THE TRANSITION INTO HIGH SCHOOL: HOW IT IMPACTS STUDENTS ACADEMICALLY, SOCIALLY & MENTALLY

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As students near the end of 8th grade and begin preparing for their first year of high school, they are often met with fear and anxiety (Mizelle & Irvin, 2000). These strong emotions may stem from various things, especially academic challenges, and changes in their social life. With this transition into high school, many students also fear that they may not be socially accepted in this new peer environment. Along with these challenges, students who are of a different culture, race/ethnicity or a lower income background, compared to White students or students of a higher class often face major challenges from a cultural standpoint, as well as stepping into high schools with less diverse representation in faculty and the student body. All of these can be a perfect storm of stressors making this transition extremely difficult for some teens.

The transition into high school is a stressful event. The stressors in this transition may strongly influence the decline in mental health for some students. Currently there is an ongoing mental health crisis among young people in this country, as there has been a dramatic increase in anxiety and depression. Especially coming out of the pandemic, students have gone from spending almost no time with their peers to being in high school where they must adapt to a new peer environment. They had a lack of an opportunity to develop social skills during the pandemic because they were isolated. Now they find themselves facing new judgement, new cliques forming and new levels of social pressure.

My senior thesis will focus on the different effects this transition has on students going into high school. I will address the following questions. What makes the transition from middle school to high school so difficult for students? What are the risk factors that may increase the likelihood of a maladaptive outcome (decline in academic performance, dropping out of high school, not graduating, or experiencing a mental health decline)? What intervention programs

have been developed to ease the transition to high school? Along with research on the above topics, I will also be looking into protective factors and intervention strategies that make for a better outcome for students who may struggle during this transition, as well as strategies to prevent a negative outcome. To help students with these transitions, researchers need to pass this information along to schools so that they can better intervene and provide students with the proper resources necessary to help them succeed and prevent the potential negative impact of the transition.

In research on this topic, life course theory has played a significant role in explaining the lasting effects of the transition to high school. The developing person cannot be separated from their environment, especially their social environment. They are continually interacting with it. Depending on how the student adapts to the various changes that come with the transition into high school, the transition can determine the direction that adolescents take in the future: continuing in school or dropping out, attending classes, mental health increasing or declining, how they handle the workload, if they are able to adapt to the social changes and changes in peer environment, and the path they choose after they leave high school.

The Life Course Theory

Life Course Theory is a useful theoretical framework for studying the transition to high school. This is the theory that an individual's future is shaped by the decisions that they make throughout life and the environment that surrounds them. In other words, it can be defined as "a sequence of socially defined events and roles that the individual enacts over time" (Giele and Elder 1998, p. 22). The article “Life Course Theory - Key Principles And Concepts - Single Parent, Gender, Poverty, Family, and History” lists six fundamental principles that make up this concept of life, “(1) socio-historical and geographical location; (2) timing of lives; (3)

heterogeneity or variability; (4) "linked lives" and social ties to others; (5) human agency and personal control; and (6) how the past shapes the future" (JRank Articles, 2023).

Socio-historical and geographical location refers to the idea that the time period and location in which a person lives will affect their developmental path. This involves their cultural, political, and economic environment, such as if they live in a time period where there is a recession or war. The timing of lives is based on a person's transitions through time, such as their generational time period, which can be defined as "the age groups or cohorts in which people are grouped, based upon their age" (JRank Articles, 2023).

Heterogeneity or variability relates to the different experiences that differ between ages. An example of this would be the idea that with older age, comes more knowledge and experience. "The longer one lives, the greater the exposure to factors that affect the aging process" (JRank Articles, 2023). It also speaks of the variability between people in the same age group, which may cause their decisions to differ. These differences would include culture, gender, social class, family structure, ethnicity, and religion.

"Linked lives" and social ties to others focus on how big events in a person's life can affect relationships between them and their family/ friends. These events can also lead to other negative behaviors in the individual that can influence their decision-making and their path to the future. Events such as a death of a family member would be a prime example of something that can cause tension between families and possibly lead to maladaptive behaviors in an individual.

