

Using SFBC Group Techniques to Increase Latino Academic Self-Esteem

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Abstract

A rural middle school in the geographic area between the Midwest to Southern U.S. sought help to motivate their Latino student population to aspire for higher academic goals. The researchers collaborated with the middle school to use solution-focused counseling techniques (Murphy, 2015) in a group format to bolster the self-esteem and ethnic identity of Latino middle school students. The group process and results demonstrated that participants significantly benefited in the areas of ethnic identity and self-esteem. Recommendations for working with multicultural students in school settings are included.

Keywords: Latino, self-esteem, ethnic identity, middle school, SFBC group counseling

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Latino students in the United States are a diverse group. They come from various countries, have different ethnic backgrounds, and speak various dialects of Spanish, Portuguese, or a native indigenous tongue. In 2016, the estimated population of the United States included over 55 million Latino individuals, which was 17.8 percent of the total population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016). The estimated number of Latinos under the age of 18 was almost 18 million, representing nearly a quarter of the total of the population under 18 in the United States (Krogstad, 2016). Additionally, the Pew Research Center noted that Latinos make up 54% of the current overall U.S. population growth (Krogstad, 2016). Negative social experiences affect Latino youth's levels of acculturation, motivation, and self-esteem (Dalla, Villarruel, Cramer, & Gonzalez-Kruger, 2004). Social rejection, low parental education, and high employment hours put Latino students in an academically *at-risk* group, which may inhibit their potential for secondary school graduation (Finn & Rock, 1997) and college attendance. On the other hand, this population also possesses protective factors that they may use to be successful. Specifically, Latino students are more likely to reach their potential if they have a strong ethnic identity, maintain support from their family and friends, and have effective coping strategies (Perez, Espinoza, Ramos, Coronado, & Cortes, 2009). Fortunately, these characteristics are strengths often held by Latinos (Harker, 2001). This study sought to help early-adolescent aged Latinos use their strengths to set and achieve high future goals.

This study took place in a small rural region between the Midwest and Southern U.S. and was the result of a collaborative effort between a local middle school counselor

and a regional university school counseling program. The local middle school reported a need to help motivate Latino students to achieve higher levels of academic success and to continue their education beyond high school. The study focus was to provide a safe counseling environment to help Latino middle school students become aware of and discuss their ethnicity, while measuring the impact of identity exploration on their self-esteem level, and ultimately to help the students gain skills for higher academic achievement. To achieve this goal, faculty members from a university and a school counselor collaborated to use solution-focused counseling techniques with Latino middle school students in a group counseling intervention.

Solution Focused Brief Counseling and Latino Resilience

Solution-focused brief counseling (SFBC) is a practical, cooperative approach focused on helping a client gain awareness of their personal strengths and use those strengths to make and meet goals for their future (Murphy, 2015; Sklare, 2014). SFBC has been shown to be effective with numerous culture groups and various settings, including clinics and schools (González Suitt, Franklin, & Kim, 2016; Lee & Mjelde-Mossey, 2004; Meyer & Cottone, 2013; Sklare, 2014). Additionally, SFBC is a reliable and effective therapeutic approach with school populations (Franklin, Moore, & Hopson, 2008; Franklin, Streeter, Kim, & Tripodi, 2007; Murphy, 2015). However, there are limited studies that demonstrate the effectiveness of this method with the Latino student population. In fact, only one study was found that concentrated on this student group, but that study was specific to Latino students with incarcerated parents. In their study, Springer, Lynch, and Rubin (2000) demonstrated positive outcomes utilizing SFBC treatment. The implication of using SFBC with the Latino population was that SFBC

focuses on characteristics that Latinos typically possess. The first emphasis in an SFBC approach was to help the students become aware of their strengths. For instance, Latino students often have a high identification with family, which was utilized as a strength in the form of family support (Orozco, 2007; Perez et al., 2009). Furthermore, high resilience identified within the Latino population was used as a focal point in helping students move forward from difficult circumstances in a college setting (Orozco, 2007). The counselor would use the students' natural resilience to help them make goals and create a plan to meet those goals.

