

DISSERTATION

COUNSELING MINORITY ADOLESCENT GIRLS IN A PREDOMINATELY  
WHITE MIDDLE SCHOOL SETTING: PERCEPTIONS OF EMPOWERMENT  
GROUPS FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS (EGAS) MODEL

Submitted by

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In partial fulfillment of the requirements

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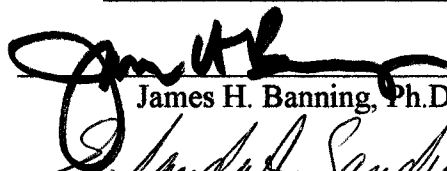
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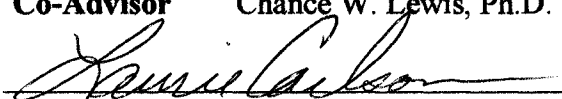
WE HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THE DISSERTATION PREPARED UNDER OUR SUPERVISION BY TWANA Y. HILTON-PITRE ENTITLED COUNSELING MINORITY ADOLESCENT GIRLS IN A PREDOMINATELY WHITE MIDDLE SCHOOL SETTING: PERCEPTIONS OF EMPOWERMENT GROUPS FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS (EGAS) MODEL BE ACCEPTED AS FULFILLING IN PART REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY.

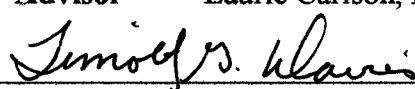
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## ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

### COUNSELING MINORITY ADOLESCENT GIRLS IN A PREDOMINATELY WHITE MIDDLE SCHOOL SETTING: PERCEPTIONS OF THE EMPOWERMENT GROUPS FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS (EGAS) MODEL

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of minority adolescent girls in a predominately White middle school setting regarding the influence of the Empowerment Groups for Academic Success (EGAS) (2005) model. The EGAS model is a group counseling approach that takes into account the influence of environmental, social, and psychological factors on academic performance for adolescents. The goal for this study was to describe the experiences of minority adolescent eighth grade girls in a predominately White middle school setting who participated in the EGAS model.

As a phenomenological research design, qualitative research methods were employed as the primary means of collecting and analyzing data. The research design involved in-depth individual interviews, journaling, and observations of a purposeful sample of eight minority eighth grade girls. Participants' perceptions and experiences were captured through self-reports in diaries, individual interviews, and the researcher's field notes during eight weekly sessions for 45 minutes.

This research presented the adolescents' perceptions of their experiences during EGAS and the outcome of EGAS (i.e. personal, social, academic, and career development). Themes emerged during this study which included: social support, racial relations, identity development, conflict resolution, and career preparation. Finally, the data were analyzed within and cross-cases for comparisons and contrasts among the adolescents regarding their experiences.

The findings of this study inform recommendations for middle school counselors, administrators, and teachers who work with minority adolescents. This study has expanded the applicability of the EGAS model in several ways: 1) it can be utilized in a suburban setting; 2) it is appropriate with minority students in a predominately White school population; and 3) it can be implemented with middle school minority adolescents. In all, this research provides lessons learned and insights gained from implementing the ESAG model with minority adolescent girls in a predominately White middle school.

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grateful to the parents of the group participants. Additionally, the minority adolescents who participated in this study are also worthy of gratitude for their courtesy, cooperation, and participation.

## DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my family. I could not have done this without GOD and the support of my family. To my belated Mom, Audrey Hilton, thank you for raising me to believe that I could do anything. To my Dad, Lester Hilton, thank you for being my foundation and constant source of encouragement. To my son, Roman, thank you for being such a good boy while I spent many hours turning my attention to a computer rather than to you. I also thank you for being such a wonderful distraction. To my sister, Darain, thank you for your faith in me. Donald and Mamie Pitre, thank you for your words of wisdom, encouragement, and late night talks.

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# **CHAPTER 1**

## **INTRODUCTION**

This qualitative study explored the perceptions of minority adolescent girls in a predominately White middle school setting regarding the influence of the Empowerment Groups for Academic Success (EGAS) (2005) model. The EGAS model is an innovative group counseling approach that takes into account the influence of social, psychological, and environmental factors on academic performance for adolescents. The theoretical framework for this study included the underpinnings for personal/social, academic, and career development for all students, which is emphasized by the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) (2003) national model. Moreover, the EGAS model was the focal point of the theoretical framework for this research. The research design involved a phenomenological method, in-depth individual interviews, journaling and observations involving a purposeful sample of eight minority adolescent girls in a predominately White middle school setting. The research has implications for school counselors, teachers, and school districts that work with minority adolescents and want to use the EGAS model for minority adolescent achievement.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this study was to describe the experiences of minority adolescent girls in a predominately White middle school setting who participate in the EGAS model. This model is supported by research which finds that group counseling is a much preferred intervention strategy for school-aged children than individual counseling (Bemak, Chung & Siroskey-Sabdo, 2005; Butler & Bunch, 2005; Lee, 2005).

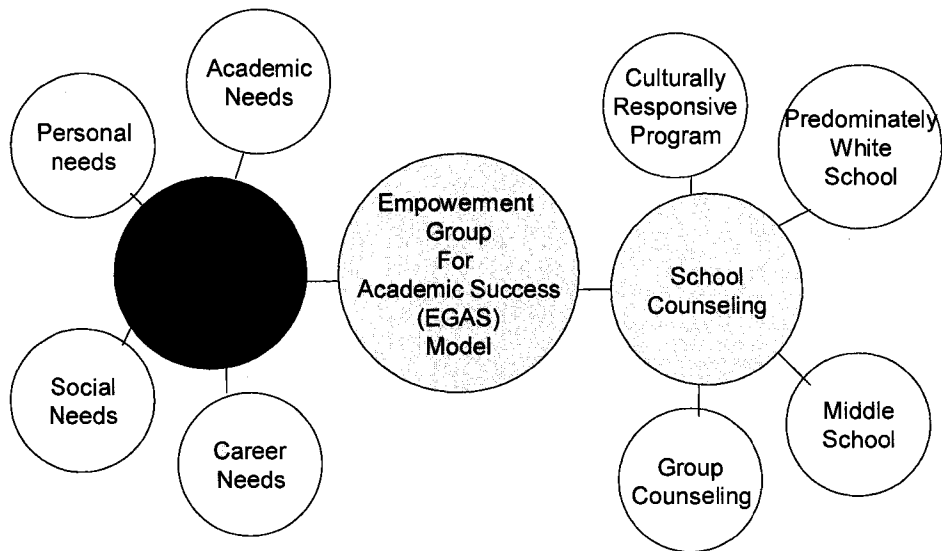
During group counseling, the students are encouraged to see themselves as part of the larger social community, which can enhance racial identity and self-esteem (Ford, 1997). In a group setting, topics involving introspection about the minority experience in their school or community along with healthy ways of dealing with these issues can be explored (Sue & Sue, 1999). Ford suggests that the opportunity to speak with other students who share their concerns may help minority students become more comfortable with “being different.” Counselors often deliver group counseling to address issues of academic, career and personal/social needs.

The EGAS model has had a positive impact on urban African American girls (Butler & Bunch, 2005). However, Butler and Bunch argue that the EGAS model lacks credible research to provide the basis for application in different school settings. Therefore, this study will utilize the EGAS model as a framework in a non-urban, predominately White middle school setting to capture the experiences of this model on minority adolescents from varied settings.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The ASCA national model (2003) has placed emphasis on school counseling programs providing encouragement and promoting academic, career, and personal/social development for students in preparation for the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In line with the expectations of the ASCA national model, the EGAS model is a unique group counseling approach to address the depth and level of the personal/social, academic, and career problems of students identified as being at high levels of risk for school failure.

In support of the ASCA national model, the perceptions of minority adolescent girls in a predominately White middle school setting who participate in the EGAS model will be examined to assess application in a school setting not previously explored.



**Figure 1.** Conceptual map of introduction to the study.

### **Significance of the Study**

“Every child wants to believe in himself or herself as a successful person; every youngster wants to be liked and respected; and youngsters want life to be just” (Stevenson, 1992, p. 3). Minority adolescents deal with many complex challenges in predominately White middle school settings. Minority students may be faced with the challenges of not being accepted by their peers and teachers when they first enter a predominately White school system (James, 1997). In addition, adolescence is a period of transition and how adolescents negotiate this formative period can have life-long consequences (Guttman & Midgley, 2000). According to the Carnegie Council on

Adolescent Development (1995), nearly half of America's adolescents are at high or moderate risk of seriously "damaging their life chances" -- referring to inappropriate adolescent decisions which may affect both short term and long-term academic, career, and personal needs.

Group intervention strategies can be used to address these needs of minority students. Holcomb-McCoy (2005) stated that "by encouraging more flexible group interventions to meet students' needs, school counselors will be able to address the 'root' of problems rather than the symptoms" (p.182). The EGAS model has recently been used by school counselors to positively impact the behavior and academic achievement of urban African American girls (Bemak, Chung & Siroskey-Sabdo, 2005; Butler & Bunch, 2005; Holcomb-McCoy, 2005; Lee, 2005). In expanding applications, my research will provide data regarding the applicability of the EGAS model in a non-urban setting with diverse minority adolescents in a predominantly White school setting.

### **Research Questions**

It has become increasingly important for counselors to utilize mechanisms that support students in their school environments. Butler and Bunch (2005) explained that "group counseling is an intervention strategy that allows the school counselor to facilitate group processes where the students do the work, not only helping themselves but other members as well" (p. 395). However, the EGAS model has not been examined in varied school settings and with populations composed of diverse minority backgrounds. This study will contribute to the potential for expanded applications by responding to the following research questions:

### ***Overarching Question***

What are the experiences of minority adolescent girls who participate in the EGAS model in a predominately White middle school setting?

### ***Focus of Inquiry***

- a) What are the participants' perceptions of the outcome of the EGAS model?
- b) What are the participants' perceptions of their experiences during the group sessions?
- c) How does the EGAS model impact the participants' personal/social, academic, and career needs?
- d) How does this model work in a predominately White, suburban setting with minority adolescents?

