent or guardian of the participant was contacted via phone and/or email by the researcher and was given further information on the study and what may be expected throughout the counseling study. It was explained to participants, parents, teachers, and
administration that the students may be missing classes and classwork as a result of this study and that it is the primary responsibility of the participant to make up any missed work.

The 12 participants were split into two separate groups with six participants in each group forming a girls group and a boys group. Each group met once per week, for 40-50 minute group sessions. Both groups met for a total of 8 sessions and utilized the same curriculum which was comprised of a series of psychoeducational and discussion-based lessons, games, and activities, aimed at helping the participants build and strengthen assertiveness skills, learn how to identify and effectively express feelings, work together as a team, identify and utilize a support network, practice role playing, etc.

**Materials**

Participants were administered the Rosenberg’s Self-Esteem Scale, for the purpose of measuring any changes in self-esteem levels throughout the course of the counseling program. The Self-Esteem Scale consists of a total of 10 questions (e.g., “I feel I am as important as others”, “I have good feelings about myself”, “I feel I don’t have much to be proud of”), which uses a four-point likert scale for responses. The “elementary version” of the Rosenberg’s Self-Esteem Scale was used in this study, because of the age/grade level of you should spell out how the age/grade level would impact the choice of scales the participants. On the day of their first group session, participants were distributed the scale during the first five minutes of group—prior to introductions. They were then given a duplicate scale to complete at the conclusion of their final group session.

The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale is a brief and unidimensional measure of global self-esteem (Rosenberg, 1968). It is made up of 10 items that refer to self-respect and self-acceptance rated on a four-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (*totally disagree*) to 4 (*totally agree*). The scale
generally has high reliability and test-retest correlations are typically in the range of .82 to .88—
with Cronbach's alpha for various samples in the range of .77 to .88 (Blascovich & Tomaka,
1993; Rosenberg, 1986). Items 1, 3, 4, 7, and 10 on the scale are positively worded, and items 2,
5, 6, 8, and 9 negatively. To score the items, a value is assigned to each of the 10 items as
follows: for items 1, 2, 4, 6, 7: Strongly Agree=3, Agree=2, Disagree=1, and Strongly
Disagree=0. For items 3, 5, 8, 9, 10: Strongly Agree=0, Agree=1, Disagree=2, and Strongly
Disagree=3. The scale ranges from 0-30, with 30 indicating the highest score possible; the higher
the score, the higher the level of self-esteem.

**Procedure**

The two groups met one time per week for a total of eight group sessions—each group lasting
40-50 minutes in duration. The curriculum for each of the counseling sessions was planned out in
advance and included a variety of psychoeducational topics, discussions, activities, games, etc.

The topics for each of the group sessions is listed in Table 1 below.

**Table One – Weekly Session Activities**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Session</th>
<th>Activity</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Session one:</td>
<td>Administer Pre Study Questionnaire</td>
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<td>Introduction and Group Norms/Expectations</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Group/Member Goals</td>
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<td>Session two:</td>
<td>What is Bullying?</td>
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<td>Why do Bullies Bully?</td>
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<td>Session three:</td>
<td>Feelings and Needs</td>
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<td>Session four:</td>
<td>Protective Factors</td>
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<td>Session five:</td>
<td>Learning and Practicing Assertiveness</td>
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<td>Session six:</td>
<td>Asking for Help</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Safe Places</td>
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Session one. (Five of the six students were present in the boys group and five of the six students were present in the girls group).

At the start of session one, the researcher administered the assessment instrument (Rosenberg’s Self-Esteem Scale) to the participants. Students were informed that their participation was voluntary and confidential. They were requested to respond as honestly as possible, and there was no time limit. The researcher provided necessary help and made sure that the participants had completed the questionnaire correctly.

Following the completion of the assessment instrument, participants completed introductions. They were asked to share their names, along with how they came to be a part of this group. In addition, they completed an icebreaker activity—“two truths and one lie”. Members were given index cards, on which they were asked to write down two facts and one lie about themselves. They each took turns reading the cards aloud—as the other group members tried to guess the lie. The purpose of this activity was to help the group members get to know one another and begin to form rapport.

Next, group norms/expectations were discussed and created. The researcher explained to the group members how group norms are defined, why they are important, and then asked the members to come up with their own set of norms/expectations for the group. As participants offered ideas, members discussed them as a group, and one designated member wrote the norms down on a large sheet of poster paper—which was displayed at each of the group sessions. For
the girls group, norms included “what gets said in the room, stays in the room”, “be nice to each other”, and “no swearing”. Norms for the boys group included “be respectful” and “no horseplay”.

Lastly, group members were asked to share about their individual goals for the group going forward/what they each hope to achieve or gain through the group counseling process. Researcher asked the members to note the similarities and consistent themes in what was said.

The researcher met with each of the absent participants for an individual session throughout the next few days, to inform them of what took place during the group they missed and to have them each complete the pre study questionnaire. One of the members missed the group session because a teacher needed her during that time to make up a test. Following this episode, the researcher sent communication to all faculty members reminding them of the importance of the students’ participation in these group counseling sessions.

*Session two. (no absent members in either group).*

Session two began with group introductions, as members were asked to share their names, along with the “highlight” of their week. In addition, they participated in another “icebreaker” question—If you could be any animal, what would you be and why? Again, the purpose of this question was to help the members get to know one another better and to further establish rapport.

Members were then presented with four scenarios—each depicting a story where a student faces a different form of bullying. After reading the scenarios, the group members discussed them aloud and spoke about which type of bullying they saw in each of the scenarios. The researcher presented the participants with an overview of the four primary types of bullying—physical, verbal, indirect/psychological, and cyberbullying—and also offered the group a few broad definitions of the term bullying. Members were given the opportunity to share about their
personal experiences of bullying in each of the four areas and to discuss which form(s) of bullying they believe to be most prevalent at their grade level.

