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Girls In Real Life Situations (GIRLS) and Self-understanding: A Program Evaluation

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Abstract

The purpose of this research project is to evaluate the school-based, psychoeducational *Girls In Real Life Situations* (GIRLS) group program (Taylor & Trice-Black, 2007). This research project examined the effectiveness of the program at a rural middle school in Livingston County, New York. It also looked to see if the GIRLS program enhances participants' self-understanding. This research project includes a literature review that explored self-understanding and its dimensions (self-concept and self-esteem) as well as how it relates to development. Also discussed was why addressing self-understanding matters and how it can be connected to the GIRLS group. A total of nine early adolescent females with a mean age of 12.78 years (*Treatment Group* = 5 and *Control Group* = 4) completed a Pre-test before the start of the eight-session GIRLS program and a Post-test at the end of the program. The average Pre-test statement response for the *Treatment Group* was 2.80, while the average Post-test statement response was 2.97. The average statement response score for the *Control Group* remained the same for both the Pre-test and Post-test at 2.85. Eighteen of the twenty-five statement responses increased for the *Treatment Group* from the Pre-test to the Post-test. The *Control Group* had 13 of 25 increased from the Pre-test to the Post-test. The Pre-test and Post-test statement response mean data shows that the GIRLS group program did have an effect on the participants' increased self-understanding and coping skills. The GIRLS program helped the participants understand more about themselves in relation to the topics discussed in the group.

Keywords: self-understanding, early adolescents, psychoeducational group

Girls In Real Life Situations (GIRLS) and Self-understanding: A Program Evaluation

Middle school-aged children face academic, social, emotional, and developmental changes (Wigfield, Lutz, & Wagner, 2005). The shift from Elementary to Middle school brings with it new academic responsibilities and the onset of puberty and hormonal changes bring not only physical changes, but cognitive and emotional changes too. One area of vast cognitive and emotional growth during this developmental period is self-understanding (Berk, 2011). This research project will focus on the evaluation of the school-based psychoeducational program for early adolescent females and how the program may affect the participants' self-understanding. This research project will explore and review the literature related to development, self-understanding, and school-based psychoeducational groups such as the one being evaluated here; the *Girls In Real Life Situations* (GIRLS) program (Taylor & Trice-Black, 2007). This research project will also detail the program evaluation and include a description of the methods of GIRLS groups, a discussion of the program evaluation results, as well as a comprehensive review of how those results relate to the literature, its implications on future evaluations and psychoeducational programs, and the limitations that were presented in the program evaluation. The purpose of this research project is to evaluate the GIRLS program and look for a connection between it and self-understanding.

Review of the Literature

Early adolescents' self-understanding becomes more central in cognitive development as their beliefs, values, attitudes, and judgments about themselves become more solid (Berk, 2011). Self-understanding is used as an umbrella term that covers self-concept and self-esteem (Berk, 2011). Self-concept has to do with how people understand

their values, beliefs, and what they are capable of; it is a more cognitive way thinking. Self-esteem involves the feelings and judgments that people have about themselves; it is more emotional in nature. Williams and Currie (2000) wrote that puberty could effect early adolescents' self-esteem during this stage in that they are experiencing many body and appearance changes. Self-understanding plays a major role in social and emotional development as children grow and form their identities (Hay & Ashman, 2003). Self-understanding relates to characteristics such as leadership, motivation, social skills, and anxiety. Wigfield et al. (2005) wrote that both self-concept and self-esteem could be molded from relationships with peers as well as parents and other adults, academic accomplishments, physical accomplishments, and decisions and choices. This connection between self-understanding and development suggests that school counselors running middle school psychoeducational groups could benefit from evaluating how such groups address self-understanding.

The following literature review will explore self-understanding as it relates to early adolescent female developmental stages and why self-understanding matters to this specific population. It will also explore the nature of a school-based psychoeducational group program for early adolescent females called *Girls In Real Life Situations* (GIRLS) (Taylor & Trice-Black, 2007). All of these topics will help to introduce the program evaluation research project.