### **Researcher's Perspective**

I am an African American female educator and school counselor trainee. During early adolescence, I attended a predominately White elementary school setting in Louisiana. As an educator, I have worked six years in the public school systems of Louisiana and Texas in the capacity of an elementary teacher. I am employed as a university supervisor of undergraduate student teachers in grades K-12. Additionally, I teach an individualization of instructional methods course in the School of Education at Colorado State University.

Extensive training in predominately White middle schools during my school counseling practicum strongly influenced my topic of interest. I have become more aware of the actual day-to-day activities of this particular setting than a researcher who is unfamiliar with the culture of the school and the counseling department. Through

observations, some minority adolescents appear to be stagnant in some predominately White middle school settings.

The idea of accepting people from different backgrounds as a viable part of society continues to be a struggle for our society and consequently our adolescents. The issue of social/personal and academic needs at this age level is complex. I believe it is imperative that school counseling programs address the needs of all students using appropriate approaches. Because of this belief, I decided to focus on the experiences of minority adolescents in a predominately White middle school who participate in the EGAS model.

### **Delimitations of the Study**

The following boundaries are critical for the purpose of this research study. The first boundary targeted minority adolescents in a predominately White middle school setting. Second, the study included eight minority adolescents who were identified by the school counselor as at risk for academic failure. Third, this study focused on the experiences and perceptions of African American adolescent eighth grade girls who participated in the eight 45 minute weekly group counseling sessions utilizing the EGAS model.

### **Definition of Terms**

- *Adolescence* is defined as the period from puberty to age fourteen. These students are ages 10 to 14 and are typically in grades 6<sup>th</sup> through 8<sup>th</sup> grade (Peterson & Leffert, 1995). This study explored adolescent eighth graders.
- *Empowerment Groups for Academic Success (EGAS) Model* is a group counseling intervention that has been used by school counselors to address or influence the

behavior and academic achievement of urban African American girls (Butler & Branch, 2005).

- *Middle School* represents grades sixth through eighth. Middle schools were developed to focus on the needs of children in the age group from 10-14. A middle school is often housed in a separate building from the high school and elementary schools.
- *Minority* refers to four major racial and ethnic groups: African Americans, American Indians and Alaska Natives, Asian and Pacific Islanders, and Hispanics (Pollard & O'Hare, 1999). In this study, all four minority groups have the potential to participate or be selected to participate.
- *Perception* is defined as judgment or insight gained from participation.
- *Predominately White School* is defined as a 79% representation of White students in a school setting for the purpose of this study.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

This literature review provides a contextual basis for this study and is presented in three sections: (a) challenges for minority adolescents; (b) culturally responsive school counseling programs; and (c) group counseling intervention techniques for minority students.

#### **Challenges for Minority Adolescents**

Adolescents, approximately ages 10-14, experience multiple developmental changes and challenges in the areas of racial relations, social support, self-esteem, academics, identity, and career. No other phase of life is characterized by greater, more rapid, and diverse development than adolescence (Pruitt, 2000). The developmental changes experienced during adolescence may be the most intense transformations in the human life cycle (Lounsbury, 2004). Middle school students are introduced to new people, new ideas, faces, and varied expectations. Adolescence is a period in which new situations, new settings, and new demands are constantly being encountered, and yet the adolescent may be ill-equipped with the knowledge or skills necessary to effectively respond to these confrontations (Tyszkowa, 1990). Coping with self-doubt, peer status, and physical changes, as well as struggling with turbulent emotions, emerging independence, and developing strong gender roles, are all a part of the lives of the emerging adolescent (Wolman, 1998).

## ***Adolescent Development***

Adolescents undergo a number of hormonal and physical changes during puberty. An imbalance between their maturity level and what their bodies start to feel often causes confusion (Akos, 2005). Puberty brings a growth spurt that includes reproductive systems, increased weight and height, and various other physical changes including the growth of pubic hair and voice change (Pruitt, 2000). As Petersen and Leffert (1995) describe, “basically, adolescents grow a new body” (p.6). These pubertal physical changes have been found to affect body image and self-esteem, such that early maturing girls in particular have a negative body image (Petersen & Leffert, 1995).

In general, girls begin puberty one to two years before boys, and in some cultures (e.g., African Americans) puberty tends to begin earlier (Davis & Thompson, 2005). Research has shown that boys who develop at a faster rate have more of an advantage in the area of sports and social recognition, where girls developing at a quicker pace often experience scrutiny from peers (Eccles, 1999). Any deviation from the perceived norm, whether developing much quicker or slower than peers, may lead to the risk of psychosocial maladaptation (Wiesner & Ittel, 2002).

Adolescent girls report higher levels of negative life stress, and their perceptions of events are more negative than that of boys (Plunkett, Radmacher, & Moll-Phanara, 2000). Further, adolescent girls are more likely to seek social support from friends and family, engage in wishful thinking, use avoidant techniques in responding to problems, and ventilate feelings (Plunkett et al., 2000; Williams & McGillicuddy-De Lisi, 2000). Adolescent boys, on the other hand, are more likely to confront problems in an assertive

manner, take risks, and engage in ventilation strategies such as humor or physical recreation (Schmidt, 2003).

Significant changes are occurring in the adolescent's psychological, cognitive, social, and moral development (Davis & Lambie, 2005). A large part of early adolescents' social-emotional growth is tied to identity development (Lambie, 2004). Concurrent with individual transformations, dramatic shifts in school environment and peer group issues are often experienced (Mauk & Taylor, 1993). Classic Ericksonian psychosocial theory described early adolescence as a drive toward industry and identity versus inferiority and role confusion (Cobb, 2001). Accordingly, questions like "What am I like?" "Who am I?" and "How good am I?" are given heightened importance by adolescents (Hansen & Maynard, 1973). Industry, or developing competence, is a part of daily experience in middle school when students actively learn by exploring and identifying talents and capabilities (Akos, 2005). Involvement in extracurricular activities has correlated positively to a host of important developmental (e.g., feelings of belonging and connectedness) and academic (e.g., increased GPA) outcomes (Akos, 2005; Eccles & Templeton, 2002; Mahoney, Cairns, & Farmer, 2003).

Adolescents are trying to discover their own identity and yet realize that they are a part of a larger social group (Cobb, 2001). Adolescents contend with increased peer competition and a fear of being left behind or judged as substandard (Akos, 2005). In the same way, peers can help develop feelings of intimacy or connection and social competence (Ransom, 2003). Research has demonstrated that adolescents perform better academically, have more achievement-oriented goals, and think more about their future when they have access to mentors (Zirkel, 2002).

Middle school adolescents often experience strain in terms of role ambiguity and role conflict (Fenzil, 1991). Adolescents attempt to determine who they are with new found cognitive abilities. For example, Akos (2005) suggests that one often overlooks aspects of identity formation such as racial identity. Adolescents' struggle for independence and identity often makes them "hypersensitive to circumstances where they feel others are asserting power over them or simply talking about them (Lambie, 2004, p. 269). As a result, this period of the child's life is the period where some students come into contact with issues of racial relations and social support (Ransom, 2003).

### ***Racial Relations and Social Support***

Minority students may be faced with the challenges of not being accepted by their peers and teachers when they first enter a predominately White school system (James, 1997). James explained that the lack of acceptance might occur because of misunderstandings based on differences in language, dress, and patterns of speech. Lack of social acceptance may also occur because of unwillingness by peers and teachers to accept, understand and learn what makes minority students unique. As a result, lack of acceptance by peers and teachers can diminish the minority student's sense of self and belonging at a time when they are much more vulnerable.

Many patterns of racial group relations in our schools are based on the ways that members of a given racial group have been included or excluded within American society (McLemore & Romo, 1998). Factors affecting the outcomes of intergroup contacts can include the belief that one's own group is superior, competition for resources and attention, and the relative power and status of the groups involved (Schofield, 1995). Stephan (1985) showed that anxiety about dealing with members of other racial groups is

prevalent among students and can direct behavior in ways that detract from academic achievement.

Schofield (1995) noted that when teachers, counselors, and administrators segregate students in honors, regular, vocational, and remedial classes that create racially or ethnically homogeneous groups, the classes often magnify already existing stereotypes and discrimination. Often minority students are assigned inferior status in the formal school structure, frequently tracked into lower level courses or groups (Stephan, 1985). They may also experience social segregation that excludes them from meaningful interactions with members of the dominant group or minority groups different from their own (Waters, 1990).

Adolescents gravitate toward their friends and peers for the opportunity to gain mutual and reciprocal respect, and to observe peer models of behavioral responses to normal life events. Friendships allow adolescents to explore new and different aspects of themselves (Youniss & Smollar, 1990); in a way, friendships provide adolescents with the opportunity to try on different hats without the threat of negative feedback. Friendships allow adolescents the chance to pool their expertise so that they may jointly strategize ways to resolve problems and cope with negative situations (Schmidt, 2003).

The impact of the peer group is so significant during this period that the adolescent's behavior is largely prescribed by her perceptions of how her peers will respond (Hansen & Maynard, 1973). As Hussong (2000) reports, "peers dominate the social context of adolescence to such a degree that difficulties in establishing and maintaining positive peer relationships are associated with multiple negative developmental outcomes including loneliness, school dropout, internalizing symptoms,

and aggression” (p. 391). In this way, simply having a friend protects an adolescent from social and behavioral risks (Schmidt, 2003).

Adolescents who are teased, neglected, or avoided by peers are at high risk for the development of behavioral disorders (Moroz & Jones, 2002). The significant impact of social withdrawal on student’s adjustment received particular attention from highly publicized incidents of school violence in which the juvenile offenders were known for being socially isolated or withdrawn. Adolescents who do not have close, positive peer relationships are less socially connected, and consequently are less likely to receive emotional or physical support in the face of negative events or stress (Hussong, 2000). Additionally, social isolation can inhibit adolescents’ self-esteem and academic success (Schmidt, 2003).