Fortunately, certain characteristics of the Latino population coordinate well with identifying and using strengths as the basis for group counseling. Marín and Marín (1991) identified seven core characteristics of Latino individuals that influence their resiliency. More recent literature supports these core characteristics as demonstrable cultural strengths (Ai, Aisenberg, Weiss, & Salazar, 2014; Carlo, Koller, Raffaelli, & de Guzman, 2007; Davis, Lee, Johnson, & Rothschild, 2019). The core values are: (a) allocentrism, where individual focus is on others instead of self; (b) *simpatía*, which represents the feeling of community and compassion; (c) familism, where the needs of the family are more important than the needs of the individual; (d) power distance, meaning that individuals accept an unequal power distribution; (e) personal space, which is physically closer for the Latino culture than for American culture; (f) time orientation, that Latinos are oriented to present-time; and (g) gender roles, for which the men are *macho* and provide for the family fearlessly, and the women follow *marianismo* where they are the dedicated, care-givers (Ai et al., 2014; Carlo et al., 2007; Davis, Lee, Johnson, & Rothschild, 2019; Marín & Marín, 1991). Each of these characteristics

reflects how Latino individuals interact socially and outlines what guides them to move forward through difficult circumstances. In addition to the individual characteristics are the factors that impact group counseling, such as universality, imitative behaviors, and group cohesion (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005), that lend themselves to adolescent (Broderick & Blewitt, 2015) and Latino ethnic values. These group factors match well with inherent Latino strengths (Sue, Sue, Neville, & Smith, 2019). Using SFBC may allow Latino students to identify their natural strengths and use them to achieve higher academic goals.

Ethnic Identity

Ethnic identity comes from the perception of being part of a cultural group, the importance given to that group, and how much is understood about the group (Dan, 2014). Ethnic identity has its origins in Erikson's developmental theory, which stated that identity was formed in the adolescent years (Broderick & Blewitt, 2015). Ethnic identity was introduced by others, such as Phinney (1989), who understood that identity, belonging, and culture were interrelated. Phinney's model of ethnic identity development remains a highly utilized model for ethnic identity research, assessment, and exploration (Dan, 2014; Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010; French, Seidman, Allen, LaRue, & Aber, 2006; Phinney & Ong, 2007; Williams, Duque, Wetterneck, Chapman, & DeLapp, 2018). Phinney identified three stages based on levels of ethnic awareness (1989, 1993). The stages are: (a) unexamined ethnic identity, where individuals may experience diffusion or foreclosure; (b) ethnic identity search/moratorium, which marks the beginning stages of exploration or awareness; and (c) ethnic identity achievement,

where individuals have a more stabilized identity in which they accept factors of their ethnicity (Phinney, 1989; Phinney, 1993).

Ethnic identity develops as a person gains life experiences, especially during the adolescent developmental stages (Broderick & Blewitt, 2015). Although early adolescents are typically in the unexamined ethnic identity stage, many have not had the opportunity, or interest, in exploring factors based on ethnicity (Broderick & Blewitt, 2015; Quintana, 2007). Ethnic identity develops gradually through adolescence and experiences of racism may even expedite the process because it challenges adolescents to become more aware of their fit in society (Quintana, 2007). Quintana (2007) suggests racism and discrimination forces adolescents into the moratorium stage due to their increased awareness of ethnic and social issues based on having a minority status.

A problem of being in the unexamined or moratorium stage of ethnic development is that experiences and perceptions of racism, labeling, and discrimination will more likely impact academic achievement (Blewitt & Broderick, 2015; Quintana, 2007). Furthermore, there is a positive correlation between the strength of ethnic identity and academic performance (Alfaro, Umaña-Taylor, Golzales-Backen, Bámaca, & Zeiders, 2009; Grindal & Nieri, 2015). Specifically, when Latino adolescents are socialized to distrust other ethnic groups, their academic performance tends to be weaker than if they are taught to have pride in their ethnic values. A high level of discrimination, distrust of other ethnic groups, and being in the first or second stage of ethnic identity development, negatively impacts academic motivation and academic success (Alfaro et al., 2009).

Perception and awareness play an important role in goal setting and academic performance. There is a connection between ethnic labels (i.e., Latino), academic achievement, and post high-school plans (Zarate, Bhimji, & Reese, 2005). When adolescents use definitions for their ethnic self-labeling that are based on their Latino culture, reading and math scores tended to be higher than those who saw labels as imposed by others (Zarate et al., 2005). If an individual is accepting of their own ethnicity, which reflects the ethnic identity achievement stage (Phinney, 1993), then they are more likely to achieve higher levels of academic success (Ai, Carretta, & Aisenberg, 2017; Dan, 2014; Evans et al., 2010). Another factor that impacts academic achievement is how ethnic identity development impacts self-esteem (Evans et al., 2010; Phinney & Ong, 2007). When an individual is accepting of their ethnicity and feels a sense of belonging, then their self-esteem levels may increase (Dan, 2014; Phinney & Ong, 2007). Additionally, early and middle adolescents reported that increased baseline levels of identity affirmation directly correlate with higher levels of self-esteem (Gonzales-Backen, Bàmaca-Colbert, & Allen, 2015).

