

# An Evaluation of a Strengths-Based Support Group for Young Men

Portland State University - Department of Psychology

Mary Gray, M.S., Gino Galvez, M.S., Ashley Boal, B.A., Alison Leach, B.A., Margaret Braun, M.S.,  
Amanda Craig, B.S., Ricardo Garcia, Brianna Finney, B.A., Rhenne Miles, B.S., & Eric Mankowski, Ph.D.  
Boys Council  
Beth Hossfeld, MFT. and Giovanna Taormina



## Background

- Traditional views of masculinity have been associated with serious risk behaviors including reckless driving, violence, and suicide (Sabo, 1999).
- A large number of boys and young men encounter serious levels of adversity, in areas such as bullying, violence, crime, school drop out rates, learning disabilities, injuries from accidents, and binge drinking (Park, Paul, Irwin, & Brindis, 2005).
- In recent studies, boys have fared poorly in areas of education, mental health, access to health care, bullying, violence, and substance abuse (Hossfeld, Gibraltar, Bowers, & Taormina, 2008).
- Boys Council emerged as a curriculum designed to offer young men a solid pathway toward healthy masculine identity development (Hossfeld, et al.).
- Although several programs have been established in many youth-serving organizations aimed to specifically support boys, it is unclear to what extent these programs are effective as a gender-specific model to support pre-teen to adolescent boys' development.

The **purpose** of this collaborative research study was to investigate the effectiveness of a strengths-based support group for boys called **Boys Council**.

## What is Boys Council?

- Boys' Council follows a structured, gender-relevant support group curriculum for young men.
- Boys to meet in a group of 6-10 boys of similar age and development with one or two facilitators, for one and a half to two hours, each week for a series of ten weeks.
- Structure of sessions:
  - Opening ritual
  - Theme introduction
  - Warm-up activities
  - A 'council' type check-in opportunity
  - Experiential activities to address gender relevant topics
  - Reflection and group dialogue component
  - Closing ritual

## Methodology

### Survey

- Design:**
  - Pre- and Post-Group assessment
- Participants:**
  - 93 boys, ages 11-22 years ( $M = 15.22$ ,  $SD = 1.94$ ) participated in one of six separate Boys Council programs from across the US
  - Ethnicity:** White (48%), African American (25%), Latino (16%), Other (9%), Native American (1%)
  - Primary Guardian:** Mother (43%), Both Mother and Father (23%), Group Home (17%), Other (8%), Other family member (6%), Father (5%)
- Community Contexts:**
  - Boys Council groups were evaluated in five different states: Arkansas, California, Connecticut, Nevada, and Oregon.
  - Boys Council groups were facilitated in diverse settings including after school programs in public schools, youth service facilities and residential facilities.
- Procedure:**
  - Boys completed the survey before the first group and after the completion of the tenth and final group.
- Survey Measures**
  - Demographic characteristics
  - School Engagement (3 adapted items taken from: Quantifying School Engagement: Research Report, 2006)
  - Positive self image and social engagement
  - Adolescent Masculine Identity in Relationships Scale (4 items from AMIRS; Chu, Porche & Tolman, 2005)
  - Drug and alcohol use (3 adapted items from: Youth Tobacco Survey developed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2006)
  - Sub-survey of Modified Aggression Scale (8 items from: MAS; Bosworth & Espelage, 1995)
  - Ethnic identity-Teen Conflict (EI-TC; Bosworth & Espelage, 1995)
  - Self-Efficacy Scale (SES; Prothrow-Stitch, DeJon, Spiro, Brewer-Wilson, Vince-Whitman, et al., 1987)
  - Satisfaction with Boys Council

### Focus Group

- Two focus groups completed with boys
  - Group 1 (6 boys), Group 2 (10 boys)
  - Middle school boys in rural Oregon

## Focus Group Findings

### Theme 1: Community building: Boys Council as a safe space - Relatedness to group members

*"What I learned was we could all come together even though we don't really like each other, we can learn about each other and all come back in together and be friends, it helped."* [Group 2]

*"Well, I did get to get away from class, but that's not really it cause I like the class that I'm in right now. Um, it was fun cause I could say mostly what I was thinking about, and like I wouldn't get judged or anything. Cause mostly it feels like, just a normal school day, and I said what I thought, I'd probably get in trouble or something."* [Group 1]