Next, the researcher asked the group members to share about why they believe people bully others. As they gave responses, the top five answers were revealed, which included “they are looking for attention”, “someone else is picking on them”, and “they have no friends and feel lonely”. Participants were asked to share about why they believe these five reasons might make someone bully others.

In closing, members were each asked to share one thing they learned from this session.

Session three. (all members present in the girls group; one member absent from the boys group).

Session three began with group introductions, as members were asked to share their names, along with the “highlight” of their week. In addition, they were asked to answer another “icebreaker” question—“If you were stranded on a desert island, what three items and three people would you take with you? Why?”

The researcher then asked group members how they might define “feelings”. Several textbook definitions were then read aloud to them. The researcher explained to the participants that we all feel different things at different times and that feelings are not “good” or “bad”, “right” or “wrong”. Members were distributed several handouts, which included a “feelings list” and a “needs inventory”. Each of the lists were reviewed and processed in depth, including members being asked to choose feelings that they may currently be experiencing or needs that they believe are important to them but may not be presently met.

Members were asked to write down eight feelings that they believe to be common among students who are bullied. Participants shared their lists aloud with the group and shared, as a group, about common themes/feelings they heard. Members were explained the importance and
therapeutic value of expressing ones feelings and how expression might benefit someone in a situation where they are the target of an aggressor. Members were then asked to brainstorm potential ways of expressing their feelings. Members in the girls group replied with, “art, journaling, and talking to friends”, while members from the boys group said, “music, drawing, and talking to teachers.”

In closing, members were each asked to share one thing they learned from the session.

*Session four. (One member absent from the girls group; one member absent from the boys group).*

Session four began with introductions, as members were asked to share their names, feeling in the moment, and the “highlight of the week”. The icebreaker question of the week was, “If you could have dinner with anyone in the world, alive or dead, whom would you choose? What would you talk about?”

The researcher explained to the group members that “protective factors” are those factors that tend to help people thrive in the face of adversity—buffering individuals against the effects of stressful experiences (such as bullying) and fostering resilience. Members were distributed a handout listing several “protective factors”, which included things like social support, healthy self-esteem, spirituality, caring and support from teachers, pets, goals, etc. Members could add whatever they wanted to the list.

Participants were given paper and art supplies and asked to draw out/construct a picture of the protective factors in their life. They could choose to focus on only one or two factors that are the most important to them or choose to draw a picture depicting many factors. Afterwards, members were asked to share their artwork with the group.
The researcher then asked the group members how they might expand upon their protective factors going forward. Where would they like to see changes made? How might they go about making this happen?

In closing, members were asked to share one thing they learned from the group.

It is important to note that there was one activity added to both groups during session four that was not a part of the original plan/curriculum. During group session #3—Feelings and Needs—many of the members shared that “music” is an effective way they cope with their emotions. The researcher asked them each to think of a song that was of value/meaning to them—either because of the lyrics, the sound, the sentimental value, whatever it is that makes that song special for them. Participants were asked to come prepared to share that song during the next group session. During session four, while members were creating their collages on “protective factors”, the writer played each member’s song individually—as they described the meaning behind the song for them.

*Session five (one member absent from the boys group; all members present in the girls group)*

Session five began with group introductions, as members were asked to share their names, feeling in the moment, and the “highlight” of their week. In addition, they were asked to answer the question, “If you won a million dollars, what would you do with the money?”

Counselor asked the group members about their familiarity with the term “assertive behavior” and how they might define it. They are then distributed a handout that describes the differences between assertive behavior, passive behavior, aggressive behavior, and passive-aggressive behavior. The handout is processed in detail with the group members, and participants are asked to share about which style they believe they use most often, as well as the style they think they
would feel most uncomfortable using and why. Members were encouraged to share examples of personal experiences.

Counselor then shares examples of situations that the group members could either role-play or discuss within the group which would display the various communication styles. For example, “You are waiting in the lunch line to be served and someone pushes in front of you. What do you do/say?” In both the girls group and the boys group, members opted to role-play the scenarios instead of just discussing them. Afterwards, members were distributed a handout: “Simple tips on being assertive”.

In closing, each member was asked to share one thing they learned from the group session.

Session six. (two members absent from the boys group; one member absent from the girls group).

Session six began with group introductions, as members shared their names, feeling in the moment, and the “highlight” of their week. In addition, they were asked to answer the question, “If you could be on any reality TV show, what would you choose and why?”

The researcher explained to the group that sometimes we need additional help and support from other people, and that it is okay to ask for help. The researcher read aloud several statements and asked that the participants give a “thumbs up” if they would ask for help in this situation, or “thumbs down” if they would not. Some of the statements included, “You are stuck with your homework”, “You are being bullied”, “You are out of toilet paper, and “You think your friend might have an eating problem”.

After reading the list, the researcher asks the participants to share about why they answered what they did for each statement. They were also asked to talk about who they might ask for help in each of these situations. The range in responses from the participants led to a discussion about our differences in how and when we might seek help.
The researcher presents the group members with a few situations in which they might feel unsafe. Members are asked where they could go or whom they might talk to in these situations. The researcher notes that in many games there are places set aside in which players can stay safe. For example, in tag, there is a free base. In basketball or soccer, it is the sidelines. The researcher asked the participants questions, such as, What makes a place safe?, How do you know you are safe when you are there?, When have you felt unsafe?, What did you do to feel safe again?, etc.

Members are asked to share about times when they were in an unsafe place. What were they thinking? What were they feeling? How did they respond? Each member shared about a specific experience where they felt unsafe. They were then asked to share about their “safe places” and “safe people”. Many shared that they feel safe in school, despite fearing being bullied at school.

In closing, each member was asked to share one thing they learned from the group.

*Session seven (no absences in either group).*

Session seven began with group introductions, as members were asked to share their names, feeling in the moment, as well as the “highlight” of their week. In addition, they were asked to share their “three greatest qualities/strengths”.

Members were then asked to participate in a “strength bombardment” activity. A chair was placed so that its back was facing the group. One by one, each member was asked to sit in the chair for one minute. During that time, the rest of the group was encouraged to offer feedback to the person sitting in the chair. No negative feedback was permitted. The feedback was to be positive and genuine.