### ***Self-Esteem and Academic Issues***

Some psychologists believe that exposure to racism and discrimination leads to low self-esteem in some individuals (Crocker & Quinn, 1998). Self-esteem refers to internalized feelings of mastery, value, and self acceptance that are derived from individuals’ assessment of their personal value based on implicit and explicit messages provided by significant others (Hill, 1999; Whaley, 1993). Researchers assert that self-esteem increases slightly during the second decade of life, but this occurs only after an initial decline in self-esteem during early adolescence (Petersen & Leffert, 1995). These changes in self-esteem correlate with psychosocial changes in increased capacity for self-understanding, identity development, and expansion and growth of personal relationships (Schmidt, 2003).

Additionally, the link between self esteem and academic performance among minority adolescents may be related to how they process achievement experiences at school and in other areas of their lives (van Laar, 2000). Teachers' low expectations may further disadvantage minority children. Minority students remain over-represented in special education programs and underrepresented in gifted education programs, often being recommended for lower level courses (Day-Vines, 2000; Patton, 1998). Several studies have indicated that teacher behaviors may disproportionately interfere with the academic engagement of minority students (Guerra, Husemann & Spinder, 2003; Tucker, 1999; Wentzel, 1994). Taking into consideration a report by Smith (1998) that states most pre-service teachers say they don't want to teach minority students, except as a last resort, the dilemma of the climate in which the ethnic and racial minority students are taught comes into question.

As a whole, Hispanics drop out of school at higher rates and attain lower levels of education than non-Hispanics. Hispanic immigrants are about seven times more likely than non-Hispanic immigrants to be dropouts. First and later generation Hispanics were more than twice as likely to drop out as their non-Hispanic peers (U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, 1996). Hispanic groups are also more than twice as likely to be enrolled in a remedial math or no math at all by the eighth grade (U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census). Low education levels of Hispanics are important factors to consider when working with Hispanic families (Kaufman, Alt, & Chapman, 2001). The statistical indicators of Hispanic students situation alone indicate a need to address the problems of educating Hispanic youth to be contributing members of American society, especially in light of the fact that the number of Hispanic youth is

expected to greatly increase in the coming years (Pollard & O'Hare, 1999). Research also indicates that although African American students begin school with test scores that are similar to European American peers, by middle school, many African-American students fall two grade levels behind (NCES, 2001c; Steele, 1992). In addition to the self-esteem and academic issues for minority students during middle school, some youth may have racial identity concerns.

### ***Racial Identity Development and Appearance***

White and Parham (1990) defined identity as “the adoption of certain personal attitudes, feelings, characteristics, and behaviors and the identification with a large group of people who share those characteristics” (p. 42). Lack of a sense of connectedness or identity leads to a “profound sense of psychological depression, personal worthlessness and social despair” (West, 1993, p.13). Even today, minority students endure teasing and ridicule because of their appearance, especially individuals at either extreme along the skin color and hair texture continua (Day-Vines, 2003). These experiences can erode feelings of self-worth and a sense of personal adequacy (Holcomb-McCoy & Moore-Thomas, 2001). Meanwhile, minority students contend both with concerns that resemble the distresses of the dominant culture and with misfortunes that are inherent in being culturally different from the dominant culture (Ransom, 2003). These problems suggest a need for services that help minority students cope with challenges. A positive racial identity may result when counselors provide the support necessary to free minority students from the racial stereotypes that others impose on them (Day-Vines, 2003; Holcomb-McCoy & Moore-Thomas, 2001).

***Racial Identity Development.*** Racial identity studies almost exclusively refer to minority groups (Ransom, 2003). Racial identity refers to a sense of group or collective identity, based on one's perception that he or she shares a common racial heritage with a particular racial group (Helms, 1994). Ogbu (1987) points out that ethnic groups have become part of another culture for widely different reasons, including conquest, slavery, political asylum and economic opportunity. Ogbu adds that these varying reasons may have an impact on the development of each groups' ability to achieve pride and acceptance of their background.

One's racial identity is paramount in understanding self. Racial identity or the identification with one's societal designated group occurs in response to environments in which societal resources are differently allocated on the basis of racial group membership (Helms, 1994). Racial identity is a complex, multidimensional construct (Ransom, 2003). Ransom concluded that as adolescents live, learn, and mature in American society, the reality of others' perception of them solely on the basis of race, as well as the perceptions they hold of themselves, becomes painfully clear. Minority adolescents are looking for the answers for who they are in terms of their race and experiencing conflicting attitudes as they mature. As adolescents go through the various stages of racial/cultural identity development (Atkinson, Morten & Sue, 1993), racial identity becomes much more salient. In the United States, the focus on the study of racial identity has been mainly on African-Americans, Hispanics, Asian Americans, and Native Americans. Biracial or multiracial youth have had less attention (Herring, 1992). Biracial youths' identity development is confounded by the presence of at least two races that must be dealt with (Gillem, 1996).

Adolescents from European descent experience less problematic paths to pride and acceptance of their ethnicity. “Because whites represent the societal norm, they can easily reach adulthood without thinking much about their racial group” (Tatum, 1997, p. 93). This is not the case for African-Americans, Hispanics, Asians and other minority diverse groups. “Other ethnic minorities, especially those from European background, have been subjected to fewer negative messages from the mainstream society” (Phinney & Rosenthal, 1992, p. 146).

Many minority students struggle with their identity. African-American, Hispanic, Asian and other racially/ethnically diverse adolescents experience trying to find a sense of self in racial terms, often at the same time they are struggling with identity of self as a young adult. “For adolescents from ethnic minority groups, the process of identity formation has an added dimension, due to their exposure to alternative sources of identification, their own ethnic group and the mainstream or dominant culture” (Phinney, & Rosenthal, 1992, p. 145).

**Appearance.** Clothing is a form of nonverbal communication (Johnson, Schofield & Yurchisin, 2002). Dress is “a systematic means of transmission of information about the wearer” (Damhorst, 1990, p.1). In Stone’s (1962) framework, appearance is a critical dimension of communication, almost always preceding verbal transactions. Stone proposed that appearance is important in formulating the self, especially during adolescence. Appearance establishes identity to others (Eicher & Baizer, 1991). Further, Stone asserted that appearance is a major factor in the “formulation of the conception of self,” and is “of major importance at every stage of early development” (p. 216). As the self is dressed, it is simultaneously addressed, for whenever we clothe ourselves; we

dress “toward” or address some audience whose validating responses are essential to the establishment of our self (Michelman & Eicher, 1991).

One place where adolescents try to define themselves is at school, and one of the most powerful tools used by many adolescents is their clothing (Cotterell, 1996). Forming an identity that will be deemed “appropriate” by one’s peers occupies much of an adolescent’s time, especially females (Schwartz, 2002). Cotterell discovered when studying adolescent behavior at the mall, “adolescents went to great pains to wear clothing which was similar to that of their friends, suggesting that group identity is partly derived from clothing and hairstyle” (Cotterell, p.25). Clothing and hairstyle can be considered “commitments”, areas of importance to middle school students concerned with establishing an acceptable identity (Bosma, 1992).

LaPoint (1992) noted that African American adolescents often experience problems related to appearance and attire. LaPoint added that African American adolescents tend to wear colors that are bright with bold designs and display ornate accessories that reflect their heritage and current fashion trends. Thus, their appearance often demands more attention from the media and from officials (Creel, 2000). Within the context of the dominant culture, the use of high affect colors is seen as risk-taking and different (O’Neal, 1998). O’Neal explained that the notion of risk-taking is probably related to the negative stereotypes associated with African Americans’ wearing “loud” colors. Loud colors suggest terms such as bold, risk-taking, being expressive, and unique. Such descriptors suggest opposition to the norm or status quo, in other words, resistance.

Clothing is a critical component of person perception (Behling, 1995). Research indicates individuals who follow the cultural dress norms (e.g., suits are “good” and

ragged jeans and worn t-shirts are not) are viewed more positively, even being perceived as a student with academic potential (Behling & Williams, 1991). Adolescents gradually learn, with varying degrees of success, the unwritten rules of appropriate dress in a school based sub-culture, Adolescents want to conform, and the literature indicates that to gain acceptance from peers, it is important to follow group dress norms (Allen & Eicher, 1973; Creekmore, 1980; Hendricks, Kelly & Eicher, 1968). Problems arise when student dress varies markedly from that favored by the culture at-large (Behling, 1995). Minority adolescents may also have difficulties with knowledge of themselves as it relates to their career interests. Bridging social norms at school with social norms at the work place may be beneficial to minority adolescents.

### ***Career Issues***

Compared with their non-urban peers, minority adolescents experience a variety of barriers to their attainment of successful careers (D'Andrea & Dabueks, 1992). Urban ethnic minority adolescents may have limited knowledge of themselves and their career interests, values, and skills because they have fewer opportunities to obtain work experience as teens (Day-Vines, 2003). This lack of experience may further limit their perceptions and knowledge of available job opportunities (Watson & Stead, 1990).

Without solid career planning programs at the middle level, many students will make poor educational and career choices in high school (Sears, 1995). Middle school students are involved in the continued development and strengthening of basic skills begun in the elementary school and in activities that can either limit or expand their horizons (Ransom, 2003). Career guidance must also take into consideration the

developmental changes of all students and be aware of the issues brought about by differences in gender.

Special efforts are needed to involve female students in the counseling process. Girls in one study were less likely than boys to talk to counselors for educational and vocational planning (Mau, 1995). Girls in middle school often do not see themselves as competent and their self-esteem decreases (Crocker & Quinn, 1998). Consequently, these two factors make girls' education and career planning difficult (Sears, 1995).

Middle school counselors may offer career exploration experiences such as computer directed career exploration activities, videos, shadowing, workbooks, slides, games, books and career day speakers (Hogan, 1995), but unless the student is in a position to receive the information in a productive way, much information may be missed. Counselors cannot provide these opportunities in isolation. "The entire school must work together to provide career exploration opportunities. Furthermore, teachers, administrators, parents and the community must be involved to make sure all students are given support as they explore career options and develop a tentative plan of study" (Arrington, 2000, p. 105).