Self-understanding and Development

Self-concept and self-esteem both begin to develop in early childhood. Self-concept starts out in a tangible and concrete manner (Berk, 2011). Children understand themselves in terms of their observable characteristics and tend not to have the cognitive

development to describe themselves in terms of their inner selves. As children grow throughout early childhood, their self-concept also changes and begins to incorporate thoughts and feelings. There is an increased emphasis on skills and abilities as children begin school in middle childhood. Cultural and social influences become factors in self-concept during middle childhood as well. With adolescence comes more self-concept growth in that people's thinking becomes more abstract and intangible, wrote Berk (2011). An "expanding social world" (p. 315) leads to early adolescents' having contradicting thoughts about their personal selves. Wigfield et al. (2005) explained that as people grow into early adolescence, they begin to have a more clear understanding of their beliefs, abilities and values. They added that early adolescents often feel increased pressure to figure out their beliefs and values. Such pressure for a greater self-concept can have an impact on self-esteem.

In early childhood, people are able to make judgments about themselves, which is how self-esteem is increased and decreased (Berk, 2011). However, Berk noted that people at this developmental stage are not able to understand the difference between the competence they think they have and the competence they actually have. Because of the lack of dimension (i.e., factors that play into development/growth) of self-esteem at this developmental stage, self-esteem tends to be very high. As people grow into middle childhood and begin school, self-esteem becomes more complex. The increased complexities of self-esteem in this stage include factors such as academics, relationships with others (e.g., friends, family, classmates, teachers), physical ability, and body image. As the number of outside forces increases during this stage of development, self-esteem tends to decrease because people are examining many more attributes (Berk, 2011). In

early adolescence, self-esteem becomes even more dimensional. Early adolescents' feelings and judgments about themselves generally increase and stabilize during this developmental stage as they gain more understanding of their beliefs, values, and abilities. The next factor to be explored in this literature review is sex and how self-understanding relates to early adolescent females.

Self-understanding and Early Adolescent Females

As people grow into early adolescence, physical development begins to accelerate with the onset of puberty. Berk (2011) wrote that puberty generally begins earlier for females than it does for males. She added that earlier puberty includes earlier and more rapid body growth, sexual maturation and brain development in females. Also, it has been argued that this developmental stage is also a time when early adolescent females begin to put more value in their attachments with peers (Hay & Ashman, 2003). This time of physical, mental, social and emotional changes plays a role in the continued development of self-understanding (Williams & Currie, 2000). Taking into account the earlier developmental changes and more reliance on peer relationships, self-understanding can take a back seat to other social and emotional issues during early adolescence.

Why Self-understanding Matters

It is believed that aspects of self-understanding such as self-esteem and self-concept are at the most risk for declining when early adolescent females are in middle school (Wigfield et al., 2005). Hay and Ashman (2003) wrote that people with specifically low self-concept are less likely to take on leadership roles, cooperate with others, have increased anxiety, and have fewer peer relationships.

Early adolescents spend much of their time with peers in school and put more value into their peer relationships during this stage of development. Egbochuku and Aihie (2009) wrote that the process of reflecting on past behavior through discussion is a way that they can grow and sustain self-understanding. A group that focuses on emotional and social development would incorporate many aspects of self-understanding. The following section will explore a specific group program that focuses on such developmental issues in a psychoeducational environment.

Girls In Real Life Situations (GIRLS) Program

Girls In Real Life Situations (GIRLS), a school-based psychoeducational group program, provides an environment in which early adolescent females come together to discuss social and emotional issues (Taylor & Trice-Black, 2007). This type of group environment provides a safe space for students to grow their peer relationships and share their knowledge. This small, closed group of six to ten students has many overlapping dimensions as those surrounding self-understanding (i.e., physical, emotional and social developmental changes relating to things like puberty, body image, academic competence, peer relationships, and physical ability among other things).

Taylor and Trice-Black (2007) developed GIRLS to focus on social and emotional development. They wrote that GIRLS was created to help early adolescent females to:

“feel empowered, gain self-awareness, develop positive coping mechanisms, improve daily problem-solving skills, feel connected with other girls, and make healthy decisions” (p. 1).

The authors wrote that a small-group format could be beneficial for students to come together and share similar social and emotional experiences. The GIRLS program has twelve different themes that can be incorporated into a group curriculum.