Self-esteem has been defined as an attitude that an individual possesses towards specific aspects of their life (Crocker & Major, 1989). The aspects include: (a) value as a person; (b) personal achievements; (c) belief of how others see you; (d) purpose in life; (e) strengths and weaknesses; and (f) relationship with others. Generally, individuals that report high self-esteem levels maintain improved academic performance, have better relationships, are more confident, and report greater happiness (Baumeister, Campbell, Krueger, & Vohs, 2003; Broderick & Blewitt, 2015). Also, individuals with high self-esteem levels are more likely to view themselves as

more competent, intelligent, having better social skills, being more athletic, and more physically attractive (Robins, Hendin, & Trzesniewski, 2001). Conversely, low self-esteem levels in adolescents correlate with obesity, sensation seeking behavior, and rebelliousness (McClure, Tanski, Kingsbury, Gerrard, & Sargent, 2010).

Ethnic identity and self-esteem are strong predictors of academic achievement (Brouillard & Hartlaub, 2005). Therefore, school personnel, and especially school counselors, should be invested in strengthening these two factors. Additionally, school personnel are in a prime position to foster the development of students' ethnic identity and self-esteem. Daily contact with students provides opportunities for exploration of ethnic factors. Ideally, discussions would be held in a safe environment, such as in a counseling group, with peers who share ethnic values and experiences.

Setting and Demographics

This study was conducted in a rural, mid-western to southern county with reported a population of 37,618. The county's White (Caucasian) population made up 92.5%, and 6% of the population identified as Hispanic or Latino (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016). This county had a larger percentage of Latinos compared to the entire state (3.4% Latino) because of local employment opportunities. The county has two school districts, the county schools and the city schools, and the racial and ethnic demographics of students in each school district are vastly different. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, the great majority of the county school district's demographic was White (96%). Roughly 4% of the student population was non-White, and 1.7% identified as Latino. The city school district had a larger percentage of

minority students (28.7%), with 9.1% who identified as Latino (U.S. Department of Education, 2016).

A struggle for the school was that even though the Latino student population seemed to have academic potential, there was an increasing achievement gap between the White students and the Latino students as they progressed into high school. The school district's standardized testing data demonstrated this increasing gap (Kentucky Department of Education, 2016). The combined reading and math scores from 2012 to 2015 indicated that the White students in the city middle school scored (50.1 average score) greater than the Latino students (35.3 average score) by a difference of 14.8 points. This point difference increased to 18.3 points between the high school White and Latino student scores in the same years, 2012-2015. The high school White students' average score went up to 57.5 points, and the high school Latino average score was 39.2. This data is especially alarming when the state's overall scores demonstrate a decreased gap by 1.9 for the same years (Kentucky Department of Education, 2016). At the state level, the average 2012 to 2015 score difference decreased from 13.1 in middle school (White student average was 50; Latino student average was 36.9) to 11.2 in high school (White student average was 49.2; Latino student average was 38).

The troubling score gap between the middle and high school continued into the post-secondary education level. The majority of Latino graduates chose not to attend a university or if they enrolled, the retention rate was low (86.7% retention from the first to second year; 59.1% from second to third year) and the graduation rate was lower (6-year graduation rate was 47.6% for the 2006 cohort and 33.3% for the 2007 cohort). These numbers, based on the most recent public data for first-time, full-time degree

seeking Latino students, indicate that few Latino students enrolled to attend the local university and if they did attend, less than half completed a degree (Murray State University, 2018).

The increasing academic achievement gap was a challenge for the city schools, which is a similar problem for other school districts (Brenchley, 2015). The main questions posed by the district were, “What is keeping these students from reaching their potential?” and “What can empower them to aspire for bigger career goals than the laborer or production occupations that await them locally?” The local school counselor and university counseling program faculty decided that a possible barrier lies within the identity development of the Latino population. The researchers used solution-focused counseling techniques in group counseling sessions that focused on Latino values and strengths. Group sessions facilitated the ethnic identity development of Latino students and positively impacted their self-esteem levels. The aim of the study was to help group participants identify and use their natural ethnic strengths to aim for greater academic achievement. Based on the needs of the school district and the desire to increase their ethnic identity and self-esteem, the following research questions were identified.