Counselors will be more effective if they are sensitive to the educational and vocational needs of different ethnic minority students (Mau, 1995). Readiness to make appropriate career decisions is influenced not only by one's age, but race/ethnicity as well. Ethnic minority under and over-representation in various occupational categories can be attributed to many factors in a multicultural society. These factors may include education, poverty, regional differences, and prejudice (Axelson, 1993; Herring, 1998).

In addition, continued representations of minority youth as having less career maturity than their peers, as measured by standardized instruments using a White middle class norm group, can lead to inaccurate career assumptions and generalization among non-white and at-risk youth (Ransom, 2003). These inaccurate beliefs, can in turn, influence minority youth's career related behavior (Schnoor & Ware, 2001). Therefore, middle school counselors should implement culturally responsive counseling programs to address the unique challenges of diverse minority adolescents.

### **Culturally Responsive School Counseling Programs**

The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) promotes a national model encouraging school counselors to take action to ensure that students of culturally diverse backgrounds have access to appropriate services and opportunities that promote the maximum development of the individual (ASCA, 2003). This is supported in the No Child Left Behind Act (Paige, 2001), which indicates that it is the responsibility of schools to provide resources or supplemental services for students who are lagging behind developmentally, academically, and socially. The goal is to specifically target the achievement gap between disadvantaged minority students and their peers. The school counselor's responsibility is to be accountable for demonstrating how the school counseling program contributes to the commitment of the school agenda in closing the gap (Garza, 2004).

ASCA (2003) presented the ASCA National Model to guide development and implementation of school counseling programs through a framework designed to promote every students' development in academic, career and personal/social domains (Galassi & Akos, 2004). School counselors are being urged to take leadership roles in educational

reform aimed at reducing the barriers to academic achievement for minority students (ASCA, 2003; Bemak, 2002; Butler, 2003; Taylor & Adelman, 2000). Culturally responsive guidance programs in schools should be based on two assumptions: (1) all young people can learn and want to learn; and (2) cultural differences are real and cannot be ignored (Bryan, 2005).

Culturally responsive counseling practice requires an ethic of caring and understanding in an effort to build bridges among children whose cultures and backgrounds do not necessarily mirror the cultural dictates of mainstream American society (Day-Vines, 2003). Recognition of complex issues related to race, culture, and class will better position counselors to deliver more effective counseling services. Often, the culture of the home and the culture of the school remain unsynchronized for minority students (Patton & Day-Vines, 2003). Patton and Day-Vines documented in their research that culturally responsive school counseling programs should accommodate the emerging demands of children from culturally distinct groups.

The American School Counselors Association (1999) established a position statement on cross/multicultural counseling that calls for the facilitation of student development through an understanding of and appreciation for multiculturalism and diversity. Lee (2001) explained that cultural diversity must be effectively addressed in the provision of comprehensive school counseling programs. Three concepts underscore the importance of promoting cultural diversity in school counseling interventions. These are access, equity, and educational justice. All students, regardless of their cultural background and heritage, deserve equal access to a quality education (Lee, 2001). Anything less, for any student is a grave educational injustice. School counselors need a

different perspective from which to operate if they are going to ensure that students from culturally diverse backgrounds have access to services that promote optimal academic, career, and personal-social development (Ransom, 2003).

### ***Culturally Responsive School Counselors***

Culturally responsive school counselors recognize students' culturally derived behaviors, and interpret those behaviors appropriately, without construing such behavior as strange or inferring pathology in a student (Ransom, 2003). They demonstrate comfort exploring and processing the specific and unique manner in which culture may impact a student's values, viewpoints, and interpretation of stimuli. Culturally responsive counselors recognize the student first as an individual and then in a cultural context in an effort to avoid some of the stereotyping that can have negative consequences during the counseling process (Day-Vines, 2003). Unequipped with the requisite knowledge of culture, counselors may inadvertently avoid, ignore, overlook, or minimize the contextual dimensions of race, culture, and class (Baruth & Manning, 2000). Culturally responsive school counselors who recognize potential dilemmas are in a better position to provide supportive and encouraging counseling interventions for minority adolescents (Lee, 2001).

Furthermore, identity is a critical component of psychological functioning, and failure to negotiate identity issues can create personal distress for some adolescents (Lee & Walz, 1998). Patton and Day-Vines (2003) also discussed that counselors' recognition of identity issues that students confront permits recognition of healthy and unhealthy identity functioning, provides more accurate case conceptualizations of students' concerns, facilitates students' self-understanding, and promotes self-acceptance. School

counselors can help foster well-being by permitting adolescents to verbalize and sort through these issues in an accepting environment (Sue & Sue, 2003).

### ***School Counselors as Facilitators of Student Development***

It is imperative that school counselors use team facilitation skills to help administrators and teachers work collaboratively with stakeholders who are representative of the students that most need help, that is, minority students (Bryan, 2005). Day-Vines (2003) documents that school counselors can be effective facilitators of student development. First, school counselors should promote the development of positive self-identities among students (Brewster & Railsback, 2003). For example, counselors could conduct self-awareness groups that emphasize self-appreciation and counselors could use culturally specific curriculum materials to cultivate self pride in individual and group interactions (Patton & Day-Vines, 2003). Second, school counselors should facilitate the development of positive interpersonal relations among students from diverse cultural backgrounds. To accomplish this goal, growth groups might be used by having students from diverse backgrounds explore the nature and importance of positive interpersonal relationships with each other (Carter & Vuong, 1997; Hayes, 1996).

Third and fourth, respectively, school counselors should focus on academic achievement, promoting the attitude and skills for school success (Cicero & Barton, 2003). These include promoting the development of positive attitudes toward academic achievement among all students and facilitating the development of academic skills and competencies. Day-Vines suggested that workshops and activities should be included to ensure that all young people have an opportunity to develop the skills to achieve, given cultural differences in learning styles. Fifth, school counselors should facilitate career

exploration and choice process among young people in a culturally sensitive manner.

From elementary through the secondary level, students of culturally diverse backgrounds need relevant guidance to the work world (Murrow-Taylor, Foltz, McDonald, Ellis, & Culbertson, 1999). Murrow-Taylor et al. noted that counselors can sponsor “Career Days” and invite career role models from a variety of cultures to school to share their perceptions and experiences in the work world. Counselors must go beyond traditional school counseling practice to assume the role of student development facilitator and advocate in a comprehensive guidance and counseling program (Henderson & Mapp, 2002).

### ***School Counselors as Student Advocates***

Lee (1998) defined advocacy as “the process or act of arguing or pleading for a cause or proposal” (p. 8). Counselors may need to perform alternative roles as advocates and change agents in which counselors work within the system to institute changes in school policy or climate, given the embeddings of racism and discrimination in our society (Sue & Sue, 2003). Sue and Sue explained that implementing this strategy requires counselors to conduct in-service training for teachers, administrators and parents on topics such as diversity; advocate on behalf of the students; and model appropriate behavior to improve the educational and social experiences of minority adolescents. Adjustments become critical considering the lack of cultural awareness or cross-cultural sensitivity on the part of many educators. Obstacles to school success for minority students, then, often comes to be perceived as student inadequacies rather than originating with institutional insensitivity (Lee, 1996).

Lee concluded that little consideration is given to problems and challenges that

may in reality be reactive responses by many students to a system that tolerates little diversity. Many school counselors are faced with a unique dilemma such as: facilitating student adjustment to the educational system, and confronting the reality that often it is the school system that needs adjustment to the student (Day-Vines, 2003). To effectively challenge school systems, an awareness of systematic barriers to quality education and the use of initiatives are required (Lee, 1995; Lee & Walz, 1998). The role of student advocate should be basic to a culturally responsive counseling program (Day-Vines, 2003).

A culturally responsive counselor can intervene in the educational system on behalf of students to eliminate institutional barriers and cultural insensitivities. According to Day-Vines (2003), the student advocate role has two imperative counselor functions: (1) facilitating educator awareness of systemic factors that may encroach upon student progress; and (2) facilitating professional development among teachers, parents and school administrators of culturally responsive approaches to education.

To identify potentially culturally alienating or insensitive factors in educational attitudes, behaviors, or policies, counselors may need to conduct individual and group consultations with teachers, administrators, and other school personnel (Bryan, 2005). Holcomb-McCoy and Moore-Thomas (2001) also placed an emphasis on the importance of educators' awareness of their own personal "cultural blindspots" and how these might affect the development of students who come from backgrounds that are very different from their own. Additionally, Bryan discussed that counselors may implement a guidance program review of curriculum and master plans to ensure that cultural diversity is reflected in all areas related to academic, career, and personal-social development. The

advocacy/counseling process should include special group intervention techniques designed for specific cultural groups (Fulks, 1990).

### **Group Counseling Intervention Techniques for Minority Students**

In any school there are students who feel a sense of detachment within the school community, who do not have a close friend, companion, or source of support. Groups can provide the support, understanding, acceptance, companionship, and opportunity for growth that these students may need (Berkovitz, 1975). When group counseling is done, students who might otherwise be overlooked, or those who might be reluctant or hesitant to join a group in other community settings can participate and profit from the group experience (Schmidt, 2003). Group counseling offers the advantages of reaching students from more diverse backgrounds, access to behavioral data from teachers and other school personnel, and the leader's unique position of being able to provide informal interventions to student group members (Natterson, 1975).

If counselors hope to better serve individual students and their needs from diverse cultural backgrounds, it is likely that counselors will need to revise their theories and techniques (Corey, 2004). The approaches that can be taken to assist minority students require innovation and creativity on the part of individual school counselors (Williams & Butler, 2003). Counselors should address both the academic and nonacademic needs of minority students (Ford, 1997). Ford emphasized that this may require awareness and information from a variety of sources (students, parents, teachers, and several objective measurements) to build an understanding of how minority students feel about themselves (self-concept), their social relationships, culture, satisfaction with life, and future by utilizing group counseling interventions.