Once every member had the opportunity to participate, members were asked to process this experience. Counselor introduced the notion of the “inner critic” and discussed how many of us can be self-critical (i.e., “I am not good enough”, I am not pretty enough”, etc.). It was explained
to the group members that the reason the receiver was to sit with her back facing the group was because face-to-face can often inhibit the process. With your back to the group, one is in a position of vulnerability. Members were also asked to share about any feedback that may have surprised them.

Following the strength bombardment activity, members were distributed a copy of the poem, “I Am Me: A Declaration of Self-Esteem”, which was read aloud as a group. In each of the groups, members took turns reading a line/stanza until the poem was completed. Members were encouraged to share about what the poem meant for them and were asked to pick out one line, word, or phrase that resonated with them.

In closing, members were asked to share one thing they learned from the session. Members were then presented with four scenarios—each depicting a story where a student faces a different form of bullying. After reading the scenarios, the group members discussed them aloud and spoke about which type of bullying they saw in each of the scenarios. The researcher presented the participants with an overview of the four primary types of bullying—physical, verbal, indirect/psychological, and cyberbullying—and also offered the group a few broad definitions of the term bullying. Members were given the opportunity to share about their personal experiences of bullying in each of the four areas and to discuss which form(s) of bullying they believe to be most prevalent at their grade level.

Next, the researcher asked the group members to share about why they believe people bully others. As they gave responses, the top five answers were revealed, which included “they are looking for attention”, “someone else is picking on them”, and “they have no friends and feel lonely”. Participants were asked to share about why they believe these five reasons might make someone bully others.
In closing, members were each asked to share one thing they learned from this session.

Session eight. (no absences in either group).

Session eight began with introductions, as usual, although it was explained to the participants that introductions would be conducted a little bit differently during this session—the final group session. Members were instructed to begin by saying, “One thing I have learned from this group is…”, and then fill in the blank. Each group member was instructed to respond as quickly and briefly as possible. Participants went around the circle as many times as possible within five minutes.

The researcher asked members to share about any recurring themes they noticed as everyone shared about what was learned through this group experience. Members were then asked to share their thoughts and feelings regarding the termination of the group process. They were reminded that closing activities for groups like these may produce feelings of anxiety and sadness, and that this is normal. In both groups, many of the members did express of sadness about the termination process.

Participants were asked to share about their individual plans/goals moving forward, now that the group had come to an end.

In closing, members were once again distributed the Rosenberg’s Self-Esteem Scale (the Elementary Version) as a post questionnaire.

In the following days and weeks after the groups terminated, the researcher met with each participant individually for debriefing. Members gave verbal feedback about their experiences in the group counseling program and were given the opportunity to express any concerns or ask questions. In addition, as part of the Rush-Henrietta IRB agreement, counselor also contacted parents/guardians of the participants via phone and/or email to also debrief with them. A few of
the parents requested copies of the data/results. Lastly, counselor met with the principal and vice-principal of the building to also conduct a debriefing meeting with them.

**Results**

After the post study questionnaires were completed, the test scores from the pre and the post tests were compared for both groups. Although both groups began with six participants, one of the members from the boys group was terminated by the counselor after missing three consecutive group sessions due an illness that resulted in him missing several months of school. Therefore, the final number of participants that completed the entire study was 11. Again, the Rosenberg’s Self-Esteem Scale (the Elementary Version) was utilized as the pre and post questionnaire to measure any changes in self-esteem levels. The test uses a “likert” scale from 1-4, however, because some of the questions were “negatively phrased”, some of the numbers and wording had to be reversed for appropriate scoring. For example, the statement that was originally phrased, “I feel I don’t have much to be proud of” was changed to “I feel I have much to be proud of—and the responses were flipped to allow for proper scoring of the test.

The means (the calculated “central value” of a set of numbers) was calculated for both the girls group and the boys group—to determine an “overall” change in scores when all of the participants’ results from each group were averaged together.

Next, a paired-samples t-test was conducted to compare the means of the two groups to determine if the counseling group had a statistically significant impact on the self-esteem levels of the participants. T-scores, degrees of freedom, and level of significance was determined for each of the 10 pairs of questions. The confidence interval was set at 95% which means that the difference in numbers is expected to arise by chance less than 5% of the time.
Table Two – Mean Scores for Girls Group

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<th>Pretest</th>
<th>Posttest</th>
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<td>Score</td>
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Table Three – Mean Scores for Boys Group

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<th>Pretest</th>
<th>Posttest</th>
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<td>Score</td>
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Table Four – Paired Samples Test for Girls Group

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Table Five – Paired Samples Test for Boys Group

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<td>Pair 8</td>
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<td>Mean</td>
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**Discussion**

The purpose of this study was to increase the self-esteem levels of students identified as the targets of bullying aggressors. The group counseling curriculum consisted of a variety of discussion-based topics, psychoeducational activities, assertiveness skill building, games, role playing activities, etc. The material was an equal balance of education and process—with the primary goal being the improvement of self-esteem and self-concept, while providing the participants with the opportunity to learn, build, and practice skills in a safe, non-judgmental environment.

The girls group appeared to connect with one another much faster than the members in the boys group, although the boys seemed to become more cohesive towards the end of the study. One of the members from the boys group was terminated from the study by counselor after he missed three consecutive group sessions related to severe illness, ending the study with 11 participants. When this student later returned to school, counselor was able to meet with him and further process the group experience and termination.

Test scores improved for all 11 of the participants at the end of the study—which would indicate an increase in self-esteem levels. In looking at the results of the t-test, a “significant” statistical difference was found between the pretest and posttest scores (p = 0.05). Statistical significance is set at 0.05 or less. For the girls group, a “marginally” significant statistical difference was found between the pretest and posttest scores (p=0.06), as determined by the t-test.

For the boys group, the greatest change in numbers was seen in question/pair 10—“I feel that I am good enough”—which was determined to have a significance of 0.001. For the girls group,
the greatest change in number was seen in question/pair 9—“I feel worthwhile”—with a significance of 0.017.