1. Will group counseling techniques focusing on positive aspects of Latino culture increase the sense of ethnic belonging of Latino Middle School students?
2. Does participation in a strength based ethnic formation group increase participant measures of self-esteem of Latino Middle School students?

Method

Participants

The study was conducted in a city’s middle school, consisting of grades six through eight. At the time, there were 72 Latino students enrolled at the school, which

accounted for 21.3% of the school's ethnic demographic (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Participants were randomly split between a treatment counseling group and a control group. There were 14 females and seven males in the study; five females and four males in the treatment group and nine females and three males in the control group. Most of the participants ($n = 15$) were in the sixth grade, along with one seventh-grade student, and five eighth-grade students. The treatment group consisted of eight sixth-grade students and one eighth-grade student. The average number of years living in the region was 8.6 years ($SD = 3.45$). Tabulated data from the study can be found in the Appendix. Table A1 provides an overview of the demographic data for the control and treatment groups.

Procedures

A quasi-experimental pre- and post-test design was implemented due to the lack of true random participant selection. The research design was the best fit for the study because of the number of variables that could not be controlled, including primarily individual participant histories, communication among treatment and control group members, and maturation (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Following IRB approval and permission from the school administration, the researchers spoke with the Latino parents during a school orientation at the beginning of the academic year. Twenty-five parents verbally agreed to participate, and letters were sent to the potential participants' parents explaining the nature, purpose of the study, and guidelines for participation in the counseling group. Of the 25 letters sent home, 21 families granted permission to include their student in the study. Parents and students were notified that participation in the counseling group was voluntary and they could cease participation at any point

without penalty. A member of the university research team was selected to blindly and randomly split the participants into a control group and a treatment group. Of the 21 students who returned parent permission letters, nine students were randomly selected for the treatment group, based on best practices for group size membership (Gladding, 2016). Additionally, control group members were assigned to a treatment group formed in the spring semester, which was altered slightly based on findings from the current study. Lastly, the authors complied with all ethical standards of the American School Counselor Association ([ASCA], 2016).

The Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM) and the Self-Esteem Questionnaire (SEQ) were administered to all participants prior to the seven-week counseling group. At the conclusion of the group experience, all participants completed the assessments a second time. The pre-assessment and post-assessment data for each participant were transferred from the paper questionnaires into an SPSS program for subsequent analyses.

Instruments

The MEIM questionnaire was developed to assess ethnic identity based on common ethnic characteristics across groups (Phinney, 1992). The MEIM is a self-report measure questionnaire scored with a 4-point response scale (SD = *Strongly Disagree*; D = *Disagree*; A = *Agree*; SA = *Strongly Agree*) that demonstrates good usability on a range of ethnic groups and ages (Roberts et al., 1999). The MEIM was developed as a tool to measure ethnic identity as a unidimensional model (Phinney, 1992). The MEIM maintains current support as a measure of ethnic identity using the unidimensional model (Ponterotto, Gretchen, Utsey, Stracuzzi, & Saya, 2003; Worrell,

2000). Ponterotto et al. (2003) reviewed twelve published studies that utilized the MEIM to measure ethnic identity finding a total of ten different samples. Reliability for the MEIM is positive with alphas ranging from .81 to .90 (Phinney, 1992) with a mean of .86 (Ponterotto et al., 2003). It has been suggested by some researchers that the MEIM measures two factors, exploration and commitment (Feitosa, Lacarenza, Joseph, & Salas, 2016; Roberts et al., 1999) or three factors, cognitive, behavioral, and affective (Lee & Yoo, 2004; Juang & Nguyen, 2010). However, Phinney and Ong (2007) more recently suggested the use the MEIM as univariate or bivariate based on the purpose of the research. While more recent analysis supports the MEIM as a two-factor measure, it also provides evidence for Phinney's original unidimensional model (Feitosa et al., 2016). The researchers determined that students hadn't yet considered their ethnic identity; therefore, the global or unidimensional measure of ethnic identity would be most appropriate.