The twelve themes within this group place an emphasis on helping early adolescent females in their social and emotional development. Each theme provided within the program includes activities and discussion questions. Aspects of self-understanding can be seen within the twelve different curriculum themes. The theme of *body image* connects physical development and self-understanding (Taylor & Trice-Black, 2007). The *self-esteem* theme focuses specifically on the feelings and judgments that early adolescent females generally have about themselves. Emotional development and self-understanding are tied together with the themes *emotions*, *tough times*, and *stress*. The *communication*, *friendships* and *relationships* themes all tie together social development and self-understanding. Behavior is also addressed in the GIRLS curriculum with themes like *choices* and *reaching out*. The goal is to help the group participants become empowered, make healthy decisions, understand their values and beliefs, learn to cope, and become more confident. The group is about the participants understanding themselves in the context of the different themes. The GIRLS group curriculum is focused on teaching the participants to search inward; to cultivate their beliefs, values, attitudes, and feelings about themselves and their experiences.

So, why should increasing self-understanding be something that School Counselors actively seek to foster? From the literature, it has been learned that self-understanding incorporates self-concept as well as self-esteem. It has also been learned that fostered self-understanding can positively affect early adolescents relationships and

communication, coping skills (e.g., anxiety and stress management), cooperation, and leadership potential. All of these outcomes relate to the various themes within the *Girls In Real Life Situations* (GIRLS) group program (Taylor & Trice-Black, 2007).

The statements reflected in this literature review suggest that keeping self-understanding at the forefront of academic, career, and personal/social learning in middle school could help early adolescents' remain confident and realistic about who they are, what they want from their lives, and what they need to do to achieve their goals. It is possible that if school counselors can work to keep track of self-understanding learning among their students, then their learning could become more enhanced through self-reflection and personal exploration. The GIRLS group is focused on the emotional and social development of early adolescent females and it is used as a platform to start an open dialogue between early adolescent females to utilize their peer relationships. The group participants gain self-awareness, and learn and grow from each other through activities and discussions. With self-awareness as a key feature in the GIRLS program, this researcher evaluated the program to explore if it goes one step further from self-awareness into self-understanding. Does the GIRLS program help early adolescent females not only become aware of their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors, but to also understand them and how they relate to them as a person; their beliefs, values, attitudes, and judgments of themselves and others?

Evaluating the GIRLS group, which operates off of those peer relationships and connection, could be a beneficial place to consciously work at enhancing students' self-understanding. This research project is a program evaluation that will look for a connection between the school-based psychoeducational GIRLS program and enhanced

self-understanding. A further goal is to determine whether if the group helps early adolescent females learn about themselves and their feelings about themselves. It is predicted that the participants of the GIRLS group program will have increased self-understanding. It is also predicted that the mean Post-test responses will increase closer to four on the Likert-type scale (or decrease closer to one, if the statement was inverted).

Method

Participants

Participants were 9 early adolescent females ranging in grade level from sixth to eighth grade (*average age* = 12.78; *SD* = 1.03) and members of their school's *Girls In Real Life Situations* group (Taylor & Trice-Black, 2007). The GIRLS program that was used is designed specifically for early adolescent females. The GIRLS program is something that is a part of this school's counseling curriculum and is administered at least once a year. In order to be eligible to participate in the GIRLS program, students had to be female and in either sixth, seventh, or eighth grade. All of the participants were enrolled at the same rural public school located in Livingston County, New York. The school was middle school that included the sixth, seventh, and eighth grade levels, and is a part of a larger Pre-K-12 school district. The GIRLS program was run twice within the 2014-2015 school year, so the participants included in this program evaluation range from either the October-January group or the January-March group. All nine of the research project participants were Caucasian. The most recently reported racial/ethnic origin data for that middle school is that 97% of students are Caucasian, 1% of students are Hispanic/Latino, and the remaining 2% remained unlisted (New York State Education Department, 2013). There were no differences in ethnicity between the participants; only

age and grade level. Of the nine participants in this research project, five completed all eight GIRLS group sessions, while four participants stopped coming after two sessions because of academic ineligibility. Because they were academically ineligible—determined by the school in which the girls were enrolled—these four participants were required to attend an after-school study hall, which conflicted with the group. The GIRLS were never officially removed from the program because they had the chance to become eligible again and regain the ability to come to the sessions. Their data was used to create a control group, while the five participants who completed all 8 sessions of the GIRLS program were made the treatment group.