Verbal feedback from the participants during the final session and during the debriefing sessions was that the group was helpful for them and that they would like to see it continue. Members cited role playing activities, assertiveness skill building, and the “connections” they formed with the other group members as the most beneficial parts of the process. Many of the members from the girls group report that they continue to sustain their connections and relationships and use each other for support when needed. Members from the boys group have reported that they have been able to practice some of the skills they learned through the group experience, such as “healthy expression of emotion” and “practicing assertiveness. Almost all of the members cited the “safety” and “warmth” of the group environment as a change factor in itself.

**Limitations**

Several limitations were identified for this research project. First, with only 11 students participating in this study, it is difficult to make generalizations about data based on the small number of subjects involved.

Another limitation would be that many of the participants missed several group sessions due to illness, needing to make up classwork, in-school suspensions, etc. Although some of the group members attended each and every scheduled group sessions, there were a few members who missed one or more groups. In fact, one member from the boys group was terminated from the study after missing three consecutive groups.

Lastly, group sessions were often started late because of the time it took for students to make it to the classroom or because of issues and mix-ups with pass distribution. Because of this, some
of the lessons/activities needed to be altered or cut short. It was difficult to adhere strictly to the curriculum because of these time issues.

**Implications and Recommendations**

School counselors are called to provide effective services for all students by asking the question, "How are students different as a result of school counseling services?" (ASCA, 2005). This study illustrates that students were different as a result of the group counseling intervention. Self-esteem scores did improve for all 11 participants involved in this study. For many of the questions/pairs, and for the boys group as a whole, there was found to be statistical significance between the pre and post questionnaire scores.

It is highly recommended that this school district, and possibly others as well, consider incorporating this curriculum/group counseling program into the standard counseling program for students experiencing bullying behaviors and/or low self-esteem. Lengthening the course of the program may also even be considered. With such a significant change after only 8 sessions, it is possible that a longer group program may elicit more significant change.

School Counselors should continue studying the effectiveness of group counseling on self-esteem levels in students who have experienced bullying. Further, there is an increased need for school counselors to report their data on effectiveness of counseling programs and to make sure the data comes from carefully designed experimental studies (Myrick & Dixon, 1990). Through research, school counselors will be able to show what works and what does not work.

**Conclusion**

Bullying is a serious, rapidly growing problem that can dramatically affect the ability of individuals to progress on many different levels—and with devastating effects on students’ self-esteem and self-concept. This research study has shown to be effective in increasing the self-
esteem levels of students who were identified as the targets of bullying aggressors. In addition to an increase in scores on their pre and post questionnaires, the students also shared verbal feedback that the experience was helpful and rewarding for them, that they “felt better about themselves” as a result, and are better able to ask and reach out for help.
References


Hazler, R.J., Carney, J.V., & Granger, D.A. (2006). Integrating biological measures into the


## Rosenberg’s Self-Esteem Scale: Elementary Version

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Oh Yeah!</th>
<th>Yeah, Sometimes.</th>
<th>No, Not Really.</th>
<th>No Way!</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I feel I am as important as others.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I feel there are a lot of good things about me.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I tend to feel that I am a loser.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. I feel I can do things as well as most other people.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. I feel I don’t have much to be proud of.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. I have good feelings about myself.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Most of the time I am happy with myself.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. I wish I could appreciate myself more.</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. I feel useless sometimes.</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. At times I think I am no good at all.</td>
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</table>
To: Denise Zeh  
From: Christine Reber  
Subject: Research Project  
Date: October 14th, 2011  

I would like to request permission to implement my research project at Roth Middle School. The purpose of my study is to measure the impact of group counseling on self-esteem levels in 7th grade girls and 7th grade boys who have been identified as the targets of bullying. I will facilitate two, eight week, education-based groups for students who have been identified by teachers, counselors, and other school staff as being the targets of bullying—one comprised of six females and the other of six males. A pre and post survey questionnaire—the Rosenberg’s Self-Esteem Scale—will be administered to each group of students during the first and the last day of group sessions to measure self-esteem. The confidentiality of each of the students will be protected, and no identifying information will be recorded on the questionnaires. I plan to initiate my research in January 2012 and reach completion by May 2012.

By signing this form you give me permission to conduct this study. In addition, you are fully aware of my research plans and are in agreement with its implementation at Roth Middle School.

Name_______________________________________  
Signature______________________________________  
Date________________________________________  
Title_________________________________________
Dear Faculty,

For those of you who may not know me, my name is Christine Reber, and I will be working as an intern in the Counseling Office during the 2011-2012 academic school year.

This letter is to inform you of a research project that I will be conducting at the school as part of the requirements for my master’s degree in Counselor Education from the College at Brockport, State University of New York. I will be studying the impact of group counseling on self-esteem in 7th grade girls and 7th grade boys who have been identified as the targets of bullying, and my plan is to implement two, eight week, education-based groups—one comprised of six females and the other of six males—with the goal of increasing self-esteem levels in the participating group members. The groups will be held one day per week, for a total of eight weeks, and will begin in January 2012.

I would like your assistance in selecting students for this group, and am asking for your input in identifying students whom you have either witnessed being bullied or who have confided in you that they have been bullied. The students must be 7th graders.

Thank you in advance for your time and assistance with this project. If you have any questions, or would like more detailed information regarding this study, please feel free to email me or visit me in the Counseling Office.

Sincerely,
Christine Reber

Please detach this form, place in a sealed envelope, and return to Christine Reber or place in Robin Hernandez’s mailbox

Student Name_________________________________________ ________________________________
Teacher Name_________________________________________ ________________________________
Observation/Situation leading to referral______________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
STATEMENT OF INFORMED CONSENT FOR PARENTS/GUARDIANS

Dear Parent/Guardian:

My name is Christine Reber, and I will be working as an intern in the counseling office at Roth Middle School during the 2011-2012 academic school year. As a graduate student pursuing a master’s degree in school counseling at the College at Brockport, State University of New York, one of the requirements of my program is that I complete a thesis/research project.