The SEQ measures the multidimensional framework of self-esteem for adolescents (DuBois, Felner, Brand, Phillips, & Lease, 1996). It is a 42-item self-report questionnaire scored with a 4-point response scale (SD = *Strongly Disagree*; D = *Disagree*; A = *Agree*; SA = *Strongly Agree*). Dubois et al. developed three versions, an interview, self-report, and parent-report form version (1996). For this study the self-report form version was utilized. It contains six subscales: peer self-esteem (e.g., I am as popular with kids my own age as I want to be), family self-esteem (e.g., I am happy about how much my family likes me), school self-esteem (e.g., I am as good a student as I would like to be), body image self-esteem (e.g., I am happy with the way I look), sports/athletics self-esteem (e.g., I am as good at sports/physical activity as I want to

be) and global self-esteem, that measures global feelings of self-worth that is impacted by the other five factors (DuBois et al., 1996). All SEQ scales demonstrated strong internal consistency from .81 to .92 for the self-report version (DuBois et al., 1996). DuBois et al. demonstrated “test-retest correlations of self-report SEQ scores for the 2-week interval between questionnaire sessions as follows: Peers ($r = .71$), School ($r = .84$), Family ($r = .82$), Body Image ($r = .75$), Sports/Athletics ($r = .74$), and Global Self-Esteem ($r = .81$)” (1996, p. 463). DuBois et al. reported that “moderate to strong convergent validity was evident across self-report, interview, and parent-report forms of the SEQ. Correlations between corresponding self-report and interview scores were strong (r values ranged from .71 to .85; mean $r = .78$)” (1996, p. 566). Regarding construct validity, SEQ scores were positively correlated to a decrease of daily stressors and fewer negative major life events (DuBois et al., 1996).

Group Process

The researchers developed seven, 30-minute sessions using solution-focused counseling techniques to help the middle school Latino participants become more aware of their ethnic values and strengths. The group topics were based on Phinney’s components of ethnic identity (1992) and Marín and Marín’s support for the significance of familism among Latino families (1991). Phinney describes the common components of ethnic group members as “self-identification and ethnicity,” “ethnic behaviors and practices,” “affirmation and belonging,” and “ethnic identity achievement” (1992, pp. 158-160). Familism is the cultural placement of family values over the prioritization of self (Marín & Marín, 1991), which has been associated with psychological health (Campos, Ullman, Aguilera, & Dunkel Schetter, 2014). These five concepts were

combined with an introduction and conclusion group session to accommodate the needs of the research population making a total of seven group sessions. Session content progression was preplanned and is included in Table A2.

The school administration provided 30-minutes to conduct group sessions before first period. Due to the limit of a once-a-week group interaction the researchers included a homework component. Each homework assignment theme was tied to the academic goals of the five cultural values identified through the literature (Marín & Marín, 1991; Phinney, 1992). The homework assignments served as a method of continuing the group process through the week (Gladding, 2016). Group members were encouraged, through homework assignments, to implement group topics in their everyday life (Corey, 2017).

Results

To statistically analyze the difference between the counseling groups on the perceived self-esteem and ethnic identity as reported by the participants, several analyses were conducted. First, because of the relatively small sample size, the data were determined to be nonparametric, therefore a Wilcoxon signed-rank test was utilized to conduct the data analysis. This non-parametric test is appropriate for small sample sizes where each participant serves as his or her own control (Wilcoxon, 1945). For this series of comparisons, the treatment group's pre-assessment data served as the baseline data against which the post-assessment data were compared.

Research question one addressed whether group counseling techniques that focused on positive aspects of Latino culture could increase the sense of ethnic belonging which was assessed with the MEIM. Results of the MEIM pre and post

measures for the treatment group were significant at $p < .01$. Results of the MEIM pre and post measures for the control group were significant at $p < .05$. Thus, both control and treatment groups demonstrated a significant increase in sense of ethnic belonging. A noteworthy observation of the treatment group MEIM data are the mean and standard deviations. The treatment group's pre-treatment and post-treatment means, and standard deviations were $M = 1.88$ and $SD = 0.12$, and $M = 3.45$ and $SD = 0.29$ respectively. Whereas the control group's pre-treatment and post-treatment means and standard deviations were $M = 2.38$ and $SD = 0.25$, and $M = 3.25$ and $SD = 0.26$ respectively (See Table A3). Effect size is used to understand the size of difference between measured groups. Effect size was calculated for the treatment group, which indicated a high to medium effect of $d = 4.1$.