### ***Group Counseling for Adolescents***

Group counseling can be an important vehicle through which adolescents can be empowered to develop key social and emotional competencies and skills (Corey, 2004). The group dynamic, making use of peer influence and peer support, can allow adolescents to develop pro-social skills and foster positive self-esteem (Schmidt, 2003). Schmidt noted that adolescents can learn to identify emotions, experiment with different communication styles and behavioral patterns, develop leadership skills, deal appropriately with conflict, understand differences, and appreciate the value of being included in a group.

Group counseling permits adolescents to process their individual and collective experiences, feel less isolated, and learn coping skills (Day-Vines, 2003). Group counseling offers understanding and support, which promotes the students' willingness to explore problems/assets they have with the group (Corey, 2004). Ford (1997) suggested that the opportunity to speak with other students who share their concerns may help minority students become more comfortable with "being different." Yalom (1985) noted that interpersonal interaction is the most effective of all therapeutic factors. Corey described that in this supportive environment, members receive encouragement as well as suggestions on how to apply what they are learning in the outside world.

Middle school counselors' time to engage in small group counseling is impacted by the amount of time spent in individual and crisis counseling sessions or "drop-ins" (Myrick, 1997). Small group counseling is especially suitable for middle school adolescents. Groups provide a place where they can safely experiment and test their limits. A unique quality of group counseling is that it enables adolescents to be

instrumental in one another's growth (Corey & Corey, 2002). Small group counseling is an essential aspect of the role of the middle school counselor.

While school counselors are also in a good position to ensure individualized attention for and service to minority students in all different areas, it has been well established that group work is quite effective and successful in school settings (Williams & Butler, 2003). During group counseling, the members are encouraged to see themselves as part of the larger social community, which can enhance racial identity and self-esteem (Ford, 1997). In a group setting, topics involving introspection about the minority experience in their school or community along with healthy ways of dealing with these issues can be raised (Sue & Sue, 1999).

Group counseling in public schools is a more effective intervention in addressing some of the serious social problems facing our youth, particularly at a time when peer relationships, social skills, and social interaction are not considered priorities in an era of high-stakes testing, test results, and academic productivity (Bemak, Chi-Ying & Siroskey, 2005). Group counseling has been linked to improvements in achievement scores and interpersonal relationships, and to enhanced learning, especially when the emphasis has been on self-awareness and responsible behavior (Campell & Myrick, 1990; Shechtman, 1993). A reduction in anxiety and an increase in self-esteem were found for adolescent female incest victims (De Luca, Hazen, & Culter, 1993). For adolescents, peer groups as well as reference groups, have been found to be helpful for assessing personal, social, and academic achievements (Bemak, et al., 2005; Bemak & Greenberg, 1994; Henry & Kilmann, 1979).

The topics included or selected for group counseling sessions are mandated by the needs of the population. In a diverse school population, counselors may encounter students with needs related to specific realities of their environment. “Conditions contributing to students’ mental health problem, such as poverty, homelessness, substance abuse, physical and sexual abuse, and domestic and community violence are fast becoming a normal part of the family neighborhood culture in which many students grow and develop” (Lockhart & Keys, 1998, p. 3). Groups specifically related to topics of race/ethnicity may be necessary in a diverse school environment. Minority children may often have issues of racial identity (Helms, 1990), immigration stress (Huang, 1994), racism (Glauser, 1999) and academic underachievement. Counselors, in cooperation with classroom teachers, often deliver classroom guidance or group counseling, to address issues of academic, career and personal/social needs. This approach also establishes the classroom teacher and the school counselor as a team who co-teaches and co-facilitates the in-class sessions on various developmental topics and multiculturalism (Day-Vines, Patton & Baytops, 2003).

### ***Multicultural Group Counseling***

The term multicultural refers to the complexity of culture as it pertains to delivery of services (Corey, 2004). Corey suggests that group counselors who ignore culture will provide less effective services. If group counselors hope to successfully lead multicultural groups, it is essential that they possess an awareness of their own cultural heritage and have a level of ethnic self-knowledge (DeLucia-Waack, 1996). In multicultural counseling, two or more people with different ways of perceiving their social environment attempt to work together in a helping relationship (Pedersen, 2000).

Group counseling can facilitate students' encounters with others who are different from themselves, thereby allowing diverse and heterogeneous groups of students to intermix with those outside of their often small, homogenous cliques. Toward this end, multicultural group counseling can allow adolescents to grow and develop in new ways. The group facilitators can encourage students' exploration of cultural differences, appreciation for student diversity, and tolerance and sensitivity to those of different backgrounds (Parker & McDavis, 1989).

Multicultural group work involves strategies that cultivate understanding and appreciation of diversity in such areas as culture, ethnicity, race, gender, class, religion, and sexual orientation (Ivey, Pedersen, & Ivey, 2001). Corey emphasizes each person has a unique multicultural identity, but as members of a group we share a common goal - the success of the group. DeLucia-Waack (1996) states that the multicultural context of group work requires attention to two tasks: (a) the application and modification of theories and techniques of group work to different cultures that are congruent with cultural beliefs and behaviors, and (b) the development of the theory and practice of group work that makes full use of the diversity among members as a way to facilitate change and growth. Multiculturalism is in all group work, and uniqueness of individuals is a key factor in how groups operate (Pedersen, 1991).

There are three goals that all multicultural groups have in common: (a) helping members conceptualize problems within a personal and cultural framework so that an action plan reflects the individual's worldview; (b) encouraging members to explore their behaviors to determine if such behaviors are helping them in their relationships; and (c) assisting members in understanding new behaviors and beliefs within a cultural context (Corey, 2004, p.17).

At the same time, the goal of multicultural group counseling is to provide new levels of communication among members (Johnson, Torres, Coleman, & Smith, 1995).

Additionally, a goal of a diverse group is to promote understanding, acceptance, and trust among members of various cultural groups (Sue & Sue, 2003).

Studies have shown that students from culturally diverse backgrounds have benefited from culturally responsive groups (Baca & Koss-Chioino, 1997; Walker, 1991). For instance, students' self-perception increased for African American, European American, and Portuguese students, while Mexican American adolescents also exhibited improvement in educational problems, quality of family life, and mental health (Bemak et al., 2005). Significant improvement in achievement scores and interpersonal relationships for Israeli students, and increased self-esteem and internal locus of control orientation for Native American adolescents were found who participated in group counseling (Kim, Omizo, & D'Andrea, 1998; Shechtman, 1993).

Further, practitioners of multicultural counseling often assert that many counseling intervention techniques fail to meet the complex needs of various ethnic minority clients because of stereotyped narrow perceptions of those needs (Ivey, 1995; Merta, 1995; Mokuau, 1987; Pedersen, 2000; Sue, Ivey, & Pedersen, 1996; Sue & Sue, 2003). Asian Americans, African Americans, Latinos, and Native Americans leave counseling significantly earlier than do White clients (Day-Vines, 2003; Holcomb-McCoy & Moore-Thomas, 2001). Corey concluded that this tendency is often attributed to cultural barriers such as language difficulties, as well as class-bound, and culture-bound values that hinder the formation of an effective counseling relationship. Moreover, empowerment groups may be considered to break the cultural barriers, aid in student success, and build an effective school counseling relationship.

### ***Empowerment Groups for Academic Success (EGAS)***

What are Empowerment Groups for Academic Success? EGAS is an innovative group counseling approach that takes into account the influence of social, psychological, and environmental factors on academic performance for inner-city youth (Bemak et al., 2005). Bemak and colleagues created an interesting and groundbreaking way to approach the empowerment of African American students (Lee, 2005). The EGAS approach was developed with the belief that structured group interventions that narrowly target only one of many problem areas for students of high risk, and approaches that do not allow ownership for the group, fall short of dealing with the complexity of problems that many urban adolescents face. Lee explained that counselors do not empower the people with whom they work. "Empowerment is an internal developmental process in which a person discovers how power operates in his or her life and then takes reasonable steps to seize upon personal power and channel it in constructive ways" (Lee, p. 393). Lee adds that counselors provide the facilitative conditions that allow people to discover the internal resources to move their lives in positive directions. Bemak et al. indicates that the EGAS approach aims at true empowerment, fostering group dynamics that generate a greater internal locus of control for students. The approach incorporates attention to the concerns of group members, allowing them to determine the agenda and to establish and maintain many of the norms for behavior in and beyond the group (Bemak et al.).

The EGAS approach to group counseling is unique in its emphasis on empowerment through group process, moving away from psycho-educational and traditional structured groups filled with exercises and activities planned by the facilitator (Lee, 2005). Lee suggests that a crucial difference between the EGAS approach and

other groups is the responsibility placed upon the group members to establish their own agenda that centers on the goals of the group. EGAS is based on a core belief that facilitators should not “control” groups so that true empowerment results in members having an actual say in how a group is run. Bemak et al. (2005) noted that this is most effectively accomplished through an unstructured process with a group that has clearly defined goals.

The EGAS model, however, uses some of the traditional strategies and structures from the group counseling movement in the 1960s and 70s, such as having a co-facilitator, establishing a set number of meetings, setting individual objectives, and building group cohesion and support (Johnson & Johnson, 2005). Moreover, Johnson and Johnson argue that the model goes beyond the traditional approach by building in a multicultural approach that is sensitive to the environmental elements that impact students living in urban settings.

***Cautions Regarding EGAS.*** Holcomb-McCoy (2005) feels that groups designed to empower African American girls should be implemented using a Black feminist perspective. According to Holcomb-McCoy, the particular oppressions that African American girls face lead to specific perspectives on reality that should be articulated in empowerment groups. Services should be administered by service providers who are adequately trained to work with African American females, women of color, or who share the sociocultural and historical experience of being African American female (Bailey, 2005). Holcomb-McCoy suggested that a female, African American counselor, who has an understanding of Black feminism would be the most effective facilitator of an

empowerment group for African American girls because she can act as a role model and can offer emotional support for the girls identifying and responding to racism.