The purpose of my research study will be to study the impact of group counseling on self-esteem in 7th grade girls and 7th grade boys who have been identified as the targets of bullying. If your child is selected to be a part of this study, he or she will be participating in a group counseling program that will be held one day per week, for a total of eight weeks. The primary aim of the group will be to raise your child’s self-esteem, and will focus on a variety of topics and team building activities, such as including assertiveness skills, role-playing, strengths-based activities, etc. I will be administering a pre-study questionnaire at the start of the program, as well as at the conclusion of the program: Rosenberg’s Self-Esteem Scale.

One possible benefit from this study is that your child will experience increased levels in their self-esteem and feel better about themselves. One possible drawback is that your child may be disclosing information of a personal nature. He or she is not required to share any information he or she does not feel comfortable sharing.

Any information that your child shares in this study remains confidential and will be known only to myself. The only exception to this is if information is revealed that your child’s health or safety may be in danger or there is a threat to someone else’s health or safety, in which case another professional may need to be contacted. Except for this consent form, all questionnaires/documents will be given a code number and names will not be placed on them.

Your child’s participation in this study is completely voluntary. You or your child are free to change your mind or withdraw participation in the study at any time during the process, without penalty. If you give permission for your child to participate in this study, and you agree with the statement below, please sign in the space provided.

If you have any questions you may contact:

Primary Researcher:
Christine Reber
(585) 359-5122

Faculty Advisor:
Summer Reiner
(585) 395-2258
“I understand the information provided on this form and give permission for my child to participate in this study.”

Signature of Parent/Guardian

Date

Name of Child

Date

**This research study has been approved by the Rush Henrietta School District Institutional Review Board, but the actual research is not conducted by, or on behalf of, the RHSD. This research study will be conducted by Christine Reber in fulfillment of her thesis requirement for her Master’s degree in Counselor Education at the College at Brockport, State University of New York.**


Appendix E

STATEMENT OF INFORMED CONSENT FOR MINORS

Dear Student:

My name is Christine Reber, and I will be working as an intern in the counseling office at Roth Middle School during the 2011-2012 academic school year. As a graduate student pursuing a master’s degree in school counseling at the College at Brockport, State University of New York, one of the requirements of my program is that I complete a thesis/research project.

The purpose of my research study will be to study the impact of group counseling on self-esteem in 7th grade girls and 7th grade boys who have been identified as the targets of bullying. If you are selected to be a part of this study, you will be participating in a group counseling program that will be held one day per week, for a total of eight weeks. The primary aim of the group will be to raise your self-esteem, and will focus on a variety of topics and team building activities, such as assertiveness skills, role-playing, strengths-based activities, etc. I will be administering a pre-study questionnaire at the start of the program, as well as at the conclusion of the program: Rosenberg’s Self-Esteem Scale.

One possible benefit from this study is that you will experience increased levels in your self-esteem and feel better about yourself. One possible drawback is that you may be disclosing information of a personal nature. You are not required to share any information you do not feel comfortable sharing.

Any information that you share as part of this study remains confidential and will be known only to myself. The only exception to this is if information is revealed that your health or safety may be in danger or there is a threat to someone else’s health or safety, in which case another professional may need to be contacted. Except for this consent form, all questionnaires/documents will be given a code number and your name will not be placed on them.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You are free to change your mind or withdraw your participation in the study at any time during the process, without penalty. If you give permission to participate in this study, and you agree with the statement below, please sign in the space provided.

If you have any questions you may contact:

Primary Researcher:
Christine Reber
(585) 359-5122

Faculty Advisor:
Summer Reiner
(585) 395-2258

“I understand the information provided on this form and agree to participate in this study.”

__________________________________________  ___________________________
Signature of Participant                          Date
Appendix F

Dear Christine,

This letter is a confirmation of our agreement to participate in a counseling study at Roth Middle School as a part of your studies at the State University of New York, College at Brockport.

You will be studying the effects of bullying on middle school students through group counseling work under the direction of Robin Hernandez, middle school counselor, and Denise Zeh, Roth Middle School principal. We are asking that you debrief with the principal at the end of the study to alert her to any ongoing issues that you uncover regarding bullying at the school. The Rush-Henrietta Central School District is also asking that you provide us with a copy of any written reports submitted to the college through this study.

It is absolutely necessary that student confidentiality be maintained in this study. It is also imperative that you alert the principal immediately if anything relating to the health and safety of our students is disclosed during the group sessions. Parents who agree to have their students participate may also want to be debriefed about this work and I ask you to consider that as a part of the process.

We are glad to support your work but please be advised that Rush-Henrietta Central School District does not endorse this study. The supervising institution is the College at Brockport and the college will assume all responsibility related to this work.

Thank you so much for asking us to partner with you in this study. We hope your research is beneficial and helps us learn more about addressing bullying in our schools.

Denise Anthony
Assistant Superintendent for Quality Assurance and Community Relations
Rush-Henrietta Central School District
2034 Lehigh Station Road
Henrietta, New York 14467
585-359-5018
danthony@rhnet.org

November 17, 2011
Appendix G

Date: November 23, 2011

To: Christine Reber

From: Colleen Donaldson
    Institutional Review Board Director

Re: IRB Project # 2011-43

Project Title: Impact of Group Counseling on Self-esteem

Your proposal "Impact of Group Counseling on Self-esteem" has been approved as of 11/22/11. Approval was based on the decision of the Rush Henrietta IRB to approve your proposal.

You must use only the approved consent form or informational letter and any applicable surveys or interview questions that have been approved by the IRB in conducting your project. If you desire to make any changes in these documents or the procedures that were approved by the IRB you must obtain approval from the IRB prior to implementing any changes.

If you wish to continue this project beyond one year, federal guidelines require IRB approval before the project can be approved for an additional year. A reminder continuation letter will be sent to you in eleven months with the specific information that you will need to submit for continued approval of your project. Please note also that if the project initially required a full meeting of the IRB (Category III proposal) for the first review, then continuation of the project after one year will again require full IRB review.