Materials

A two-page survey was given to each participant at the beginning of the first group session, which they were instructed to complete at that time. The survey used is what has been used previously at the site while running the *Girls In Real Life Situations* (GIRLS) program (Taylor & Trice-Black, 2007). Participants rated 25 statements relating to their self-understanding (ex. “I know myself and the things that make me happy”), on a 4-point Likert-type agreement scale (1 = *Not At All True*, 2 = *A Little Bit True*, 3 = *Mostly True*, and 4 = *Very True*).

Procedure

The candidates for participation were selected as a result of conversations between the two school counselors at the middle school and this researcher. Candidates’ names were recommended to if the counselors believed that they would either struggling with the issues discussed in the program, had gone through such issues and could now act as a leader within the group, or both. After the list of names was provided, the candidates

were sent home with information about the GIRLS group program, a parent consent form, and a student assent form.

The information sent home explained the purpose of the research project. They were informed that the purpose of the research project was to evaluate the *Girls In Real Life Situations* (GIRLS) program and to understand how it relates to their self-understanding (self-esteem and self-concept) (Taylor & Trice-Black, 2007). The nature of the participants' anonymity was explained as well; that this researcher would be using the Pre-test and Post-test data and that all identifying information would be avoided. It was explained that this research project was a program evaluation and that only the aggregate responses on the Pre-test and Post-test would be used because this researcher is looking at the GIRLS program as a whole. Parents/Guardians were given the opportunity to contact this researcher by telephone or email with any questions or concerns. All of the participants' in this research study had signed parental/guardian consent as well as the participants' signed assent. Candidates were only refused for the research project if they did not return signed consent and assent to participate. Candidates were allowed to participate in the GIRLS program and not participate in the research project. Upon returning the signed permission to participate in the group and program evaluation research project, each participant was informed of the date and time for the first group session. The Pre-tests and Post-tests were all kept anonymous and not given to this researcher for data entry until all participants had completed them.

The independent variable in this research project is the *Girls In Real Life Situations* (GIRLS) program (Taylor & Trice-Black, 2007). Because there were four participants who were unable to attend the majority of the group sessions, this researcher

designated them as the *Control group*, while those who completed the program were designated as the *Treatment group*. The dependent variable is self-understanding. Neither the independent nor the dependent variables were manipulated because this researcher was evaluating the program as is, to discover if it is achieving what it is set out to achieve at this site.

School-based Intervention

The intervention that was evaluated for this research project was a psychoeducational program called, *Girls In Real Life Situations* (GIRLS) (Taylor & Trice-Black, 2007). This program is utilized to educate early adolescent females on social and emotional development topics. This researcher facilitated the GIRLS program for the 2014-2015 school year. As it was done in previous school years by this researcher's site supervisor, the program was run in 8 weekly 45-minute after-school sessions using discussion and activities. A detailed description of the GIRLS group sessions can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1 Detailed Curriculum of the Girls In Real Life Situations (GIRLS) Program At This Site

Week 1: Welcome to GIRLS

Introduction to the group including completion of the *About Me* surveys (pretest/posttest), individual introductions, discussion of the group rules, signing of the girls' *Membership cards*, and activity in which the participants watch and discuss a music video relating to body image.

Week 2: Who Am I?

Building group connection activity in which the participants self-reflect and explore their values, beliefs, thoughts and feelings. The participants reflect on things that have happened in their lives and feelings they've had about such things.

Week 3: Role Models

Focus on self-exploration of values and beliefs, and discussion of appropriate role models. Intrinsic and extrinsic motivations are discussed. Participants identify role models and the reasons behind what make them role models.

Week 4: Body Image

Discussion of body image and media's influence including the topics of automatic thoughts, how to reform unhelpful body image thoughts/feelings into a positive self-image, the media industry and advertising. The Participants watch and react to commercials targeted to sell 'beauty' products.

Week 5: Today I Choose

Focus on choices, decision-making, responsibility and consequences. The participants talk about their daily choices and whether or not they are helpful or unhelpful. Participants reflect on their choices and explore ways to take responsibility for making healthy decisions.