Butler and Bunch (2005) describe the EGAS model as a very strategic intervention for African American females involved in Bemak et al.'s study. However, Butler and Bunch feel that "this model lacks credible and objective data that could generalize it's use to other school environments and with populations composed of different ethnic backgrounds and/or gender" (p. 396). Overall, Butler and Bunch indicate that the EGAS model has strong merit and is worthy of further exploration.

Bailey (2005) is aware of the challenges that urban schools face with regard to providing a culturally responsive and quality education to culturally diverse students, and further states that urban schools are not alone in these challenges. For instance, Bailey explains, that rural schools may struggle with providing a culturally responsive, quality education for adolescents as well. Some of the very same problems (e.g., school failure, incidents of violence, racism, teen pregnancy, drug use) interfere with the educational process for adolescents regardless of their location.

The EGAS model must be considered with some caution (Lee, 2005). Lee discusses that EGAS seems to have a profound effect on the participants; however, more evidence is needed that this approach truly impacts the academic performance of the participants. Lee believes that academic achievement is the primary measure of empowerment for adolescents in a school setting.

***Strengths of EGAS.*** The EGAS model utilizes knowledge and skills that counselors have learned during their counselor preparation programs (Johnson & Johnson, 2005). Johnson and Johnson suggest it takes very little additional counselor

training to be able to implement the model effectively with a variety of school populations. This model has been proven to be highly successful in helping urban African American female adolescents to become empowered to improve the personal, social, and academic aspects of their lives ( Lee, 2005).

Based upon the self-reports supplied by seven African American girls, some participants acknowledged an improvement in their behavior and their academic achievement after EGAS (Bemak et al., 2005). The open structure in the EGAS approach allows students to experience a true sense of empowerment and control over their lives and destinies (Johnson & Johnson, 2005). Bemak et al. points out that the EGAS model is founded on a belief in self: exploration and empowerment. The process and the necessity of having culturally sensitive interventions that are open to the exploration of differences may have the greatest benefit for minority adolescents. Bemak et al. hopes that other school counselors may be able to replicate EGAS and intervene “in the ‘cycle of disengagement’ that negatively impacts the lives of so many adolescents” (p. 389).

### **Summary**

This review of literature describes the importance of the link between culturally responsive school counselors and empowerment group interventions to promote successful experiences for minority adolescents. Further, this review expresses the challenges faced by minority adolescents in school settings. Research has shown that culturally responsive counseling involves a deliberate effort to bridge the cultural divide through the demonstration of understanding and respect in dealing with cultural difference. Important components of the culturally sensitive counseling process may involve: (a) facilitating student development; (b) being an advocate; (c) varied

intervention techniques for minority students; (d) multicultural group counseling; and (e) the Empowerment Groups for Academic Success (EGAS) approach.

Group counseling provides critical elements related to the interpersonal process that does not exist in individual counseling. A review of literature found that group counseling in schools was more effective than individual interventions, fostering better developed social competencies within groups, bringing about new insights that were unavailable through individual work, and enhancing social skill development (Becky & Farren, 1997; Bemak et al., 2005; May & Housley, 1996; Phillips & Phillips, 1992; Prout & Prout, 1998). Further, some argue that the efficacy of group counseling in schools provides a framework that more efficiently manages time constraints and provides the greatest service delivery to the maximum number of students in the most efficient manner (Proehl, 1995; Roland & Neitzschman, 1996).

When counselors work to address the developmental needs of the growing number of adolescents from culturally diverse backgrounds, they help to ensure a successful adolescent experience in a school setting. Moreover, counselors can effectively promote academic achievement and cultural awareness through the use of multicultural group counseling and an EGAS approach.

The review of literature suggests that minority adolescents are faced with many challenges in school settings such as: (1) adolescent development; (2) racial relations / social support; (3) self-esteem / academic issues; (4) racial identity development/ appearance and; (5) career issues. Given the varied challenges that minority students face, it is imperative to explore current group counseling intervention techniques designed for specific cultural groups. The literature thoroughly describes the focus,

reactions, and the strengths of the EGAS model. Authors explain that the EGAS model could be the archetype of a true empowerment model as its power has been instrumental in the personal, social, and academic changes exhibited by urban African American female adolescents during group counseling sessions. Lee (2005) urges professionals to conduct further investigations of the EGAS model with varied groups of students. This current study utilizes the EGAS model with minority adolescents in a predominately White suburban middle school setting.

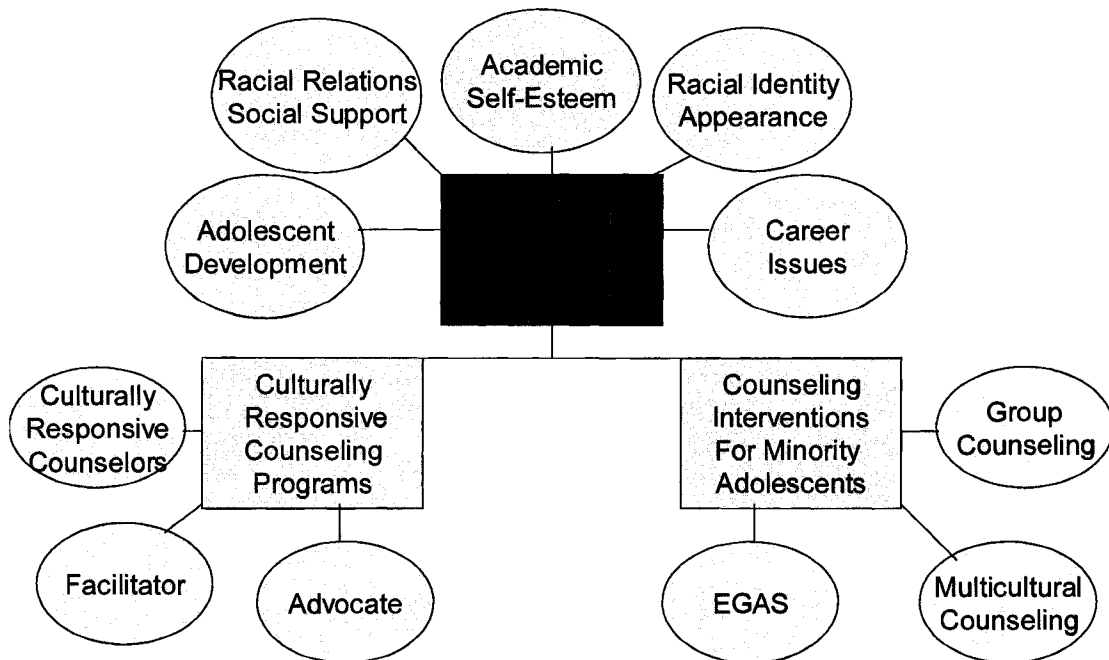


Figure 2. Literature map.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **METHODOLOGY**

This chapter provides a framework for understanding the methodology used in conducting this study. Eight sections highlight the major components critical to conducting qualitative research. These components are: (1) research approach and rationale; (2) research setting; (3) group participants and leaders; (4) procedures; (5) research interview questions; (6) data collection; (7) data analysis; and (8) verification.

#### **Research Approach and Rationale**

In general, research topics that relate to participants' perceptions, attitudes, or opinions are well suited to qualitative research methods (Patton, 1990). A qualitative study was chosen primarily because the study's focus and the participants' characteristics justify a descriptive process. Qualitative research is designed to explain or theorize about a particular experience of a particular person or group of people (Jacelon & O'Dell, 2005). Qualitative research is influenced by words and pictures, rather than numbers, and is used to convey what the researcher has learned. These attributes enable the researcher to get a clearer understanding of the phenomena (Merriam, 1998). The researcher analyzes transcripts, field notes, and other documents, paying close attention to the richness of not only the words but also the recorded gestures and physical observations. These data allow the researcher to answer questions about the participants' experiences and meanings.

Qualitative research, or naturalistic research, is defined by Bercovici (1981) as a method of understanding: (a) the system or environment in which the participant is engaged, and (b) the unique perspective of the participant. Because the major focus of

this study is to gain an understanding of minority adolescents' perceptions regarding the Empowerment Groups for Academic Success (EGAS) approach, the research design of this study is framed within the phenomenology paradigm. Qualitative research methods are the best way to obtain this type of rich and detailed information (Atkins, Bullis & Todis, 2005).

A qualitative researcher plays an active part in the study. By being involved within the setting, the researcher becomes acquainted with the context and the participants of the study in a non-threatening manner. These settings provide for experiences and meanings to unfold naturally because the researcher has the advantage of being able to quickly process data, clarify, and summarize the participant's responses as the study evolves (Lincoln & Guba, 1981).

This study examines the phenomenological experience of minority adolescents who participated in EGAS within a White middle school setting. Phenomenology is concerned with the phenomena that appear in our consciousness as we engage with the world around us (Willig, 2001). Willig suggests that phenomenology identifies different approaches to human understanding and it argues that certain forms of knowing may be more constructive than others. This research made an attempt to "discover and understand a phenomena, a process, or the perspectives ... of the people involved" (Merriam, 1998, p. 11).

Finally, a constructivist approach was taken as the center of applicability of the EGAS model with minority adolescents in a suburban setting. Lincoln and Guba (2000) explain that constructivism is specific to constructed realities. Constructivist researchers address the "process" of interaction among individuals (Creswell, 1998). Creswell noted

that constructivist researchers recognize that their own background shapes their interpretation and interpretation flows from their personal, cultural, and historical experiences. My research topic has a constructivist tone because I articulated from my own experiences, findings regarding the impact of the EGAS model when utilized with minority adolescent girls in a predominately White middle school setting. Lincoln and Guba (2000) believe that constructivists have central interests of meaning making and attribution activities that shape action. The constructivism paradigm fits with a need for: (a) enhancing awareness of the EGAS model and its applicability to diverse backgrounds (people/students) and locations (schools) and (b) understanding how school counselors may be able to address the personal, social, academic and career needs of students of color in predominately White middle school settings.