*"I liked it. It was like cool because like I don't have to worry about anyone telling anything that I tell in the group. I could just say like whatever, like, to get something off my chest or something. Yeah it's pretty cool."* [Group 1]

*"It's like whatever you talk about in the group, stays in the group."* [Group 1]

### Theme 2: Boys Council helped boys improve their attitudes and avoid judging other boys

*"[Boys Council] helped me a lot with my attitude and that's why I think and my ways with other people. That's why I'm saying that they should get people that hate each other and bring them in Boys group and see if they help each other and be friends afterwards and that's what I think well I think that's a good chance for Boys group to do it."* [Group 1]

*"That kinda helped me in like in real life too like in public with everything. Like not to judge people so much, like right I have been not like mad all the time. I've been more happier and just hanging out, just being myself."* [Group 1]

*"It is like okay to express your feelings, even though you're a guy, just like don't bottle them up. Cause I think guys who do that, they get in fights and stuff."* [Group 2]

## Survey Findings

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics

	n	Min.	Max.	Mean	Std. Dev.	Cronbach's alpha
School Engagement						
Pre-Survey	86	1.67	5	3.77	.91	.68
Post-Survey	80	2	5	4.06	.70	.61
Positive Self-Image and Social Engagement						
Pre-Survey	71	1.0	4.0	3.04	.52	.72
Post-Survey	72	1.38	4.0	3.1	.48	.76
Sub-survey of the AMIRS						
Pre-Survey	86	1.0	3.75	2.26	.71	.63
Post-Survey	88	1.0	4.0	2.19	.61	.52
Drug, Alcohol, and Tobacco Use						
Pre-Survey	87	0	18	1.78	3.82	.77
Post-Survey	88	0	18	1.69	3.85	.83
Sub-survey Modified Aggression Scale						
Pre-Survey	84	.88	4.0	2.25	.78	.79
Post-Survey	87	0	4.0	2.33	.74	.78
Ethnic Identity - Teen Conflict Survey						
Pre-Survey	86	1.0	4.0	3.28	.76	.77
Post-Survey	87	0	4.0	3.31	.79	.77
Self-Efficacy Scale						
Pre-Survey	85	1.71	4.0	3.03	.60	.80
Post-Survey	84	1.0	4.0	3.1	.56	.83

Table 2. Paired-samples t tests

	n	t statistic	df	p value	Effect Size
School engagement	79	-3.15	78	.002**	-.37
Positive Self-Image and Social Engagement	59	-.33	58	.74	-.07
Sub-survey of the AMIRS	83	-.99	82	.33	-.12
Drug, Alcohol, and Tobacco Use	86	-.23	85	.82	.02
Sub-survey of the Modified Aggression Scale	80	-1.2	79	.24	-.16
Ethnic Identity - Teen Conflict Survey	82	-.29	81	.77	-.03
Self-Efficacy Scale	80	-.94	79	.35	-.12

\*Significance at the .05 level. \*\*Significance at the .001 level

Table 3. Satisfaction with Boys Council

Item	Never (0)	Sometimes (1)	Usually (2)	Always (3)	Mean (SD)
1. I could say what I was thinking in Boys Council.	6	17	29	36	2.08 (.94)
2. I could trust Boys Council leaders.	7	14	25	42	2.16 (.97)
3. People were fair in Boys Council.	6	11	33	37	2.16 (.90)
4. Everyone respected me in Boy Council.	6	14	22	46	2.23 (.96)
5. Boys Council leaders focused on what I'm good at.	6	17	26	37	2.09 (.95)
6. Boys Council was worth my time.	10	14	24	39	2.06 (.94)
7. People kept things confidential in Boys Council.	4	12	26	46	2.30 (.87)

Note. Cell values indicate frequency of responses.

## Conclusions

- Boys increased their level of school engagement as a result of their participation in Boys Council.
- Other pre- to post-group survey changes were not significant.
- Boys generally reported positive experiences and satisfaction with their participation in Boys Council.
- Based on our review of the literature, this is the first evaluation of a community-based, strengths focused program for adolescent boys.