Week 6: The Boiling Point

Focus on moods, specifically anger. Participants use the example of boiling pasta to talk about their anger and what it is like to "boil over." The things that make them boil over will be discussed as well as healthy and unhealthy coping skills.

Week 7: Wall of Support

Focus on support systems for participants in home and school-life. Participants discuss people their own age who support them as well as adult supports in and out of school. Participants discuss what makes these people supportive, as well as are introduced to the ideas of enabling vs. empowering support systems.

Week 8: The Gift of Happiness

This is the last session. Participants begin by completing new *About Me* surveys (pretest/posttest). Participants discuss their experience of the group, what they learned, and how they will use that knowledge in the future. Participants complete booklets in which they write compliments to one another.

Results

In reference to the hypothesis predicting that the participants of the *Girls In Real Life Situations* (GIRLS) psychoeducational group program would respond to the Post-test statements more positively (responses would increase, or decrease for inverted

statements), a comparison of the means was done for each statement as well as the total response mean (Taylor & Trice-Black, 2007). This was done for both the *Treatment group* (N = 5) as well as the *Control group* (N = 4).

As seen in Table 2, 18 out of 25 of the *Treatment Group* statement means increased from the Pre-test to the Post-test. The average statement response for the *Treatment Group's* Pre-test was 2.80, which in the Post-test increased to 2.97; a 0.17 point increase. Four statement response means decreased from the Pre-test to the Post-test for the *Treatment Group*, and three statement response means remained the same from Pre-test to Post-test. On the Pre-test, this group's lowest statement response mean came from two different statements including the following items: (7) I can talk openly to my friends and family about my true feelings, and (14) I worry about the way media portrays beauty. The highest statement response mean on this group's Pre-test was from this statement: (9) I am in touch with my emotions and often know how I am feeling. The latter statement was also one of the statements with the highest Post-test response mean along with this statement: (12) I practice good decision-making skills and don't feel pressure from friends to do things I don't want to do. The lowest Post-test statement response mean also came from two different statements: (14) I worry about the way media portrays beauty, and (16) Drama gets in the way of my learning in school.

The *Control Group* data, in Table 2, shows that 13 out of 25 of the statement means increased from the Pre-test to the Post-test. The average statement response for the *Control Group's* Pre-test was 2.85, which in the Post-test remained the same. Ten of the statement response means decreased from the Pre-test to the Post-test for the *Control Group*, and two remained the same from the Pre-test to the Post-test. On the Pre-test, this

group's lowest statement response mean came from statement number 20, "It is easy for me to make my own decisions." The highest statement response mean on this group's Pre-test was from two different statements including number four, "I have a few close friends that I trust," and number 23, "I know that other girls often struggle with the same things I do." The lowest Post-test statement response mean also came from statement number 16, "Drama gets in the way of my learning in school." The highest Post-test statement response mean came from three different statements including number two, "I make friends easily," number five, "I am always a good friend and am trustworthy," and number 21, "I am kind to others."

The results show that there is a difference between the group that participated in all eight of the *Girls In Real Life Situations* (GIRLS) psychoeducational group program and those who participated in only two of the eight group sessions (Taylor & Trice-Black, 2007). Both groups had Pre-test and Post-test overall response means that were slightly under a score of three, but the *Treatment Group's* increased while the *Control Group's* did not change.

Table 2 Mean Values of *Treatment Group* and *Control Group* Pre-test and Post-test Statement Responses

Pre-Test/Post-Test Statements	Treatment Group N = 5		Control Group N = 4	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
1. I know myself and the things that make me happy.	3.20	3.60	3.50	3.00
2. I make friends easily.	2.80	2.80	2.75	3.75
3. I have lots of friends.	2.20	2.80	3.75	3.25
4. I have a few close friends that I trust.	3.20	3.40	4.00	3.50
5. I am always a good friend and am trustworthy.	3.60	3.60	3.25	3.75
6. I often feel lonely. *	2.60	2.40	3.00	2.25
7. I can talk openly to my friends and family about my true	2.00	2.80	3.00	2.75

