

Effect of a Counselor Facilitated Male Adolescent Group on Behavior

Abstract

Male adolescents are more likely to be behavior referrals, twice as likely to receive D's and F's in school and drop out, than female adolescents, which can lead to greater opportunities of participating in antisocial behaviors. A modern-day rites of passage seems to change the negative trajectory of male adolescents. Is there a statistically significant difference in behavior between male adolescents who attend a 10-week counselor-facilitated group, and those that do not attend the male adolescents group? A modern-day rites of passage program provides a process to redirect male adolescents toward positive behaviors and stay in school. A paired sample *t* test analyzed the data from the Behavioral Evaluation Scale (BES) administered by teachers. The results showed that male adolescent's behavior was better after attending the 10-week program. The control group effect was significant in a negative direction and is reflected in the after scores of each dependent variable.

Keywords: rites of passage, adolescents, male groups, masculinity

The prevalence of problem behaviors among male adolescents in the United States has increased in the past three decades (Aitken, Clark, Fairchild, & Stankovic, 2014; Cohen & Piquero, 2009). These problem behaviors include but limited to binge drinking, vandalism, drunk driving, gang activity, unhealthy sexual activity, and self-harm or suicide attempts (Gallasch & Lines, 2009; Scheer, Gavazzi, & Blumenkrantz, 2007). Within the school setting, the data indicate that male adolescents were diagnosed with higher rates of learning disabilities than female adolescents (Lawlis, 2005; Hawley & Reichert, 2010), received up to 70% of all Ds and Fs given to all students (Hawley & Reichert, 2010), created 90% of all classroom discipline problems (Hawley & Reichert, 2010), and were twice as likely as girls to drop out of school (Cabus & Witte, 2013). A modern-day rites of passage program may be one way to address the developmental needs of male adolescents and improve psychological and educational outcomes.

Two developmental theories can be used to provide the basis of a rites of passage program as a method of addressing the developmental needs of male adolescents: Erikson's (1963, 1968) theory of psychosocial developmental and Bronfenbrenner's (2005) process-person-context-time (PPCT) bioecological model of human development. Erikson's theory emphasizes the biological, psychological, and social aspects of development that contribute to individual growth. There are eight stages of psychosocial development and the individual task in each stage is to resolve the tension or crisis defining that period. All eight crisis-stages are operative in a developmentally appropriate way, with the resolution of earlier stages being formative of later stages and experiences. Stage five is associated with the period of adolescence in which the psychosocial crisis concerns identity vs. role confusion. Erikson's psychosocial development theory may be most relevant for understanding the basis of a rites of passage

program, because such a program would contribute to resolving the crisis associated with this stage of development.

With regard to Bronfenbrenner's (2005) PPCT bioecological model, the model has been used to design a modern-day rites of passage program (Gallasch & Lines, 2009; Rosa & Tudge, 2013). The PPCT model is described as: (a) the process, (b) the person, (c) the context, and (d) time. The context includes: (a) microsystem - home, mesosystem – home – school, home – peers, home-community, (b) exosystem – a follow-on effect, not directly a participant (e.g., bring home from school or work), (c) macrosystem – involve institutional systems (e.g., social, education). The model operationally proposes a method for evaluating developmental outcomes resulting from active participation with the four components of the PPCT model (Ghazinour, Richter, & Ungar, 2013; Rosa & Tudge, 2013). As such, the PPCT model may be most relevant for understanding the format and design or outline of a modern-day rites of passage program.

A modern-day rites of passage program for male adolescents would include mentoring (Genep, 1960; Lessor & Marwit, 2000), physical and mental challenges, character building processes, and graduation or ceremony. These processes can potentially lower behavior disorders that lead to negative referrals in school, as well as prevent male adolescents from dropping out (Cabus & Witte, 2013; Cohen & Piquero, 2009). There is a gap in the literature on dropout prevention measures (Cabus & Witte, 2013), while high school dropout rates have become one of the most prominent educational problems (Fan & Wolters, 2014; Leppanen, 2013). A potential solution may be a counselor-facilitated group for male adolescents in the form of a modern-day rites of passage (Leppanen, 2013; Rohr, 1998) designed to meet the developmental needs of male adolescents. As such, the current study adds to the research literature by evaluating a modern-day rites of passage program as a means of prevention and

intervention with adolescent boys (Anglin, Artz, & Scott, 1998; Gallasch & Lines, 2009; Genep, 1960).