Please contact Colleen Donaldson, IRB Administrator, Office of Academic Affairs, at (585) 395-5118 or cdonalds@rockport.edu, immediately if:

- the project changes substantially,
- a subject is injured,
- the level of risk increases
- changes are needed in your consent document, survey or interview questions or other related materials.

Best wishes in conducting your research.
#1/Introductory Group:

(1) Counselor will administer pre-study questionnaire—The Rosenberg’s Self-Esteem Scale (Elementary Version).

(2) Introductions: Group members will be asked to share their names, along with how they came to be a part of this group. Also part of the introductions will be an icebreaker activity—“two truths and one lie”. Members will be given index cards, on which they are each to write down two facts and one lie about themselves. The other group members will try to guess the lie. The purpose of this activity will be to help the group members get to know one another and begin to form rapport.

(3) Group norms/expectations will be created and discussed. Counselor will explain to the members what group norms are, why they are important, and then ask members to come up with specific expectations they would like to establish for this group. They will write down/draw out group norms on a large sheet of paper, which will be displayed within sight at each group session. The purpose of this will be to help the group members establish a foundation for the group and to gain an understanding of what will be expected from everyone in future group sessions.

(4) Members will be asked to share about their goals for the group/what they each hope to achieve or gain throughout the upcoming group sessions.
Appendix I

#2/What is Bullying?

(1) Introductions: Group members will be asked to share their names, along with the “highlight” of their week. In addition, they will be asked another “icebreaker” question—“If you could be any animal, what would you be and why?” Again, the purpose of this question is to further help the members get to know one another and establish rapport. Each week, members will begin the group with introductions, and each week, there will be a different question incorporated (to add variety and fun).

(2) Members will be asked to read the following four scenarios:

(a) Tom is in grade 8. He is scared to go to school because Marcus, a boy in his class, likes to lock Tom inside his locker.

(b) Christina is in grade 7. Lately, her friend Maria has started hanging out with a new girl in the class, Justine. When Christina walks over to the two girls at recess, Maria and Justine will either pretend they can’t hear what Christina says to them or they will run away laughing.

(c) Steven got braces two weeks ago. Kate, a girl in his class, has been making fun of him every time he smiles, calling him Braceface and Metal Mouth. Steven doesn’t like to show his teeth anymore at school because he knows Kate will make jokes about it.

(d) Brittany is having a Facebook chat with Torie. They are talking about the kids in their class and Brittany tells Torie that she has a crush on Ethan, the new boy in the class. The next day, Brittany discovers that Torie has copied their message and emailed it to all the kids in their grade, including Ethan.

(3) Counselor will explain to the group members that each of these four scenarios are examples of bullying, and will then ask members to try to define what they believe to be the definition of bullying. On a large sheet of paper, counselor will write out a definition of bullying. It will be explained to the members that there are four main types of bullying—and that not all bullying is done through hitting and pushing others:

- **Physical bullying**: punching, kicking, spitting, etc.
- **Verbal bullying**: name calling, threatening, teasing, etc.
- **Indirect or Psychological bullying**: spreading rumors, excluding people from games and groups, etc.
- **Cyberbullying**: writing mean things on someone’s Facebook, emailing embarrassing photos of people, etc.
(4) Counselor will write the four types of bullying on the sheet of paper and discuss what each one entails. Members will be asked to give examples of each type and write them on the paper.

(5) Counselor will then ask members to share about WHY they believe people bully others. As they give responses, the top five answers will be revealed:

(a) Someone else is picking on them
(b) They are looking for attention
(c) They feel bad about themselves and want others to feel bad too
(d) They have no friends and feel lonely
(e) They want people around them to think they are strong and tough

(6) Counselor will give the members insight into what each one of these means. As a group, members will process why these five reasons might make someone bully others.

(7) Session closing: Members will be asked to each share one thing they have learned from this session.
Appendix J

#3/Feelings and Needs:

(1) Introductions: Group members will be asked to share their names, along with the “highlight” of their week. In addition, they will be asked another “icebreaker” question—“If you were stranded on a desert island, what three items and three people would you take with you? Why?”

(2) Counselor will ask group members to talk about what they believe to be the definition of “feelings”, and will then read aloud a textbook definition of feelings. Counselor will explain that we all feel different things at different times, and that feelings aren’t “good” or “bad, “right” or “wrong”. Feelings just are. Members will review “feelings lists” (see below). Next, members will be asked to talk about “needs”, and how needs may differ from feelings. Members will review “needs inventory” (see below).

(3) Group members will be distributed handouts similar to the following:

---

**Feelings when your needs are satisfied**

<table>
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<th>AFFECTIONATE</th>
<th>CONFIDENT</th>
<th>GRATEFUL</th>
<th>PEACEFUL</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>compassionate</td>
<td>empowered</td>
<td>appreciative</td>
<td>calm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>friendly</td>
<td>open</td>
<td>moved</td>
<td>clear headed</td>
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<td>proud</td>
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<td>comfortable</td>
</tr>
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<td>stimulated</td>
<td>surprised</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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HOPEFUL  vibrant  enthralled  rested
expectant  exuberant  restored
encouraged  radiant  revived
optimistic

Feelings when your needs are not satisfied

AFRAID  CONFUSED  EMBARRASSED
apprehensive  ambivalent  ashamed
dread  baffled  chagrined
foreboding  bewildered  flustered
frightened  dazed  guilty
mistrustful  hesitant  mortified
panicked  lost  self-conscious
petrified  mystified  FATIGUE
scared  perplexed  beat
suspicious  puzzled  burnt out
terrified  torn  depleted
wary  disoriented  exhausted
worried  distances  lethargic

ANNOYED  CONFUSED  EMBARRASSED
aggravated  ambivalent  ashamed
dismayed  baffled  chagrined
disgruntled  bewildered  flustered
displeased  dazed  guilty
exasperated  hesitant  mortified
frustrated  lost  self-conscious
impatient  mystified  FATIGUE
irritated  perplexed  beat
irked  puzzled  burnt out