feelings.				
8. I know how to communicate my feelings to others.	2.20	2.60	2.50	2.50
9. I am in touch with my emotions and often know how I am feeling.	3.80	3.80	2.25	2.75
10. I know how to handle stress.	2.20	3.40	2.50	2.25
11. I know who to go to when I need help and/or support.	3.00	3.60	3.25	3.50
12. I practice good decision-making skills and don't feel pressure from friends to do things I don't want to do.	3.00	3.80	3.00	3.25
13. I am happy with the way my body looks.	2.80	3.20	2.25	1.75
14. I worry about the way media portrays beauty.	2.00	1.80	2.25	2.50
15. Overall, I enjoy school.	3.00	2.75	2.75	3.50
16. Drama gets in the way of my learning in school. *	2.20	1.80	2.00	1.50
17. I worry about my ability in school. *	3.40	2.80	3.00	2.50
18. I feel angry easily. *	2.20	1.80	2.25	2.50
19. I often feel sad. *	2.60	2.40	2.50	2.75
20. It is easy for me to make my own decisions.	3.00	2.80	1.75	2.25
21. I am kind to others.	3.40	3.60	3.50	3.75
22. I am kind to myself.	3.00	3.40	3.00	2.75
23. I know that other girls often struggle with the same things I do.	3.20	3.00	4.00	3.50
24. Overall, I feel good about myself.	2.80	3.00	2.50	2.50
25. I am confident, secure, and know that I am an important part of this world.	2.60	3.40	2.75	3.00
Mean of Response Means	2.80	2.97	2.85	2.85

* = Inverted statement

Discussion

Findings and Implications

According to the Pre-test and Post-test data of the participants in both the *Treatment Group* and the *Control Group*, the *Girls In Real Life Situations (GIRLS)* psychoeducational group program is effective in helping the girls learn about themselves and how to cope, or handle, situations related to the Pre-test/Post-test statements (Taylor & Trice-Black, 2007). The statement response mean data shows that the *Treatment Group* participants' feelings about themselves as related to the issues addressed increased from the beginning of the program to the end.

Based on the mean data provided, the GIRLS program is effective at helping the participants learn coping skills to help themselves with the social and emotional issues going on in their lives at this point in their development. According to the mean data, there is a connection between participating in the group and increased Post-test statement responses. The data implies that the GIRLS psychoeducational group program was effective in improving the participants' coping abilities as related to the topics discussed within the program. It is, however, unclear if the GIRLS program was responsible for helping to improve the participants' self-understanding specifically.

The *Control Group* consisted of four participants who were unable to attend all of the group sessions due to academic ineligibility. Academic ineligibility meant that the participants were failing two or more classes and were required to stay after every day in what is called, "Ineligibility Study Hall." The study hall took place when the GIRLS group was occurring, which meant that because they were not performing academically, they were unable to work on the emotional and social topics discussed in the program. As noted in the review of the literature, there is a connection between early adolescents' self-understanding and academic performance (Wigfield et al., 2005), so it could be implied that participating in the GIRLS group program might have helped them raise their grades, if their poor academic performance was due to low self-esteem and self-concept. It is difficult to know, though, whether the GIRLS group program helps participants with academic performance because it has not been looked for.

Self-understanding becomes more significant to cognitive development in early adolescence, and people in this age group are forming more concrete feelings, attitudes, judgments, and beliefs about themselves (Berk, 2011). During this time of vast growth

and change, measuring and attending to this area could be a key to unlocking an enhanced learning experience (Wigfield et al., 2005). The outcome of this research project shows one way in which self-understanding can be addressed; a psychoeducational group such as the GIRLS program. The collected data shows that the *Treatment Group* participants' self-understanding increased in the areas discussed within the program. The data shows that the participants of the *Treatment Group* had more positive views of themselves after going through the GIRLS program. Their self-esteem and self-concept as related to the Pre-test/Post-test statements increased more for the *Treatment Group* than the *Control Group*.

The data also shows that issues related to body image and how the participants viewed themselves was changed from the beginning of the program to the end for both groups. From Pre-test to Post-test, the *Treatment Group's* mean response to the following statement raised by 0.40 while the *Control Group's* decreased by 0.50: (13) I am happy with the way my body looks. As noted in the literature review, it is possible that puberty can effect early adolescents' self-esteem, so to see the data showing that the GIRLS program helped those in the *Treatment Group* feel better about their bodies is important (Williams & Currie, 2000).