The combination of the two developmental theories as a basis of a modern-day rites of passage extracurricular activity merits further exploration as a strategy to address the behavior problems of male adolescents in school. Previous research has reported that male adolescents who participated in extracurricular activities were less likely to engage in disruptive problem behaviors that can occur when there is no available father (Driessens, 2015). Even so, such activities and programs can also be beneficial for adolescent boys whose fathers are physically or emotionally present. The primary experiences and lessons that are learned when a male adolescent goes through a rites of passage program are respect for the feminine community, anger management, spiritual connection to the divine through personal rituals of renewal, rituals for communal protection and growth, an adult role or mission along with the important work that goes with it, respect for one's own flaws and limitations, integration of one's shadow side into one's life, communication skills, intimacy and sexuality training, hobbies and crafts, knowledge of the natural world, and values and morals (Anglin et al., 1998; Gallasch & Lines, 2009; Genep, 1960).

The purpose of the present study was to evaluate the effectiveness of a 10-week counselor-facilitated group for male adolescents. Specifically, the research question that guided this exploratory study was would male adolescents who participated in a rites of passage group have a positive effect on their behavior?

Methods

Participants

The participants were 40 adolescent boys who participated in a rites of passage program and the teachers of 40 male adolescents who formed the control group. All boys were 11–14 years of age attending middle school or high school. Parents were asked permission for their son to participate in this research study and the rites of passage program (treatment group). No coercion or pressure was used, and participation was voluntary and confidential. The primary teacher was asked to participate as well by completing a questionnaire on the boys in the treatment group. The control group included boys that were identified by their teacher as having had behavior referrals and the potential for dropping out of school. The participants for the control group were the primary teachers who completed a questionnaire on the 40 boys.

Rites of Passage Group

The rites of passage group was a weekly group that met for ten weeks and was led by a counselor. The content was based on the literature on such groups. An analysis of ceremonies that center on an individual's life crisis can be classified as separation, transition, and incorporation (Gennep, 1960) and essential components of a rites of passage in adolescence (Scheer, Gavazzi, & Blumenkrantz, 2007). Rites of passage programs include content on four relationship topics: self, others, world, and the divine (Gallasch & Lines, 2009; Rohr, 1998), and combines emotional and social education with doing and experiencing. An initiation process is confidential, but some common sacred themes associated with many rites of passage rituals include the following: symbolic death and rebirth; isolation of the initiate; physical changes; spiritual cleansing; test of endurance, bravery, or competence; teaching and learning; and

community and sharing of food (Anglin et al., 1998; Scheer et al., 2007; Gallasch & Lines, 2009; Genep, 1960).

Measure

The Behavior Evaluation Scale (BES) School Version (House & McCarney, 2014) is a 73-item questionnaire consisting of five subscales and a behavior quotient. The five subscales are used to assess learning problems, interpersonal difficulties, inappropriate behavior, unhappiness/depression, and physical symptoms/fears. Learning problems refers to students who do not respond to traditional learning experiences and need special attention, and the problem is not attributed to intellectual, sensory, or health factors. Interpersonal difficulties encompasses behaviors ranging from the inability to make or keep friends to acting out/aggressive behavior that interferes with resolving conflict, etc. Inappropriate behavior represents atypical behavior in the context of the educational (or home) environment. Unhappiness/depression refers to subtle indicators of emotional/behavioral problems represented by a pervasive mood of dissatisfaction resulting from personal or school-related experiences. Physical symptoms/fears represents a negative reaction to personal or school problems. Inter-rater reliability was reported as .83 to .91 for all age levels with an average correlation of .85 (House & McCarney, 2014), indicating a substantial degree of inter-rater reliability.

The student's primary teacher completed the BES before the rites of passage program began and again one week after the end of the 10-week program. An alternate data-collection individual administered the BES before and after the program to ensure data accuracy and reduce the potential for bias.

Statistical Analysis

The researcher used archival data of the BES completed by the teachers to compare the before and after scores on the measure using a paired samples t -test (Pituch & Stevens, 2016). The dependent variables were the five dimensions of behavior measured by the BES and the independent variable was the treatment group and the comparison or control group.