Human agency and personal control is the concept that individuals have control of their own paths. People are in control of their own lives and are in charge of deciding what will be beneficial to them based on their own personal experiences and opinions. There are often outside factors that may play a role in the paths that an individual decides to take. It is mentioned that

family may come into play in pushing an individual towards certain opportunities and deciding what they believe is best for the individual in some cases.

Lastly, Giele and Elder (1998) discuss how the past shapes the future – how an individual's future is shaped by the decisions that they make throughout life and the opportunities and environmental conditions that surrounds them. Decisions that an individual may possibly make at an earlier point in life, will act as a domino effect on everything else that may happen in their life. This effect can happen in many ways, including another individual's impact on others. An example of this would be one person starting a movement, that will affect the lifestyle of future generations, like the feminist movement. Another version of this would be the timing of earlier life events and how it would impact the future of the individual, such as dropping out of school, this could cause a ripple effect, leading to difficulty finding a job in the future, problems within the family, and other possible events.

Based on LCT, Benner (2011) writes about how a student's transition into high school can determine how their future will play out, describing the possible outcomes for students who may struggle with this transition, such as social changes, academic decline, and issues regarding a student's mental health. He writes, “The success with which adolescents manage the high school transition can have lasting implications for life course trajectories and life prospects through accumulating advantage when transitions are negotiated with ease, or accumulating disadvantage when transitions are more disruptive to well-being.” (Conclusion, 2011). This is referring back to the author's thesis, that different milestones in a person's life can have an influence on their future, and what path they choose to take as they move forward in life. As a teen endures this amount of change in curriculum and social differences during the high school transition, it is a lasting memory for them. Some students adapt to high school better than others and are able to prosper in this environment, and in some cases do better in 9th grade than in 8th,

however, depending on how this transition goes, in the worst-case scenario, students may fall off track and drop out of school.

In many ways, Benner (2011) advocates for support for students going into high school. For example, the author mentions that researchers should use this knowledge to provide possible solutions for these issues, such as possible support groups, or extra help programs that can help to teach, guide, and support students as they experience this new environment and workload. Researchers need to pass this information along to schools so that they can better intervene and provide students with the proper resources necessary to help them succeed and prevent the negative impact this transition may have on their future. In regard to the idea of sharing research to aid schools and student, the article says "we have accumulated a large base of information that now needs to be organized into a coherent body of knowledge. Such organization efforts are necessary to make meaning of sometimes disparate research findings, to inform high school support and intervention efforts, and to identify existing gaps in our knowledge of students' high school transition experiences in order to identify directions for future research endeavors." (Benner, 2011). Passing along this information to students, and finding ways to accommodate and assist them, could lead to a better chance of excelling and preventing further damage for these students.

Academic Effects and Outcomes

As mentioned above, this transition has a domino effect on how students are affected after they finish school. Alspaugh (1998) explored the nature of the achievement loss associated with school-to-school transitions from elementary school to middle school and to high school. The researcher's second goal was to explore the relationship between school-to-school transitions and the high school dropout rate.

This study consisted of three groups of 16 school districts for a total sample of 48 districts. The schools were primarily in rural small towns, and no urban districts were included in the comparison groups. Group 1 consisted of districts that had a K-8, 9-12 grade-level organization, with only one elementary school and one high school. The second group consisted of districts containing one elementary school, one middle school, and one high school, with a linear transition arrangement. The third group of districts had two or three elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school, with a pyramid transition arrangement of students from multiple elementary schools into a single middle school.

Achievement was measured by the Missouri Mastery and Achievement Test (MMAT). It was given to students in May of each year to score for reading, mathematics, science, and social studies, scaled around the state mean of 300 and a standard deviation of 60. The results revealed that all three school groups experienced a statistically significant achievement loss in the transition from middle to high school at 9th grade. This can signify that the change in workload that followed the transition into high school took a negative toll on the work ethics of students. There was no statistically significant difference among the three school districts' achievement losses associated with the four academic areas. The achievement loss for all schools in the study was less for mathematics than for the other academic areas. Lastly, the number of students per grade and mixing students from multiple elementary schools in the transition increased the achievement loss associated with the transition to high school. A significant limitation of this study was that the researcher failed to go in-depth on their methods and what they used to measure academic performance. They were very limited with the measures they used.