### **Research Setting**

This study was conducted at one suburban middle school located in a city in Louisiana. Due to confidentiality, the research setting will be called Louisiana Middle School. Louisiana Middle School is one of the highest performing middle schools in Louisiana. Educational programs are provided to students in grades five through eight. The school's mission is to focus on teamwork, a positive learning environment, and meaningful activities to ensure student success. Louisiana Middle School has approximately 689 students. The overall student body is comprised primarily of five major ethnic groups: Whites (79%), African-Americans (15%), Hispanics (4%), Asians (1%), and American Indian (1%). The percentage of families who receive free and reduced lunch is 9%.

### ***The Learning Community Culture***

Louisiana Middle School has high expectations for their students, ensuring that each child has the best educational experience possible. The students are expected to demonstrate basic skills in all content areas including decision-making, creative/critical thinking, and problem solving. The student's behavior is expected to reflect a sense of cooperation and respect for all. The students are expected to be knowledgeable about the changing world of technology. All students are valued individuals who possess unique physical, social, emotional and intellectual needs, and who learn in different ways. Additionally, individual student performance increases when students are challenged and engaged in all aspects of the learning process.

### ***The Academic Environment***

The staff seeks to challenge students academically through the rigor included in each class. Louisiana Middle School operates on a modified A/B block schedule. English Language Arts and Math classes meet every day for 90 minutes. Enrichment and P.E. classes meet every day for 45 minutes. Science and Social Studies classes meet every other day for 90 minutes. At the same time, all students are expected to be productive, prompt, prepared, and polite participants with a positive mental attitude.

### ***The Counseling Environment***

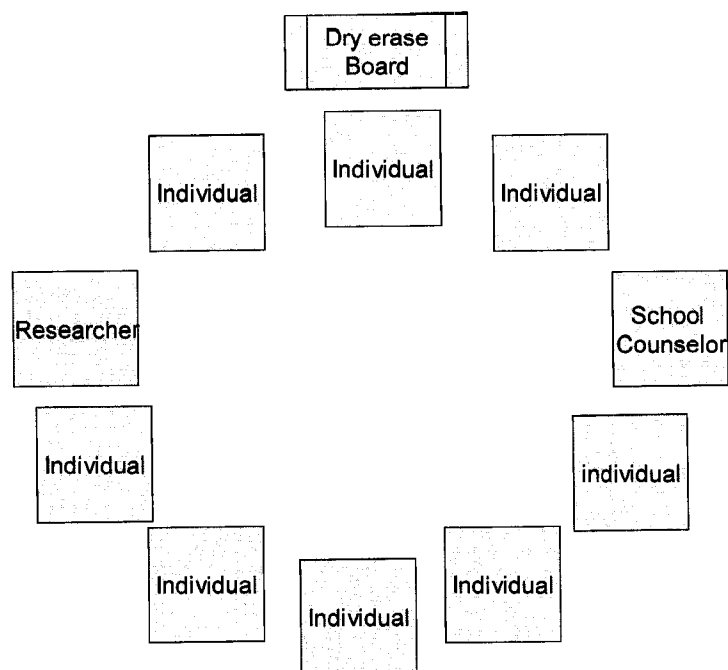
The counseling personnel consist of one certified professional school counselor. The counseling office provides information about schedules, grades, and community resources, as well serving as a contact point for students/parents requesting conferences with teachers. The counselor heads the testing program that is carried out each year.

iLEAP tests are administered to help determine the level at which the student is achieving and LEAP tests determine a student's eligibility to be promoted to high school. Parents who desire an interpretation of test scores may make an appointment with the counselor to discuss them.

The counselor is also available to students who need assistance with any problem they might have. Issues the counselor may see students and parents about include interpersonal skills, adjustment problems, loneliness, depression, decision making, problem solving, death, divorce, physical and sexual abuse, parenting, and suicide. Parents are invited to discuss any difficulties that they feel may be harming the progress of their child. Individual and group counseling services are provided.

### ***The Intervention Setting***

For the purpose of this study, the eight week group counseling sessions were held in a classroom with natural light illuminating through multiple windows. The chairs were arranged in a circular formation to allow for face-to-face interactions during the EGAS process. The group met once a week for 45 minutes during elective classes.



*Figure 3.* Setup for weekly EGAS group sessions.

### **Procedures**

Prior to approval from the Colorado State University Human Subjects Committee, the researcher contacted the school district and the principal of the middle school research site to obtain consent to conduct the research study (Appendices A, B, E). A research proposal was submitted to Colorado State University Human Subjects Committee for approval. This proposal discussed the necessary procedures for conducting the study with participants as minors. To protect participant anonymity, participants were assured complete confidentiality by having their names and locations changed.

Because the participants were minors, parental permission was obtained to conduct the research (Appendices C, D). After participant and parental informed

consent, the group met once a week for 45 minutes during elective classes. Issues related to group goals, group norms, client's right to privacy, and informed consent were discussed during the first group session.

For the benefit of this study, purposeful sampling was the method of choice. This sampling strategy enables the researcher to "discover, understand, and gain insight from a sample from which the most can be learned" (Merriam, 1998, p. 61). In purposeful sampling, the research establishes criteria for the participants in the study (Patton, 1990). The target population for this study was 8 minority adolescent 8<sup>th</sup> grade girls identified by the school counselor. Minority refers to four major racial and ethnic groups: African American, American Indian and Alaska natives, Asian and Pacific Islanders, and Hispanics (Polland & O'Hare, 1999). In this study, girls from all four minority groups had the potential to participate or be selected to participate.

The group leaders consisted of two African American female facilitators, with the school counselor being the lead facilitator and the researcher as co-facilitator. The first group session began in October 2006 and included eight weekly group counseling sessions utilizing the EGAS model. EGAS is based on a core belief that facilitators should not "control" groups so that true empowerment results in members having an actual say in how a group is run. This is most effectively accomplished through an unstructured process group with clearly defined goals. By using the EGAS approach, group members develop ownership and have choices about discussing personal and social problems that may be directly related to poor school behavior and low academic performance. The EGAS sessions outline was as follows:

- 1) Session 1- the facilitators and participants introduced themselves, discussed the purpose of the group, established ground rules (no putdowns, what is said in group stays in group, one person talks at a time, etc.), and discussed things that make each of us special. The facilitators defined the four basic goals of the EGAS model (Personal, Social, Career, and Academic). It was explained to the participants that they had ownership in deciding what goals/topics would be explored each session.
- 2) Session 2- The facilitator and participants began with a memory activity (i.e., recalling group members' names, ground rules, and special characteristics of members). The four broad group goals were written on a dry erase board. Individual participants were allowed to choose what they wanted to talk about based on the goals. Participants discussed personal and social concerns. Group members targeted problematic behavior for change.
- 3) Session 3- Participants were reminded of group norms/rules. The four broad group goals were written on a dry erase board. Individual participants were allowed to choose what they wanted to talk about based on the goals. Participants discussed personal, social, and career concerns. Members began to focus on and discuss things that make them angry in school and these anger producing situations were written on the board. Focus was placed on how group members responded to their anger (i.e., What was going on with me?). The group began to identify ways to deal more productively with their anger, and participants were to think about the things they did in school when they became angry and to write down some of the consequences of that anger.

Because of the time constraint, career preparation was discussed in the next session. However, for homework, members had to think about at least three careers they might be interested in exploring.

- 4) Session 4- Participants were reminded of group norms/rules. The four broad group goals were written on a dry erase board. Individual participants were allowed to choose what they wanted to talk about based on the goals. Participants wanted to discuss careers. The group reviewed the previous career homework assignment. The facilitators brought and discussed handouts about various careers. Participants wrote down three careers they might want to explore. Additionally, facilitators discussed college opportunities and resources.
- 5) Session 5- Participants were reminded of group norms/rules. The four broad group goals were written on a dry erase board. Individual participants were allowed to choose what they wanted to talk about based on the goals. Participants wanted to discuss personal, social, and academic concerns. Anger provoking situations were identified by group members. The facilitators presented some techniques to group members to assist them in effectively handling anger situations, including problem-solving strategies, modeling, coping statements, and alternative thinking strategies. Some anger-provoking situations were presented through role-play for group members to practice newly acquired techniques.
- 6) Session 6- Participants were reminded of group norms/rules. The four broad group goals were written on a dry erase board. Individual participants were

allowed to choose what they wanted to talk about based on the goals.

Participants wanted to discuss academic and career concerns. Test taking skills were discussed. The facilitators explained the Pre-ACT results and clarified what the scores meant. Valuable ACT information was given to each member to help prepare them for high school and college. Career planning and preparation handouts were explained and given to the group members. Facilitators discussed college majors, goals for obtaining a college degree, and excelling in school/subject matter. Participants discussed best/worst subjects in school.

- 7) Session 7- Participants were reminded of group norms/rules. The four broad group goals were written on a dry erase board. Individual participants were allowed to choose what they wanted to talk about based on the goals. Participants wanted to discuss personal and social issues. The focus was placed on members discussing their thoughts and feelings about relationships, family, friends and school. Group members identified the number of positive people connections they created at school through their involvement in the group experience. Participants also identified and discussed at least three of their personal strengths. The facilitators and participants shared and discussed future individualized goals and plans for achieving them.
- 8) Session 8- The final session was directed toward the facilitators and participants pulling together all of the information they had learned over the course of seven weeks; the facilitators reminded participants of all the positive aspects that were identified during the course of the group meetings. Group

members engaged in a parting activity where each member listened while other group members told her what she liked about that particular member. In addition, group members involved themselves in a final game of their choice (explored similarities and differences).

### **Research Questions**

This study contributed to the potential for expanded applications by responding to the following research questions:

What are the experiences of minority adolescent girls who participate in the EGAS model in a predominately White middle school setting?