Results

Treatment Group Analysis

The data revealed that the mean score for learning problems after participating in the rites of passage group ($M = 16.50$) was not significantly lower than the mean score before participating ($M = 16.55$). The mean score for interpersonal difficulties after participation in the group ($M = 15.80$) was not significantly lower than the mean score before participating ($M = 18.70$). Although the scores indicated a decrease in interpersonal difficulties, the difference was not significant at the $p < .01$ level. The results indicated there was no significant difference between the score for inappropriate behavior before ($M = 32.33$) and after ($M = 30.68$) participating in the group. Although the scores indicated a decrease in inappropriate behavior, the difference was not significant at the $p < .01$ level. There was no significant difference between the score for unhappiness/depression before ($M = 11.18$) and after ($M = 9.75$) participating in the group. Although the scores indicated a decrease in unhappiness/depression, the difference was not significant at the $p < .01$ level. Lastly, there was no significant difference between the score for physical symptoms/fears before ($M = 11.80$) and after ($M = 11.75$) participating in the group.

There was one significant difference at the $p < .05$ level in the before and after means of the dependent variables in the rites of passage group. Additional analysis was made at the .05

level because the prior analysis showed no significant differences in scores before and after the group when using .01. The results of these analyses are shown in Table 1. The obtained t value for interpersonal difficulties was significant at $p = .015$, indicating a significant decrease in interpersonal difficulties.

Control Group Analysis

In the final analysis, there were 37 boys with complete data and three teacher forms not turned in after the 10-weeks. With regard to learning problems, there was no significant difference in the before ($M = 19.35$) and after ($M = 20.73$) scores at the $p < .01$ level of significance, although there was an increase in the mean score. The mean scores for interpersonal difficulties before ($M = 15.11$) and after the ten weeks ($M = 18.08$) were not significantly different at the $p < .01$ level, although there was an increase in the mean score. Scores for inappropriate behavior before ($M = 33.05$) and after the ten weeks ($M = 40.41$) were not significantly different at the $p < .01$ level, although there was an increase in the mean score. Unhappiness/depression mean scores before ($M = 10.46$) and after ten weeks ($M = 10.35$) were not significantly different at the $p < .01$ level. Lastly, physical symptoms/fears before and after mean scores were not significantly different (12.95 and 13.43, respectively) at the $p < .01$ level.

There was one significant difference at the $p < .05$ level in the before and after means of the dependent variables in the control group. The results of these analyses are shown in Table 2. The obtained t value for inappropriate behavior was significant at $p = .014$, indicating a significant increase in inappropriate behavior.

Discussion

The purpose of the present study was to evaluate the effectiveness of a 10-week counselor-facilitated group for male adolescents. The research question that guided this

exploratory study was would male adolescents who participated in a rites of passage group have a positive effect on their behavior? The paired samples *t*-test was used to determine if there was a significant difference in the behaviors of the participants after completing the 10-week program, based on teacher's ratings of the student on the Behavior Evaluation Scale (BES). The results indicated a decrease in the five areas of behavior assessed by the BES; however, the only significant decrease was in interpersonal difficulties. On the other hand, the results for the control group indicated an increase in four of the five areas assessed by the BES; however, the only significant increase was in inappropriate behavior. These findings suggest that while there was no statistical significance for four of the five variables measured in each group, they may still have clinical significance with regard to how the two groups were rated by their teachers.

Interpersonal difficulties includes behaviors such as the inability to make or keep friends and acting out/aggressive behavior, which interferes with resolving conflicts with others. This was the one behavior where there was a significant positive change in the boys who participated in the rites of passage program.

Inappropriate behavior or feelings, under normal circumstances, includes atypical behavior in the context of the educational or home environment. This was the one behavior where there was a significant negative change in the boys who did not participate in the rites of passage program.

With regard to clinical significance, the data suggest that some male adolescents who are at risk may act out with negative behaviors over time, without any change in traditional school interventions or instructions. An intervention is necessary when male adolescents are identified with behavior and emotional issues in school. More importantly, early prevention is necessary to decrease problem behavior rates and lower dropout potential (Poulou, 2014).

Alvarez, Brown, Cascardi, and Shpiegel (2015) provided a conceptual definition of child advocacy: an action intended to empower or elevate the status of children by promoting their self-expression and participation, while recognizing that the improved status of children depends on the welfare of the families and community. This definition provides a relevant foundation for the need of a modern-day rites of passage for male adolescents. The results corroborate and support the bioecological theory and the PPCT model (Bronfenbrenner, 2005) in the form of an intervention strategy addressing behavioral issues of male adolescents. The age with the greatest positive behavior effect from the 10-week group potentially intervening and preventing future behavior problems from occurring is 13 years old. Future research should consider utilizing psychosocial developmental theory (Erikson, 1963, 1968) and the (PPCT) model as a modern-day rites of passage (Gallasch & Lines, 2009) as an intervention for male adolescents around the age of 13 years old who have been identified as having behavioral problems.