Students may also shift into different pathways that in many cases play a major role in their academic and social outcomes. Langenkamp (2009) sought to expand research on the transition into high school, as a pathway that may play a role in students’ initial high school

academic performance, as well as explore whether students' social integration into schools is affected differentially depending on which pathway is followed. This study consisted of adolescents in grades 7–12 from 134 public, private, and parochial schools using the school-based survey, the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health and the Adolescent Health and Academic Achievement study (N = 90,118).

In this study, the researcher identified three pathways' students could take following their transition into high school, characterized by varying amounts of disruption and opportunity for new social relationships upon entering high school. These three pathways were labeled as divergent (n = 785), mixed (n = 719) and uniform (n = 1,175), "n" representing the number of students identified in each pathway. The uniform pathways refer to students who maintain social ties with classmates who transitioned from middle school to high school with them. The mixed pathway includes students who have a higher chance of developing new social relationships in high school. Students who follow a divergent pathway undergo the biggest social change once they transition into high school. Students who follow this pathway tend to move away from past middle school relationships.

Most students who follow a uniform pathway are non-Latino/ white, while minority students are more likely to follow a divergent pathway. Those following the mixed pathway have more of an opportunity to develop new social relationships in high school. The study has shown that students who follow a mixed pathway earn a higher predicted GPA in the first year of high school. "In the uniform pathway and the mixed pathway, students who are more bonded with their teachers have a higher first-year GPA" (Langenkamp, 2009). This is said to mean that teacher and student relationships play a significant role in student academics and whether their GPA increases or decreases. Differences in middle school social ties may indicate the realities of students' connection to the people in their schools as they face the high school transition. In

conclusion, “results indicate that both the pathway followed and social integration into middle school are associated with academic performance in the first year of high school” (Langenkamp, 2009), meaning, the differences in academic achievement for students can depend on which pathway they follow, and can also can work handing hand in determine how their social life overall will turn out in high school. Weiss and Bearmans’s (2007) goal were to reexamine the effects of school transitions by directly comparing the ninth-grade outcomes of students who transition to ninth grade by moving to a new school with those who do not. This study's participants consisted of 132 schools in 80 communities, stratified by region, urbanicity, school type (public, private, parochial), and ethnic mix. From September 1994 until April 1995, questionnaires were administered to all students in each school, resulting in data on more than 90,000 students. For the first stage of data collection, students were asked about the educational and occupational background of parents and about their household structure, risk behaviors, visions of the future, self-esteem, and health status. Students were also asked to nominate their five best male and female friends. School administrators also completed a self-administered questionnaire in the first and third years of the study. For the second stage, The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent to Adult Health (Add Health) obtained rosters of all enrolled students in each school and conducted 20,745 in-home interviews. With this assessment, researchers gathered data on more sensitive health risk behaviors, such as drug and alcohol use, sexual behavior, and criminal activities, in addition to detailed measurement of health status, family dynamics, aspirations, and attitudes.

The results of this study revealed that all student outcomes, whether academic or nonacademic, there is a significant negative change from eighth grade to ninth grade. The results also suggested the need for a more expansive view of how transitions shape outcomes for groups of students. These findings revealed that these changes are driven by factors such as the that the

idea that students who remain in the same school during the transition from middle school to high school, may do a better job academically but not in attachment to school, than students who change schools. From another perspective however, there seem to be benefits for some students to having a fresh start, and this is especially so for those students who have troubled histories with respect to peer integration, attachment to school, and prior history of grade retention. Transitions do not have as much of an effect compared to other features of school life since those students who are in good shape do not tend to suffer, and those with more checkered social, academic, and behavioral pasts could either benefit or decline.