Research question two addressed whether participation in a strength-based ethnic formation group increase the participant's measures of self-esteem which was assessed using the SEQ. Results of the SEQ indicate pre and post measures for the treatment group was significant at $p < .01$. Additionally, five of the six subcategories, Peers, School, Family, Sports/Athletics, and Global Self-Esteem, were significant; however, the Body Image subcategory was not significant (See Table A3). Results of the SEQ pre and post measures for the control group were not significant at $p = .67$. A noteworthy observation of the SEQ data is the slight decrease in pre to post mean scores for the control group. Effect size was calculated for the treatment group, which indicated a high effect of $d = 1.86$. Table A3 provides the mean, standard deviation, and level of significance for the SEQ and MEIM as indicated by SPSS.

Discussion

In this study, the researchers used counseling group sessions to strengthen the ethnic identity of Latino students in a rural school district and to increase self-esteem levels. Results suggest that the researchers, through a group intervention, were able to increase measures of ethnic identity among participants. The control group also demonstrated an increase in measures of ethnic identity, which, in retrospect, based on the environment and study limitations, should have been an expected result. Participants were all part of a small minority and even smaller Latino population in a largely white school district. The experiment group and control group regularly interacted during and after school. Additionally, the experiment group members stated that they regularly discussed the topics and content of the group intervention with their control group peers.

Results also suggest that participation in a group intervention was able to increase participant measures of self-esteem. Furthermore, the control group's decreased scores on the self-esteem measure further supports the idea that the intervention may have led to the increase in ethnic identity measures and self-esteem in the treatment group. The control group, which benefited from an increased sense of ethnic identity, was not present to discuss the topics and benefit from a guided group supported process. Group discussions highlighting the strengths of cultural identity provided member's positive evaluations of Latino cultural values. This positive evaluation was more likely to be incorporated into participant's self-evaluation, which led to increased self-esteem (Bandura, 1997). The control group members had to make meaning of their increase in ethnic identity and figure out how to accommodate that

change with their rural predominantly Caucasian surroundings, unlike their treatment group peers. Akbar, Chambers, and Sanders Thompson (2001) suggest that there is a positive correlation between increasing cultural identity values and self-esteem. Furthermore, increasing positive cultural identity among recently immigrated Latino youth predicted prosocial behaviors among 302 Latino youth (Meca et al., 2017). These findings suggest a link between group participant's measures of cultural identity and self-esteem.

Yalom and Leszcz (2005) discuss the importance of group cohesiveness among members. The group members were able to bond more due to both their shared grade level and their similar developmental level. Members in the group represented the middle childhood and adolescence developmental stages (Kuther, 2017). Had the group cohesiveness process further developed, the expectation was that there would have been improved bonding, thus greater significant results on the MEIM and SEQ.

Even though there were initial struggles with group cohesion, group members demonstrated a significant measure of universality, a feeling that they were not alone in their shared struggle (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005). While group members discussed topics, they were able to identify with others' experiences, which also decreased their sense of isolation or alienation. Through the structured group dialogues, members learned that their ethnic strengths were shared, and could see in real time how those strengths were positive factors, not limitations. This sense of universality would not have been possible without the introduction of the group format due to the overwhelming presence of majority Caucasian students and staff in the school. The varying results of the groups

support that having peer support throughout the day did in fact assist Latino students with their increased measures on the MEIM and SEQ.

Implications for Latino Students and School Counselors

School counselors facilitate the personal, social, academic, and career development for all student populations (ASCA, 2019). Ethnic minority students face significant counterculture messages that suggest they must abandon their culture to be as successful as their majority group peers. Rather than help students be more like the majority culture, this study demonstrated that helping minority students process their ethnic identity development, leads to increased measures of self-esteem, which in turn may decrease barriers to academic success (Sue et al., 2019).

By facilitating groups, school counselors could reach a greater number of students. Additionally, the group process allowed for therapeutic factors not possible through other intervention. Specifically, group process provided opportunities for universality, imitative behaviors, and group cohesion (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005).

Encouraging the use of ethnic strengths to become more academically successful is in opposition to the social message minority students receive and internalize. Tannenbaum (1938), identified that when a young individual relates to the label that has been given, such as 'bad kid,' or 'poor student,' that individual may start to believe that label accurately represents who they are. Self-perception impacts behavior; for instance, a Latino adolescent may be labeled as 'unintelligent' or 'trouble-maker.' If that student believes this label, then she or he may lower their academic expectations to reflect the altered self-concept. However, a counseling group that promoted students' ethnicity helped these Latino students break that negative cycle. Creating an

environment where such imitative behaviors helped these students internalize a new message; a message that has the potential to change a possibly negative internalized self-perception to a perception that is positive and empowering.