The findings help show that the GIRLS program helps them enhance their coping skills during a time of great change and growth; emotionally, socially, and physically. According to Berk (2011), self-understanding is at a vulnerable state in this age group, so for the participants' thoughts and feelings about themselves in relation to the topics discussed in the GIRLS program is a step in the direction of have early adolescents who

are less anxious, cooperative with others, leaders, and emotionally as well as socially articulate (Hay & Ashman, 2003).

Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research

The Pre-test survey is a way for the facilitator of the *Girls In Real Life Situations* (GIRLS) psychoeducational group program to gauge the participants' feelings about themselves as related to the topics will be discussed within the program (Taylor & Trice-Black, 2007). It helped this researcher understand the main issues surrounding the group of participants and helped shine a light on the focus that the group would take. The Post-test is the very same survey and it gauges the participants' feelings about themselves related to the topics that were discussed within the program. However, the Post-test doesn't measure, or examine, whether or not and improves feelings and coping skills are due specifically to the GIRLS group program.

This research project involved a *Treatment Group* and a *Control Group*, which helps to imply that it was the group that may have led to improved self-understanding and coping skills. The site's measurement of how effective the GIRLS group program is at improving participants' self-understanding could be enhanced by creating a Post-test that poses more program-specific statements or questions. For example, instead of a statement being "I am in touch with my emotions and often know how I am feeling," it could say, "This group helped me get more in touch with my emotions and understand how I am feeling." Making the Post-test more specific to the GIRLS group program's involvement in increasing the statement responses could lead to more confidence in the idea that it is the group that leads to greater self-understanding.

Another suggestion for further evaluation of this group program would be to have more than one Post-test. It would enhance the database to have another Post-test a few months after the program has ended. Doing so would help to further understand if the group effective in a more long-term sense.

The number of participants in each group is quite small—the *Treatment Group* had five participants and the *Control Group* had four participants— and it is a singular school year that was examined. It is suggested that the Pre-test and Post-test data from each time the program is facilitated be kept, so a database can grow. This could help to build a stronger foundation of the program at this site as well as improve its accountability and keep it effective.

The facilitators and their colleagues have always chosen participants for the GIRLS group program at this site. While the facilitators have first-hand knowledge of students who are struggling or familiar with the topics and issues focused on in this program, they might be leaving out girls who could greatly benefit from the program, but haven't been as vocal about their issues with such topics. This researcher suggests that the facilitator of the GIRLS group program administer a needs assessment to all female students in sixth, seventh, and eighth grades as a way to recruit participants. This is more generalizable and a way to reach out to all students; leading to less exclusion of girls who might really benefit from the program.

The culture of the site could play a role in how the GIRLS program effects the participants. Is there a connection between the rural environment and community, and the effectiveness of the program? The site is an economically diverse community with 26% of students eligible for free or reduced lunch (New York State Education Department,

2013). This is something that may be worthwhile to explore at the site as to whether or not the economic background of participants could play a role in their self-understanding at the beginning of the group as well as how it progresses throughout the group. It could be difficult for participants to focus on the topics of the GIRLS group and their thoughts and feelings if they and their families are stressed financially on a regular basis.

However, if financial stress is a theme that participants are experiencing at this site within the GIRLS group, then it could be beneficial to incorporate coping skills surrounding that issue. Another question focusing on demographics of the GIRLS group participants is whether or not their age and grade level plays a role in their self-understanding growth; does that make a difference? As Berk (2011) noted, people's ability to self-understand evolves as they grow older, so it may be that older students experience more growth in that area than their younger co-participants. Age and grade level are demographics that could be explored further to better understand participants abilities to reflect on their feelings, thoughts, beliefs, values, and judgments of themselves. Depending on the goal of those who do future research, there are many avenues that can be taken to find out more information about the effectiveness of the *Girls In Real Life Situations* program. There are many variables that can be explored specifically to enhance the program for what any particular school site's major demographics and issues are.