ANGRY  CONFUSED  EMBARRASSED
enraged  ambivalent  ashamed
furious  baffled  chagrined
indignant  bewildered  flustered
irate  dazed  guilty
livid  hesitant  mortified
outraged  lost  self-conscious
resentful  mystified  FATIGUE

AVERTION  CONFUSED  EMBARRASSED
animosity  ambivalent  ashamed
appalled  baffled  chagrined
contempt
disgusted
dislike
hate
horrified
hostile
repulsed
startled
surprised
troubled	

turbulent
uncomfortable
uneasy
unnerved
unsettled
upset
disappointed
discouraged
dishheartened
forlorn
gloomy
heavy hearted
hopeless
melancholy
unhappy
wretched

Needs Inventory

CONNECTION
acceptance
affection
appreciation
belonging
cooperation
communication
closeness
community
companionship
compassion
consideration
consistency
empathy
inclusion
intimacy
love
mutuality
nurturing
respect/self-respect

CONNECTION continued
safety
security
stability
support
to know and be known
to see and be seen
to understand and
be understood
trust
warmth

PHYSICAL WELL-BEING
air
food
movement/exercise
rest/sleep
sexual expression

HONESTY
authenticity
integrity
presence

PLAY
joy
humor

PEACE
beauty
communion
ease
equality
harmony

AUTONOMY
choice
freedom
independence
space
spontaneity

MEANING
awareness
celebration of
life
challenge
clarity
competence
consciousness
contribution
creativity
discovery
efficacy
effectiveness

growth

hope
learning
mourning
participation
purpose
self-expression
stimulation
to matter
understanding
(4) Counselor will ask group members to write down eight feelings that are common among students who are bullied. They will then be asked to share their lists aloud with the group and talk about common themes/feelings they heard.

(5) Counselor informs group members that it is important to express ourselves, to talk about our feelings, and to ask questions about what confuses us. Members are told that there are several different ways to express feelings in healthy, positive, and effective ways. They are asked to brainstorm ways of expressing feelings, and these are written down on a large sheet of paper. These methods of expression may include journaling, drawing pictures, using “I feel” statements, etc.

(6) Session closing: Members will be asked to each share one thing they have learned from this session.
Appendix K

#4/Protective Factors:

(1) Introductions: Group members will be asked to share their names, feeling in the moment, and the “highlight” of their week. In addition, they will be asked another “icebreaker” question—“If you could have dinner with anyone in the world, alive or dead, whom would you choose? What would you talk about?”

(2) Counselor explains to the group members that “protective factors” are those factors that tend to help people thrive in the face of adversity. They buffer individuals against the effects of stressful experiences (such as bullying) and foster resilience. Members are distributed a handout listing the following “protective factors”:

- Social support
- Healthy self-esteem
- Spirituality
- Adaptability
- Caring and support from teachers and staff
- Abstinence from alcohol and other drugs
- Hope for the future
- Having goals
- Pets/Connectedness to others
- Good problem-solving skills
- Strong interpersonal bonds, especially with family and adults
- Family cohesion
- Ability to cope and handle crisis
- Opportunities to contribute/participation in school and/or the larger community
- Safe, stable environment

(3) Each item on the list is discussed in detail. Members are asked to think about any factors not on the list that they may want to add.

(4) Members are then given paper and art supplies and asked to draw out/construct a picture of the protective factors in their life. They may choose to focus on only one or two factors that are the most important to them or choose to draw a picture depicting many factors. After, members will be asked to share their artwork with the group.
(5) Counselor will then ask the group members how they might expand upon their protective factors going forward. Where would they like to see changes made? How might they go about making this happen?

(6) Session closing: Members will be asked to each share one thing they have learned from this session.
The Impact of Group Counseling

Appendix L

#5/Being Assertive:

(1) Introductions: Group members will be asked to share their names, feeling in the moment, and the “highlight” of their week. In addition, they will be asked another “icebreaker” question—“If you won a million dollars, what would you do with the money?”

(2) Counselor asks the group members if they are familiar with the term “assertive behavior”, and if so, how they might define it. They are then given a handout similar to the following:

**Aggressive**
- Aiming to win regardless of the other person.
- Standing up for your rights in such a way that the rights of others are violated.
- Putting others down to make you seem better than they are.
- Manipulating others, including tricking them, seducing them, or getting your revenge in subtle ways.
- Deriding, humiliating, belittling or overpowering others in order to win.

**Assertive**
- Expressing true feelings thoughts and beliefs.
- Feeling in control of what you say and do.
- Standing up for your rights, choices and feelings in a way that doesn’t threaten others or violate their rights.
- Assessing a situation and making clear choices about the appropriate way to behave.

**Passive**
- Having difficulty standing up for yourself.
- Avoiding conflict or confrontation.
- Giving up responsibility for yourself – not making decisions for yourself.
- Playing the victim or martyr.
- Not expressing honest and true feelings or thoughts.

(3) Counselor processes the handout with the group members and explains in detail each of the three behavior styles: aggressive, assertive, and passive.

(4) Members will be asked to share about which style they see themselves using most often, as well as the style they think they would feel most uncomfortable using and why. They will be encouraged to share examples.

(5) Counselor then shares the following examples of situations that the group members could either role-play or discuss—demonstrating and/or discussing the three different behavior styles for each one:

(a) You’re waiting in the lunch line to be served and someone pushes in front of you. What do you say/do?
(b) You are at the mall with your friends. One of them suggests you steal an article of clothing by putting it in your purse. You are afraid you might get caught. What do you say/do?

(c) Your best friend asks to go see a movie with her that you really don’t want to see. What do you say/do?

(d) You are at a party. One of the popular girls from your school approaches you and offers you an illegal drug. She is very persistent, and you don’t want to do it. What do you say/do?

(e) You let your friend borrow a dress several weeks ago, and she has not returned it. You would like to wear it to the dance this weekend. What do you say/do?