It is necessary for counselors and other school personnel working in school systems to be culturally competent to initiate conversations with students regarding ethnic identity and cultural awareness (ASCA, 2015; Murphy, 2015). In rural regions, it may be uncommon to have school counselors that are fluently familiar with ethnic minority populations. School counselors need to be trained in appropriate methods to work with a wide variety of minority and immigrant populations. There is an expectation that all school counselors have the capacity to work with diverse student populations by the time they graduate from a counselor education program (Council for Accreditation of Counseling & Related Educational Programs [CACREP], 2016). Unfortunately, the increase in cultural training is not commensurate with the increase of diverse minority population growth (Ortiz, Flanagan, & Dynda, 2008). A large amount of cultural-competency training appears in the form of a single class and a large majority of school professionals are sent into the work force unprepared to work with diverse families (Ortiz et al., 2008). It is imperative for school personnel to seek further training in multicultural skills and to be open to conversations about ethnic identity development (ASCA, 2015; Murphy, 2015).

Limitations

A major challenge for this group design was that these students never discussed topics of Latino ethnic characteristics before. Since the participants were in the unexamined ethnic identity stage (Phinney, 1993), the researchers found it necessary to

regularly encourage participants to think about their ethnicity and sometimes provide examples to stimulate conversation. Participant developmental stage may have impacted the depth in which topics were discussed. However, with encouragement, they did participate in the discussions. Another challenge was having the group sessions constrained by the time limits set by the school. Even though the school administration in this study understood the importance of providing the service to the Latino students, they couldn't allow the researchers to take students out of class because some students were struggling academically. Therefore, the researchers had to work through the limited and chaotic time before school to hold group sessions. Further, there were several school breaks, standardized testing days, or school events (e.g., a pep rally) that interrupted the regular group meeting days. Yet, despite the challenge of a regular meeting time, there were still positive impacts for these students which demonstrated the importance of offering this type of counseling group. While the group and concepts presented a challenge, the research design experienced threats to validity.

Group members were part of a small cohesive Latino community in a largely White county. Treatment and control group members regularly interacted outside of the group. Treatment group members indicated that they did speak to the control group members about group topics. Treatment diffusion may have impacted the data or led to an erroneous interpretation of the data.

Finally, the small sample size precluded the generalizability of the findings to the larger Latino community. The small sample size also raises the concern about selection. Participants may have been more likely to note changes in ethnic identity based on the relative cultural isolation. Thus, this sample may have been different than would be

found in geographical areas with larger Latino populations or areas where more support was available.

Suggestions for Future Research

It is important to facilitate ethnic identity exploration in young Latino adolescents by exposing them to topics regarding ethnic identity and challenges. The exposure may initiate their progression through the stages of ethnic identity development (Phinney 1993). Other researchers may replicate this study with groups consisting of same grade participants to determine whether age or grade level is a factor in self-esteem and ethnic identity development. Another consideration that Phinney and Ohn (2007) noted is that ethnic identity is dynamic and changes over time, therefore, it may be beneficial to conduct longitudinal studies of youth as they transition into adulthood to determine what impact discussing ethnic identity has on long term development. Lastly, a longitudinal study would be helpful to determine the potential impact on student academic development through the educational journey. The researchers did not receive permission to access student academic records from the school district. However, along with the self-esteem and ethnic identity data, it would be interesting to determine any change in scholastic data (e.g., grades, academic goals, and career aspirations) through middle school, high school, and college.

It may also be beneficial to examine the role of bicultural identity and define the balance between being American and being Latino. This role exploration would be especially significant to investigate with students living in rural areas as they are often largely in the minority. Conducting a study focused on balancing two cultures may be

more beneficial with older grade levels as older students may have more cognitive ability or self-awareness to process and discuss the topics.

Future replication studies should also consider the issue of treatment diffusion. This limitation could be addressed by replicating the study in multiple rural locations or by considering larger urban areas. Sample size is regularly an issue with group counseling studies. Future studies should consider multiple groups to attain a larger sample size, which would improve generalizability (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Conclusion

There are increasing numbers of Latino students in school systems in many rural areas of the nation. As a result of various factors, Latino students are considered *at-risk* and there is a need to facilitate their academic and career achievement. This study identified a method of using group counseling to increase aspects of self-esteem and ethnic identity in Latino middle school students. The results highlight the need for schools to focus on the personal and social development in these populations to increase their feelings of belonging, maximize their school participation, and to potentially inspire them to pursue greater academic goals. Using solution-focused counseling in a group setting can benefit both the school counselor and the students. The counselor can reach more students and the students develop greater connections with others who share ethnic characteristics.