The purpose of this research project was to evaluate the GIRLS program and understand its relation to the participants' self-understanding. As it currently stands at the site, the GIRLS program is helping to enhance participants' knowledge of and skills to deal with social and emotional development issues. According to the mean statement response data collected (see Table 2), there seems to be greater self-understanding

Taylor & Trice-Black, 2007 increase in some topics and not so much growth with other topics. The current evaluation of the school-based *Girls In Real Life Situations* (GIRLS) psychoeducational group program shows that participants are gaining understanding of themselves in relation to the topics discussed throughout the program (). It is helping early adolescent females to have improved feelings and thoughts about themselves and their ability to cope with certain situations. Moving forward, it would be beneficial to explore the effectiveness of the GIRLS program in more detail, looking for a link between other variables and the program. As Berk (2011) noted, self-understanding is so vital during this time of emotional, social and physical development and more research into the enhancement of self-understanding in early adolescents could help them in all realms of their lives including academically, personally, socially, and with their future career-related endeavors.

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Appendices

Appendix A

The Pre-test/Post-test used in this research project:

GIRLS Pre-Test/Post-Test

1

G.I.R.L.S.

'About Me' Survey

Please circle one: Pre-test or Post-test Date _____

Directions: Read the following questions and circle only one answer for each.
Please really think about your answers before you respond and be honest
with yourself. Thank you!

1=Not at all true 2=A little bit true 3=Mostly true 4=Very true

1. I know myself and the things that make me happy.	1	2	3	4
2. I make friends easily.	1	2	3	4
3. I have lots of friends.	1	2	3	4
4. I have a few close friends that I trust.	1	2	3	4
5. I am always a good friend and am trustworthy.	1	2	3	4
6. I often feel lonely.	1	2	3	4
7. I can talk openly to my friends and family about my true feelings.	1	2	3	4
8. I know how to communicate my feelings to others.	1	2	3	4
9. I am in touch with my emotions and often know how I am feeling.	1	2	3	4
10. I know how to handle stress.	1	2	3	4
11. I know who to go to when I need help and/or support.	1	2	3	4
12. I practice good decision-making skills and don't feel pressure from friends to do things I don't want to do.	1	2	3	4
13. I am happy with the way my body looks.	1	2	3	4
14. I worry about the way the media portrays beauty.	1	2	3	4

Appendix A continued:

GIRLS Pre-Test/Post-Test

2

15. Overall, I enjoy school.	1	2	3	4
16. Drama gets in the way of my learning in school.	1	2	3	4
17. I worry about my ability in school.	1	2	3	4
18. I feel angry easily.	1	2	3	4
19. I often feel sad.	1	2	3	4
20. It is easy for me to make my own decisions.	1	2	3	4
21. I am kind to others.	1	2	3	4
22. I am kind to myself.	1	2	3	4
23. I know that other girls often struggle with the same things I do.	1	2	3	4
24. Overall, I feel good about myself.	1	2	3	4
25. I am confident, secure, and know that I am an important part of this world.	1	2	3	4

Appendix B

The original *Girls In Real Life Situations* (GIRLS) Pre-test/Post-test:

G.I.R.L.S. Pretest/Posttest

Name _____ Date _____

Directions: Read the following questions and choose only one answer. Think about your answers and be really honest with yourself!

1. I feel that I know myself and the things that make me happy.
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Sometimes
2. I am happy with the way my body looks.
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Sometimes
3. I practice good decision-making skills and don't feel pressure from my friends to do things I don't want to.
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Sometimes
4. I feel that I can talk openly to my friends and family about my true feelings.
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Sometimes
5. I am in touch with my emotions and always know how I am really feeling.
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Sometimes
6. I feel that I am always a good friend and can be trusted.
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Sometimes

(Taylor & Trice-Black, 2007)

Appendix B continued:*G.I.R.L.S. Pretest/Posttest (continued)*

7. I know who I want to date or "go out with" and choose them according to what I like.
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Sometimes
8. I feel good about myself.
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Sometimes
9. I know how to handle stress.
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Sometimes
10. I know who to go to when I need support.
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Sometimes
11. I know that other girls often have trouble with the same issues that I do.
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Sometimes
12. I am confident, secure, and know that I am an important part of this world.
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Sometimes

(Taylor & Trice-Black, 2007)