In terms of aiding students during the transition, schools could be doing a better job at providing resources for students, lowering the dropout rate and providing support. According to The Bureau of the Census, "As many as 5% of all high school students leave school each year; and among certain student populations, (e.g., rural or urban), more than 10% drop out annually" (Bureau of the Census (DOC), 1997; National Center for Education Statistics (ED), 1995; Schwartz, 1995). These negative statistics show that students forced to enter high school with little to no preparation tend to have a more challenging time adapting to the new setting and persevering. Middle school administration needs to play a role in adequately aiding students in their transition to high school. By providing specific preparation resources and a more hands-on approach, students will be better prepared for any potential difficulties they may have initially feared before entering. "Middle school principals also indicated that they expected fewer of their students to drop out before graduation when the school provided supportive advisory group activities or responsive remediation programs" (Mizelle & Irving, 2000). Allowing all students to have an option to access these resources, including those less fortunate and those who may otherwise not have these resources accessible to them allows for equal opportunity. According to Mizelle & Irving, programs that focus on topics such as time management, introducing the new

work they should expect, and coping skills to help students avoid being overwhelmed may benefit them. “The research indicates that facilitating young adolescents' transition from middle school to high school requires programs that specifically address the transition period” (Mizelle & Irving, 2000).

By creating these programs for transitioning students and welcoming teachers, the school administration may provide comfort for both parties. Teachers could give the students a perspective on the workload and level of difficulty they may experience. It could ease the tension between the two parties and help build a respected connection between the students and teachers. By involving middle school and high school teachers, they can work together to create plans on what would work best for the students, while keeping their best interests in mind. In the future, this method could also help middle school teachers understand what the students need to be prepared for and how they can help to prepare them.

In addition to the educational assistance, providing students with programs regarding the social aspect of high school aids with the transition process by extending support. It also allows students to engage with their peers and form new friendships that can continue into high school. With these supporting programs and groups, schools could play a significant role in eliminating any educational and/or social fears within students before they enter high school.

How the Transition is Viewed by Students, Parents and Teachers

In many cases, students, parents, and teachers agree on how the middle school to high school transition affects students. Akos and Galassi (2004) investigated how the middle school and high school transitions are viewed by teachers, students, and parents. This study included 320 ninth-grade students, 61 parents, and 17 teachers in a single high school in a medium-sized southern school district. The student sample consisted of 47.8% boys (153), 50.3% (161) girls,

and 1.9% (6) who did not specify gender. The racial composition of the student sample was 76.3% (244) Caucasian, 10.3% (33) African American, 5.6% (18) Asian, 3.4% (11) Hispanic, 2.2% (7) multiracial, and 1.9% unspecified (6). Each participant completed a self-report questionnaire early in the school year about various aspects of the high school transition. Students were asked to respond to a series of open-ended, short-answer questions about (a) what teachers, parents, and friends in middle school had told them about high school; (b) what the best and most difficult aspects of being in high school were; (c) what they had done to feel comfortable in high school; (d) what can be done in middle school to help eighth graders with the move to high school; and (e) what can be done in high school to help ninth graders with their move from the middle school. Parents first rated the difficulty of the move from middle school to high school for their child on a four-point Likert scale from difficult to easy. Then they answered open-ended questions like high school students. Similar to students and parents, teachers were asked in a checklist format what they thought the most positive and negative aspects of the move to high school were for students, also rated on a four-point Likert scale from difficult to easy. Then teachers did a series of open-ended, short-answer questions about the school transition that were altered to fit their perspective, asking: (a) about the types of transition activities and programming that should be provided at various times-in eighth grade, during the summer for rising ninth graders, during the first few days of high school, and during the fall semester of high school-for students and their families; (b) who should provide this programming; and (c) when it should be provided.

For both transitions (middle school and high school), students and parents agreed that the amount of homework and falling behind academically were top concerns. All three groups saw making new friends as the main thing about the transition that they most looked forward to. High school students identified freedom (30%), meeting new people/more people (24%), and

lunch/extracurricular options (24%) as the best aspects of the new school, while their parents specified new friends (27%), a bigger environment (21%), and sports/clubs (15%). High school students viewed the transition as "somewhat easy" and significantly easier than both parents and teachers. The parents did not rate the transition as any easier than the teachers rated it. Students also identified homework (35%), a variety of social and organizational changes (e.g., not having their friends in class, riding the school bus, getting around the school; 25%), and grades (16%) as the most difficult aspects of actually being in the high school, and parents identified homework (24%), academics (20%), and time management (16%). Teachers seemed to have an appreciation of students' academic concerns, as reflected by their choices of difficult classes and the pressure to do well. At the same time, they also viewed social adjustment, fitting in and making new friends as top student concerns. Parents were in close agreement with the students about the difficulty level of the transition and about the top student transition concern (amount of homework). From the parents' perspective, the school could help by placing less focus on academics (i.e., grades, tests, and homework), with greater accessibility of teachers and counselors, and through more communication about the work.