(6) Members are given a handout: some simple tips on being assertive:

- Repeat quietly but firmly the point you're trying to make. Don't be shouted down.
- Be prepared to say no – firmly and clearly – if you feel someone is trying to pressure you into doing something that you don't want to do.
- Be clear about what you mean, feel or want. Don't be vague as this can lead to misunderstandings and may place you in an awkward position.
- Don't be drawn into arguments or discussion that may lead you into confusing the issue – keep to your main points.
- Don't allow people to make you feel guilty if you can't do something.
- You have a right to decide what you feel able to do or not to do.
- Be aware that body language gives off clear messages. People will take account of how you look, the way you’re standing, sitting, and any eye contact, as well as your tone of voice and the words you actually use.
- When you’re being assertive, you need to keep eye contact, use a firm tone of voice, be positive and don’t go over the top with apologies.

(7) Session closing: Members will be asked to each share one thing they have learned from this session.
Appendix M

#6/Asking for Help:

(1) Introductions: Group members will be asked to share their names, feeling in the moment, and the “highlight” of their week. In addition, they will be asked another “icebreaker” question—“If you could be on any reality TV show, what would you be on and why?”

(2) Counselor explains that sometimes we all need additional help and support from other people, and that it is okay to ask for help. Counselor reads the following statements and students must decide “Yes”—if they would ask for help or “No” of they would not ask for help. They are to indicate their response by using a thumbs up/thumbs down:

(a) You’re stuck with your homework
(b) You’ve run out of toilet paper
(c) You’re being bullied
(d) You’ve got chewing gum on your clothes at school
(e) You think your friend might have an eating problem
(f) You don’t understand what the teacher said

(3) After the group members made their decisions, counselor asks them why they answered what they did for each question. They are also asked to talk about who they might ask for help in each of these situations.

(4) Counselor presents to the group members two or three situations in which they might feel unsafe. Members are asked where they would go or whom they would talk to in these situations. Counselor notes that in many games there are places set aside in which players can stay safe: in tag, there is a free base; in soccer or basketball, the sidelines; and in baseball, the bases. Counselor asks the members the following questions:

(a) What makes a place safe?
(b) How does a place become safe?
(c) How do you know you are safe there?
(d) Is being safe a feeling or an action?
(e) Are there different ways of not feeling safe?
(f) When have you felt unsafe?
(g) What did you do to feel safe again?
(h) Whom did you talk to help you to feel safe?

(5) Members are asked to share about times when they were in an unsafe place. What were they thinking? What were they feeling? How did they respond?
(6) Group members are then asked to name safe places they can go to. They are written down on a large sheet of paper. Members are then asked to name safe people they can talk to. These are also written down on a large sheet of paper.

(7) Session closing: Members will be asked to each share one thing they have learned from this session.
#7/Strength Bombardment:

(1) Members will begin with group introductions. They will be asked to share their names, feeling in the moment, as well as the “highlight” of their week. In addition, they will be asked another “icebreaker” question—“What are your three greatest qualities?”

(2) Next, they will participate in a “strength bombardment activity”. A chair will be placed so that its back is facing the group. One by one, each member will be asked to sit in the chair for one minute. During that time, the rest of the group will be encouraged to offer feedback to the person sitting in the chair. No negative feedback is permitted. The feedback should be positive and genuine.

(3) Once every member has had an opportunity to participate, members will be asked to process this experience. Counselor will introduce the notion of the “inner critic” and discuss how many of us can be self-critical (i.e., “I am not good enough”, I am not pretty enough”, etc.). It will be explained to the group members that the reason the receiver sits with her back facing the group is because face-to-face can often inhibit the process. With your back to the group, you are in a position of vulnerability.

(4) Following the strength bombardment activity, members will be given a copy of the poem, “I Am Me: A Declaration of Self-Esteem” to be read aloud as a group:

I Am Me: A Declaration of Self-Esteem by Virginia Satir

In all the world, there is no one else exactly like me.
Everything that comes out of me is authentically mine
Because I alone chose it.
I own everything about me;
My body, my feelings, my mouth, my voice, all my actions,
Whether they be to others or to myself.
I own my fantasies, my dreams, my hopes, my fears.
I own all my triumphs and successes, all my failures and mistakes.
Because I own all of me, I can become intimately acquainted with me.
By so doing, I can love me and be friendly with me in all my parts.
I know there are aspects about myself that puzzle me, and other aspects that I do not know,
But as long as I am friendly and loving to myself,
I can courageously and hopefully look for solutions to the puzzles and for ways to find out more about me.
However I look and sound, whatever I say and do, and whatever I think and feel, at a given moment in time is authentically me.
If later some parts of how I looked, sounded, thought and felt turn out to be unfitting,
I can discard that which is unfitting, keep the rest, and invent something new for that which I discarded.
I can see, hear, feel, think, say and do.
I have the tools to survive, to be close to others, to be productive, and to make sense and order out of the world of people and things outside of me.
I own me, and therefore I can engineer me.
I am me and I am okay.

(5) Members will then be asked to share about what this poem means to them.

(6) Session closing: Members will be asked to each share one thing they have learned from this session.
Appendix O

#8/Closing Group:

(1) Counselor will explain to the group members that introductions will be conducted a little bit differently today (the last group). Members are instructed to begin by saying, “One thing I have learned from this group is…”, and then fill in the blank. Each group member will be instructed to respond as quickly and briefly as possible. Members will go around the circle as many times as possible within five minutes.

(2) Counselor will ask members to share about any recurring themes they noticed as everyone shared about was learned in the group process.

(3) Members will be encouraged to share their thoughts and feelings regarding the termination of the group process. They will be reminded that closing activities for groups like these may produce feelings of anxiety and sadness, and that this is normal.

(4) Members will be asked to share about their individual plans/goals moving forward, now that the group has come to an end.

(5) Counselor will administer post-study questionnaire—Rosenberg’s Self-Esteem Scale (Elementary Version).