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Appendix

Table A1

Overview of the Demographic Data for the Control and Treatment Groups

Demographic Variables for the Fall and Spring Participant		
Variable	Treatment (<i>n</i> = 9)	Control (<i>n</i> = 12)
Female	5	9
Male	4	3
Spanish Primary Language at Home	7	9
Level of Education	<i>M</i> = 6.25 (<i>SD</i> = .71)	<i>M</i> = 6.58 (<i>SD</i> = .9)
Years in State	<i>M</i> = 6.19 (<i>SD</i> = 4.0)	<i>M</i> = 10.21 (<i>SD</i> = 1.83)

Table A2*Session Topics and Goals*

Session Topics	Session Goals
Session 1: Introduction	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Participants will get to know other group members 2. Participants will help establish group rules 3. Participants will understand the group process
Session 2: Resiliency	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Participants will define the word <i>resiliency</i> 2. Participants will discuss characteristics of the Latino culture 3. Participants will discuss Latino challenges
Session 3: Family	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Participants will discuss the meaning of family 2. Participants will identify a support system 3. Participants will continue the discussion of the challenges in being Latino
Session 4: Support system	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Participants will discuss the concept of trust 2. Participants will identify persons that they trust 3. Participants will identify types of supports (i.e., how family support and friend support is different) 4. Participants will discuss how they could use different support groups for various personal challenges
Session 5: Having hope and high expectations	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Participants will identify expectations from self or others for the future 2. Participants will name individuals who have high expectations for them 3. Participants will identify their emotions regarding having high expectations for self
Session 6: Community participation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Participants will understand their participation with other Latinos <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. They will identify their participation in Latino-based activities b. They will identify other options for participation with the Latino community 2. Participants will discuss the positives of belonging to a community
Session 7: Wrap Up	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Participants will identify awareness gained from the group participation 2. Participants will discuss ways to apply new awareness to their daily lives 3. Participants will review topics of discussion from previous sessions

Table A3*Mean, Standard Deviation, and Level of Significance for the SEQ and MEIM***Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test**

Treatment Group (N = 9)					
SEQ	<i>M - pre</i>	<i>SD - pre</i>	<i>M - post</i>	<i>SD - post</i>	<i>p</i>
	2.79	0.32	3.34	0.27	0.01
Control Group (N = 12)					
SEQ	<i>M - pre</i>	<i>SD - pre</i>	<i>M - post</i>	<i>SD - post</i>	<i>p</i>
	3.05	0.36	3.03	0.32	0.67
Treatment Group (N = 9)					
SEQ Index	<i>M - pre</i>	<i>SD - pre</i>	<i>M - post</i>	<i>SD - post</i>	<i>p</i>
Peer	2.82	0.83	3.48	0.58	0.01
School	2.80	0.80	3.35	0.56	0.01
Family	3.00	0.96	3.39	0.62	0.01
Body Image	2.69	0.83	3.18	0.69	0.07
Sports / Athletics	2.48	0.97	3.10	0.83	0.03
Global Self-Esteem	2.82	0.97	3.39	0.57	0.01
Control Group (N = 12)					
SEQ Index	<i>M - pre</i>	<i>SD - pre</i>	<i>M - post</i>	<i>SD - post</i>	<i>p</i>
Peer	3.05	0.70	2.957	0.72	0.25
School	2.99	0.83	2.97	0.77	0.79
Family	3.15	0.82	3.27	0.64	0.32
Body Image	3.06	0.84	2.94	0.86	0.41
Sports / Athletics	2.99	0.93	2.96	0.81	1.00
Global Self-Esteem	3.03	0.86	3.04	0.81	0.78
Treatment Group (N = 9)					
MEIM	<i>M - pre</i>	<i>SD - pre</i>	<i>M - post</i>	<i>SD - post</i>	<i>p</i>
	1.88	0.12	3.45	0.29	0.01
Control Group (N = 12)					
MEIM	<i>M - pre</i>	<i>SD - pre</i>	<i>M - post</i>	<i>SD - post</i>	<i>p</i>
	2.38	0.25	3.25	0.26	0.05