A limitation of the study was that the transition was measured only by a self-report questionnaire. Thus, this study was based on potentially biased reports from young students. Students could be biased to give more positive reports – to see the transition through “rose-colored glasses,” and thus believe what they want to believe about the transition. This study excluded objective measures of aspects of the transition - their grades, measures of social adjustment, etc. The participants' pre-transition recollections could have also been influenced either by their post-transition experiences or by forgetting given that they were surveyed in October, approximately 2 months after the students had entered their new schools.

Longitudinal Studies of the Developmental Process

Longitudinal studies have allowed researchers to study the process of the high school transition over an extended period of time. This method is beneficial to research, as researchers can keep track of how students excel or decline, and how the transition plays a role in their academics, social life, and other aspects of high school, and what comes after. Isakson and Jarvis (2004) studied the adjustment of adolescents during their transition to high school in a longitudinal study. Their primary hypothesis was that, compared to eighth grade, the social and academic adjustment would decrease during the transition to high school. Stressors and a sense of autonomy were expected to increase and perceived social support from friends and parents was expected to decrease. Their second hypothesis was that stressors would increase during the transition to high school and that this increase would predict negative adjustment outcomes. Their third hypothesis was that adolescents' perceived level of parental support would be positively correlated with parental well-being.

In this longitudinal study, the sample consisted of 41 (20 male, 21 female) adolescents (mean age= 13.7) attending eighth grade at a public university-affiliated, K-8 Laboratory School in the Midwest along with their parents. The participants were mostly Caucasian, middle-class, students. This study followed a longitudinal design to assess adolescents' adjustment as they transitioned from junior high to high school. Changes in adolescents' sense of autonomy, perceived stressors, social support, sense of school membership, grade point average (GPA), and attendance were assessed. Coping strategies were also considered at each time point. Also, because parents who feel better about themselves may offer more support to their adolescents, parents of the adolescents in the study completed measures assessing their stressors and coping mechanisms. Most measures were taken at the end of 8th grade, the middle of 9th grade, and the end of 9th grade. Daily stressors were measured using the Daily Hassles Scale to assess how the stressors students face may change during the transition from junior high school to high school.

Coping strategies were measured using the COPE to assess how students managed the stressors they encountered in the eighth and ninth grades, as well as any changes that might have occurred in these coping strategies during the transition period. Social support from friends was assessed using Procidano and Heller's (1983) scale of Perceived Social Support from Friends (PSS-Fr), which measures how much a person feels that his or her needs for support, information, and feedback are met by friends. Social support from parents was assessed using Lamborn and Steinberg's (1993) measure of relationship support. Lastly, Autonomy was measured by Steinberg and Silverberg's (1986) autonomy scale, which assessed how emotional autonomy changes in adolescents. At each time of measurement, data regarding GPA and attendance rates were gathered from student records. Each student's GPA and attendance from their school records from the eighth-grade year were compared to the GPA and attendance from both the first and second semesters of their first year of high school. Grade point averages were measured on a 4-point scale, ranging from 0.00 to 4.00.

The results revealed that partial evidence was found regarding the expected increase in stressors during the transition into high school. Support from friends increased over the transition, contrary to the hypothesized decrease in support. No support was found for the expected changes in sense of school membership, autonomy, and perceived support from parents. Important relationships were found between adjustment outcomes and stressors, adaptive coping, autonomy, support from friends, and support from parents. Support from parents measured at the beginning of ninth grade was important in influencing school membership. With parental involvement, students may receive more support and encouragement when it comes to academics and participation in school activities. It was also found that stressors at the beginning of ninth grade lowered students' sense of school membership. With these results, it can be determined that **s**tressors during the transition to high school affected academic

achievement, and adaptive coping efforts were limited in their success. These stressors are very significant when considering their impact on GPA during the transition into high school. Results from this study also indicated that teaching adolescents adaptive coping strategies, such as problem-solving skills involving how to manage schoolwork, social changes, and changes in the environment, may help them during school transitions.