The present study contributes to the knowledge base of how Bronfenbrenner's (2005) bioecological theory that takes into account process-person-context-time (PPCT) model in the designing of a modern-day rites of passage program can affect systems of relationships (Gallasch & Lines, 2009). Rites of passage programs as suggested by Bronfenbrenner's theory typically have not involved a pre- and post-test research design (Rosa & Tudge, 2013) on male adolescents who receive behavioral referrals and are at risk for dropping out of school. Studying the male adolescents of today is one of the most key areas of behavioral and social sciences; it is critical to promote and formulate ways for male adolescents to receive what they need to become men and to function effectively in society. According to Dickerson's (2014) study, the needs expressed by male adolescents and expected from their fathers included support, guidance, being held accountable, motivation, learning certain skills, knowledge about gender

roles, and a father-son bond. Most of these needs went unmet in high school and negatively affected the male adolescents emotionally, behaviorally, and academically. A rites of passage program may be able to address some of these unmet needs in fatherless male adolescents and is an area for future research investigation.

More research on modern-day rites of passage programs with male adolescents is needed to evaluate the effectiveness of the program as an intervention to reduce behavioral problems. Such programs can be based on psychosocial development theory (Erikson, 1963, 1968) and designed operationally in the form of Bronfenbrenner's (2005) bioecological model. The present study was limited due to its small sample size and the absence of important demographic information on the participants in the archival data set. Future research should consider a multi-site investigation or multiple groups at one site so that more boys would be involved resulting in a larger sample. A modern-day rites of passage model utilizing (PPCT) and integrating the three theories is represented as follows: the process (modern-day rites of passage); the person (male adolescents 11–14 years of age); the context (male adolescent's transition into manhood), which includes the microsystem (home), mesosystem (home – school, home – peers, home – community), exosystem (a follow-on effect), and macrosystem (institutional systems, school); and time (10-weeks for one and half hours each week).

Conclusions

This study involved evaluation of an intervention with male adolescents in the form of a modern-day rites of passage program. Such programs may make a difference by addressing the developmental needs of male adolescents at this critical stage. Although there were few significant findings, the data suggests that the program likely had clinical significance for the participants compared to the boys in the control group. Generally, while mean scores for

problem behaviors decreased in the rites of passage group, the scores increased in the control group. Some male adolescents will try to initiate themselves into manhood in unhealthy ways such as the use or abuse of alcohol and drugs or acting out violently. A rites of passage program has the potential to prevent or reduce such behaviors, leading to male adolescents becoming more productive in school and society.

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Table 1

T-Test of Differences Between the Means on the Behavior Evaluation Scale Subscales Before and After Rites of Passage Group

Behaviors	Difference in Means	SD	Standard Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference Lower, Upper	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i> (2-tailed)
Learning Problems	0.50	7.822	1.237	-2.451, 2.551	.040	39	.968
Interpersonal Difficulties	2.900	7.210	1.140	.594, 5.206	2.544	39	.015
Inappropriate Behavior	1.650	11.831	1.871	-2.134, 5.434	.882	39	.383
Unhappiness/Depression	1.425	5.679	.898	-.391, 3.241	1.587	39	.121
Physical Symptoms /Fears	.050	2.908	.460	-.880, .980	.109	39	.914

Note. The difference in means on the subscales was calculated by subtracting the mean score after the end of the 10-week rites of passage group from the mean score before the group. Therefore, the positive numbers represent a decrease in the behaviors.

Table 2

T-Test of Differences Between the Pre- and Post-test Means on the Behavior Evaluation Scale Subscales for the Control Group

Behaviors	Difference in Means	SD	Standard Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference Lower, Upper	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i> (2-tailed)
Learning Problems	-1.378	8.450	1.389	-4.196, 1.439	-.992	36	.328
Interpersonal Difficulties	-2.973	9.723	1.598	-6.215, .269	-1.860	36	.071
Inappropriate Behavior	-7.351	17.335	2.850	-13.131, -1.571	-2.580	36	.014
Unhappiness/Depression	.108	4.864	.800	-1.513, 1.730	.135	36	.893
Physical Symptoms /Fears	-.486	5.237	.861	-2.233, 1.260	-.565	36	.576

Note. The difference in means on the subscales was calculated by subtracting the mean score after the end of the 10-week period from the mean score before the 10-week period. Therefore, the negative numbers represent an increase in the behaviors.