Another longitudinal study that played a role in studying this crucial transition was done by Aprile D. Benner and Sandra Graham's (2009). The researcher's goal was to study how the transition into high school affected students psychologically and academically over the span of four years. This longitudinal study also measured the changes in the school climate for the participants.

To study the high school transition the researchers conducted their study using a racially and ethnically diverse, urban sample of 1,979 adolescents, and followed them from 7th to 10th grade (M age = 14.6, SD = .37 in 7th grade). This study consisted of 46% boys and 54% girls as well as a high proportion of ethnic minority students—46% Latino (primarily Mexican and Central American), 21% African American, 11% Asian (primarily East Asian), 9% White, and 13% biracial/multiethnic. Using school and complete student-level data, the researchers measured the perceptions of the school climate, psychological functioning, and academic behaviors through a longitudinal study during the fall and spring middle school semesters for a total of 8-time points. To carry out this study, each school year student would complete the questionnaire during the middle of the fall and spring semesters. These questions were read aloud to the students, and the students were to individual respond on their questionnaires.

The results showed that the transition was challenging for African American and Latino students. This was shown as the size of these participant groups decreased during the middle

school transition due to participants leaving the study. In terms of perceptions of school climate, across middle school, students increased in their school liking. Immediately after the transition to high school, students reported liking school more than at the end of middle school. School liking declined from fall of 9th to spring of 10th grade. The students did not experience any change in their general feelings of school belonging after the high school transition. In terms of psychological functioning, After the transition to high school, students reported more anxiety than at the end of middle school, and they continued to decline across 9th and 10th grades. Immediately after transitioning to high school, students' grades declined, and they continued to decline across 9th and 10th grades. Feelings of loneliness also increased across the first 2 years of high school. At the same time, students' grades were declining across those years and their school absences were increasing.

The results show that the transition into high school was not consistently positive among all students. Students experienced loneliness, anxiety and struggled academically, directly after the transition due to the shift in environment and academic demand. While there were reports of liking high school after the transition, results revealed that these positive reports quickly declined across 9th and 10th grade as academics, attendance, and psychological health/ experiences all declined. The results also reveal that the transition was more stressful when African American and Latino students transitioned to high schools where there were significantly fewer same-ethnicity peers.

Intervention Programs

The transition from Middle School to High School can be hard on some students. In some cases, students may fall behind when it comes to academics, have trouble adjusting to their new setting, experience issues socially and in the worst-case scenario, some may not graduate. In

order to help students with these transitions, researchers need to pass this information along to schools so that they can better intervene and provide students with the proper resources necessary to help them succeed and prevent the negative impact that may come as a result of the transition.

Rutgers University (2013) conducted a study to oversee the impact that the Peer Group Connection (PGC) program has on students. This group is a High School transition program, led by other High School students and peers that provides multiple services to teens, including leadership skills and academic help and providing an insight into what students may expect in High School. The researcher's goal of this study was to examine students who participate in the high school transition program (PGC) and see if it improved the likelihood of them graduating from high school in four years.

In this study, researchers examined 268 ninth-grade students (133 females; 135 males). These students came from a low-income, Mid-Atlantic urban high school and a majority of them were Latino/Hispanic (92%), with only 2% of them being African American, and 6% “other”. Each participant was randomly assigned to participate either in PGC once per week as a component of their physical education course or to participate in physical education five days per week. Lastly, to conclude the study, the researchers obtained a list of all the students who graduated from high school in June 2009. The primary measure was to observe the graduation rates of each student in four years and to compare the rate of graduates who participated in the program to the graduation rate of students who did not participate in the program.

The results of the graduation rates show that the graduation rate was positively impacted for males who had taken part in the program. These results also show that there was no difference in graduation rates for females in the program, compared to the control group.

However, it notes that the program positively impacted females in other outcomes, including higher academic self-efficacy, higher attendance, and better grades. These results show that PGC does play a role in improving the graduation rate among participants and that having programs like this can help to aid students in their transition into high school.

One limitation of this study is the type of participants. This study used participants from one low-income high school, and the participants were predominantly Hispanic. Thus, the results are very generalized and may not provide a proper insight into all students of all cultures and economic statutes. One-way researchers could better this study is to expand their field of research, so it has more diversity, and see how the data and results may differ in a positive or negative way. Another limitation of this study would be that the researchers had separated the male results and the female results. If they were to conduct this experiment combined group, it may have impacted the results of the experiment, as well as give them more information on what parts of the program students may benefit from, and what parts they need to improve on.

In a different approach, Erin Spier (2011), examined the effectiveness of a group art therapy intervention within a school setting. This study was done to increase coping skills and decrease disruptive behaviors in a group of 6 eighth-grade students. Each student was at a high risk of making a poor transition to high school.

The participants in this study consisted of 2 girls and 4 boys in regular education classes at a private K-8 elementary school, mean age 13.5. Each participant exhibited poor coping skills and/or disruptive behaviors and were referred to the study by their teachers due to the significant impact these behaviors had on the student's academic experience. Examples of coping skills that each student struggled with were "speaking out in class at inappropriate times, exhibiting

difficulty following or accepting adult requests, and interacting poorly with peers" (Erin Spier, 2011).

This study was done using a mixed-method single-case experimental design, with the control group being the students who did not take part in this program but were in the same class as the students who did. Participants completed a "Adolescent Coping Orientation for Problem Experiences" (A-COPE) which is a 54-item self-inventory that measures adolescent coping behaviors based on answers to 5-point Likert's scale. Students were asked questions such as "When you face difficulties or feel tense, how often do you . . . ." (Erin Spier, 2011). Each participant also took part in a twice-weekly art therapy session where they completed art-related tasks over 9 different sessions that lasted 45 to 60 minutes and began with a verbal check- in for participants to describe their individual overall functioning on a 10-point scale. By allowing these students to take part in these activities, they can express their deepest feelings through art. This also aids them in finding comfort that their peers, who also act out, may feel the same feelings they do.

The results for session 1 revealed fear of getting lost in the crowd, anxiety over physical size and appearance and uncertainty about entering high school. Session 2 revealed a general feeling of stress. In session 3, the participants revealed where they experienced stress in their bodies, depicting headaches, upset stomachs, tears and overall anxiety. Session 4 participants identified stressors using objects to represent them, such as a game of life, feathers (to represent going with the flow) and rubber bands to represent being flexible. From session 5 participants made masks, to identify their true self or what they wish to hide. This mostly represented the fear of hiding their true self to make friends or be someone that people will like. In session 6 participants noted steps they could take to conquer their fears and stressors. In session 8, participants presented themes regarding the desire to be socially accepted, inclusion in a sports

team and the need for support when entering high school. Through these activities, researchers observed the hidden fears and worries amongst the students and helped them come up with possible coping skills they could use to combat these feelings. Some coping skills students and researchers had come up with were done through each step of the program. In session 6, after completing the task, during the discussion, "the students acknowledged that most of the steps taken to resolve or reduce the stressors were appropriate, but they did discuss other options for some of the situations presented" (Erin Spier, 2011). This is an important method, as it allows students to acknowledge unruly behavior, and understand different ways that they could go about certain situations in a healthier manner.

One major limitation of this study was that the sample was very small. The results do not generalize to a larger population that the sample is intended to represent. N=6 is way too small for a study to have any generalizability. In the future, this study should be run with a larger sample of students to compare their findings with past research and see how it has improved.

Conclusion

As students near the end of 8th grade and begin preparing for their first year of high school, they are met with fear and anxiety. The anxiety that teens experience about going into high school may stem from various things, including a heavier workload, more challenging courses, change in environment, and a change in their social life. With this transition into high school, many students also fear that they may not be socially accepted in this unfamiliar environment. A heavy influence that plays a role in these perceptions of high school are TV shows that depict frightening scenarios, including bullying, and falling behind in classes. The direction that these students take following the transition, whether it is positive or negative, ties into the life course theory. Life course theory is the idea that anything a person does in the present will play a role in

the paths they take in the future. In this case, it will determine if a student chooses to graduate high school, goes to college, or even takes part in maladaptive practices. Benner (2011) writes about how a student's transition into high school can determine how their future will play out, describing the possible outcomes for students who may struggle with this transition, such as social changes, academic decline, and issues regarding a student's mental health.

From the parents' perspective, the school could help by placing less focus on academics (i.e., grades, tests, and homework), with greater accessibility of teachers and counselors, and through more communication about the work. To help students, researchers need to pass information about research done regarding the struggles students face during the transition into high school. By passing this information along to schools they can better intervene and provide students with the proper resources necessary to help them succeed. This can help to prevent the negative impact that may come because of the transition. With programs such as peer leadership groups, such as the Peer Group Connection (PGC) program, and after school programs with middle and/or high school faculty, teachers and students who had already experienced this transition would be able to give the students a perspective on the workload and level of difficulty that they may experience, the social pressures and an insight on the new environment. This will allow students to see the new school, meet their new teachers and see the new curriculum they will be doing as they move ahead. It could help build a respected connection between the students and teachers. By involving middle school and high school teachers, they can work together to create plans on what would work best for the students, while keeping their best interests in mind, as well as provide coping mechanisms for these students to give them a way to navigate the different stressors in a healthy and manageable way. In the future, this method could also help middle school teachers understand what the students need to be prepared for and how they can help to prepare them. By providing specific preparation resources and a more hands-on

approach, students will be better prepared for potential difficulties they may have initially feared before entering. By creating interventions programs for transitioning students and welcoming teachers, the school administration may provide comfort for both parties.

Studies on the transition have shown that, the transition can be more stressful when African American and Latino students transitioned to high schools where there were significantly fewer same-ethnicity peers (Benner & Graham's 2009). The reason for this level of discomfort is because they have little to no representation. Often when students are placed in classrooms where they are surrounded by little to no one who shares their race/ethnicity, they feel like an outsider, and in many cases, this can cause a roadblock to their academics and social life. Benner and Graham (2009) studied how the transition into high school affected students psychologically and academically over four years. In this study it discussed how minorities were affected by this transition, and the researchers had reports from students regarding feelings of loneliness increasing across the first 2 years of high school. The transition was more stressful when African American and Latino students transitioned to high schools where there were significantly fewer same-ethnicity peers, as it is harder for them to build trust and make connections.

There are many limitations of current research that can be improved in order to aid students. For example, there are too many cross-sectional studies of students at a certain point in time, towards the end of the eighth grade, or the start of the ninth grade, and not enough longitudinal studies of the transition over time. One can only study the developmental process and pathways by following a group of kids over time. By implementing more studies that keep track of how intervention strategies affect the students over time, researchers will be able to show if their hypothesis on if intervention strategies aid students before, during and after the transition, is correct.

While some longitudinal studies aid researchers by showing the results of research over a long period of time, some longitudinal studies focus on only certain variables (e.g., academics) and ignore the larger developmental context of teens' complex lives. This focus limits the extent to which researchers can study the transitional process, which involves multiple interacting variables, including peers, the school environment, family environment. This is also very important when it comes to students of different cultural backgrounds. The lack of deeper research ignores the possible events that are happening outside of school and different experiences that play a role in how the students perform in school.

Lastly, many studies lack control or comparison groups. This is a major limitation because it hinders researchers from comparing different groups of students in a study. Without a control group, it is not possible to determine if an intervention is having an effect. In terms of this research, it would be referring to if the intervention strategies and coping mechanisms are easing the transition for students and can be used in the future to help students prepare for the transition from middle school to high school. If studies lack comparison groups, researchers cannot draw conclusions about purported risk factors and if the outcomes they are observing are being caused by what they believe to be the risk factors. If researchers are unable to identify these risk factors, then they are unable to identify the different variables that play a role in making the transition difficult for some students. This will create a roadblock for researchers, as they will not be able to create or investigate what certain intervention, they should focus on to aid students.

To get the most of studies and data that has been collected over the years about the high school transition, researchers need to consider how they can improve their research methods. With better methods, researchers will be able to identify the risk factors that affect students. Once the risk factors are established, then they can come up with better and more versatile

solutions for students, teachers and parents, and help students to better succeed in new environments, and develop new coping strategies. Teachers and staff can develop programs to guide them on a healthier and positive path as students move forward.

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