- a) What are the participants' perceptions of the outcome of the EGAS model?
- b) What are the participants' perceptions of their experiences during the group sessions?
- c) How does the EGAS model impact the participants' personal, social, academic and career needs?
- d) How does this model work in a predominately White, suburban setting with minority adolescents?

### **Data Collection**

Following each group session the researcher kept field notes and the participants were asked to write self-reflections of their group experience in a diary. Given the age range of the participants, three questions were pre-written in each student's weekly diary. This helped with the issue of having a blank page at the end of each session. The students were given five minutes at the end of each session to write in their journals. The weekly diary questions were: (1) My Thoughts... (2) What was most helpful for you this session?

(3) Is there anything else you would like to share? The diaries were collected by the researcher at the end of each group session (Appendix F).

At the end of the eight week session, the researcher conducted individual, semi-structured face-to-face interviews. A semi-structured individual interview is one in which either (a) the interviewer refers to a sheet containing key areas to be covered in the interview, or (b) uses a set of questions but is prepared to insert other questions into the interview in order to capture elaborations (Burnard, 2005). Interviews are important to qualitative research because they allow the researcher to capture the perspectives of the participants and provide in-depth information through questions that are open and broad. These questions gave participants the opportunity to focus on various elements of their experiences. Given the ages of the participants (11-15), a “Student Interview Form” with eight open-ended questions was read aloud and available to each participant before responding to each question (Appendix G).

Interviews were the primary instruments for data collection. The researcher conducted face-to-face interviews with all participants of the group. These interviews lasted approximately 15 to 45 minutes. Pseudonyms were developed to protect the identity and location of the participants. During the interview, the researcher used an audio recorder and note pad to accurately record the participants’ verbal and non-verbal responses as well as interviewer observations.

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis is about making sense of collected data. It is a complex process that involves consolidating, reducing, and interpreting to make meaning (Merriam, 1998). Interviews with the participants were transcribed immediately after the face-to-face

interview to capture the “fresh” perspectives of the participants. During the transcription process, interviews were read and compared with the audiotapes by the researcher. Re-reading these transcriptions allows the researcher to accurately record the voices as well as “get a sense of what the text is about” (Darlington & Scott, 2002, p. 144). This process ensures the researcher of her “conscious effort to stay in the words of the participants, without theorizing or analyzing based on the researcher’s experiences and notions, and to focus on the phenomenon that appeared” (Ray, 2001, p. 40).

The interview transcripts, diaries, and observational notes were coded using an inductive approach, appropriate to a phenomenological study (Willig, 2001). The coding process was informed by the theory and literature associated with the EGAS Model, but a general inductive coding process followed the steps of reading the participants’ materials, coding themes, and then clustering these themes into major themes (Willig, 2001).

Creswell (2003) defines a six step generic process of qualitative data analysis which guided the data analysis.

Step 1: Organize and prepare the data for analysis. Preparing the data for analysis involves transcribing interviews, optically scanning material, typing up field notes, or sorting and arranging the data into different types depending on the sources of information (Creswell, 2003). Data collected from the face-to- individual interviews and diaries were separated into qualitative data to be coded. The qualitative data were sorted into separate categories.

Step 2: Read through all the data. Tesch (1990) provides a useful process for data analysis which begins with reading through all of the data to obtain a general sense of the information, reflecting on its overall meaning (as cited in Creswell, 2003). Merriam

(1998) suggests reading through the transcripts, field notes, and documents, jotting down notes, comments, and observations in the margins. The researcher wrote and read field notes after each session, and reread all transcriptions of interviews in addition to participants' weekly diaries.

Step 3: Begin detailed analysis with a coding. The second step in Tesch's process is to pick one document (i.e., one interview transcript or diary) and focus on its underlying meaning, writing thoughts in the margins (Creswell, 2003). The identification of topics was determined by the researcher (as based upon the EGAS literature) and emerged from the participants' vocabulary (Merriam, 1998). This process was repeated for each document and then a list was made of all topics. Similar topics were clustered and then formed into a table and arranged as major topics. (Creswell, 2003).

Step 4: Use the coding process to generate a description of the setting or people as well as categories or themes. Categories were reduced by grouping related topics and, once this process was complete, lines were drawn to show interrelationships between categories (Creswell, 2003). This process was continued until all categories were identified and codes made (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Step 5: Advance how the description and themes will be represented in the qualitative narrative. There are several techniques used to aid integration of central categories and concepts. This may include a narrative passage such as a discussion, or a detailed discussion of themes representing multiple perspectives from individuals utilizing quotations, or use of diagrams including visuals, figures, or tables (Creswell, 2003). These techniques were utilized to integrate and represent the data. The clustering of themes into major categories was utilized (Willig, 2001). This procedure was

performed with data of each participant (within-case analysis) and then all the participant themes were compared and contrasted (cross-case analysis). This allowed for the essence of the students' experience with EGAS to emerge.

Step 6: Make an interpretation or present the meaning of the data. Refining the data consists of reviewing the scheme for internal consistency and for gaps in logic, filling in poorly developed categories and trimming excess ones, and validating the scheme by comparing it or by representing it to participants for their reactions (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The refined data then answers "what were the lessons learned?" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, as cited in Creswell, 2003). All of these procedures provided standardization and rigor in the qualitative data analysis process.

### **Verification**

Because of the variety of multiple perspectives in qualitative research, researchers are encouraged to utilize credible methods to assess the trustworthiness or the accuracy of their study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Angen (2000) argues that the credibility of research resides in part in the skill and competence of the researcher. To address the issue of credibility, the following verification procedures were used by the researcher.

Weekly field notes were kept to contribute to the credibility and dependability of the study. Field notes are "analytical in themselves" in that they contain "immediate and later perceptions and thoughts" about the research participants (Rose & Webb, 1998; Tuckett, 2004). They can offer a vehicle for reflection about the research process, the researcher's role, and potential influence of data collection (Koch, 1994). In the context of contributing to trustworthiness, the research participants' personal journals (diaries) can assist in reducing potential negative influences on credible data (Tuckett, 2005).

Tape recorded individual interviews aim to counter criticism of qualitative research as “prone to systematic bias” (May, 1991). Recording individual discussions and in-depth interviews facilitates credibility and dependability of the data collection procedure (Peräkylä, 1997). A transcriber was hired to create the verbatim transcript, which means that every transcript was audited against the original audio tape. Auditing transcripts involves careful listening, reading, re-reading and preliminary thematic identification of the taped and transcribed text (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This process is important for familiarity with the data and gaining confidence in its overall trustworthiness (Boyatzis, 1998). The researcher provided detailed documentation, transcripts, and notes for informed colleagues to replicate the study.

Member checking was used to ensure that the participant “voices” were accurately reflected in the study. That is, individuals were provided with a brief summary of their interview to see if the data accurately reflect their contributions. Member checking allowed me not just to “play back” what the research participant had said (description), but also clarify and interpret the significance of their self-understanding in ways the participant may not have been able to (Grant & Giddings, 2002).

Thick description is proposed as advancing the claim for transferability of a qualitative study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Miles & Huberman, 1994). For knowledge to be transferable, thick description includes the research setting and information about participants, as well as in-context data and credible interpretation (Tuckett, 2005). Information and description of this kind was recorded and stored in my field notes, face-to-face individual interviews, and transcriptions.

Peer review, as a “type of investigator triangulation” involves the use of an “objective other” (Tuckett, 2005). In this respect, I consistently had opportunities to share my work with peers through research symposiums. Peer reviews were used to examine the research chapters, proposal, and research instruments for corrections. In this study, the researcher utilized the expertise of colleagues and peers to examine and analyze the procedures, texts, and references.

Denzin (1970) suggests the use of triangulation of information as “the flaws of one method are often the strengths of another, and by combining methods, researchers can achieve the best of each, while overcoming their unique deficiencies” (as cited in Merriam, 1988, p. 69). Strauss and Corbin (1998) focus less on this traditional definition of triangulation, but make a similar point, “to build defense, well-developed and integrated, a researcher should make use of any or every method at his or her disposal” (p. 33). In this study, triangulation of the data was conducted by analyzing the diaries of participants, the researcher’s field notes, and the individual participant interviews. Additionally, the use of both written and oral communications enhanced the data collection process as they allowed individuals with different communication preferences and strengths to fully participate in the study. This process ensured the credibility of the research study.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS AND FINDINGS

As stated in Chapter 1, the qualitative study reported here explored the perceptions of eight minority adolescent eighth grade girls in a predominately White middle school setting regarding the influence of the Empowerment Groups for Academic Success (EGAS) model. The EGAS model is a unique group counseling approach to address the depth and level of the personal, social, academic, and career problems of adolescents. The study lasted eight weeks and groups were conducted once a week for 45 minutes in a classroom setting at a Louisiana Middle School. This research involved a phenomenological method utilizing in-depth individual interviews, participant diaries and researcher's field notes.

This chapter is organized in terms of specific research questions posed in Chapter 1. It reports on participants' experiences during EGAS sessions. The following research questions are addressed in this chapter:

What are the experiences of minority adolescent girls who participate in the EGAS model in a predominately White middle school setting?

- a) What are the participants' perceptions of the outcome of the EGAS model?
- b) What are the participants' perceptions of their experiences during the group sessions?
- c) How does the EGAS model impact the participants' personal, social, academic, and career needs?

d) How does this model work in a predominately White, non-urban (suburban) setting with minority adolescents?

### **Participants**

To become more familiar with the participants, the researcher has provided information regarding the participants. Pseudonyms are used to protect the identity and location of the participants. The following information is actual participant responses to interview questions.

#### *Ashley (P1)*

Ashley is eleven years old and lives with her step mother and father. Her favorite subject is English. Ashley likes to dance, sing, skate, and watch movies. She has attended Louisiana Middle School for four years. Ashley has attended a predominately White school since kindergarten. She has not been an honor student since attending this school, but she is keeping her grades up as best as she can.

#### *Bridget (P2)*

Bridget is fourteen years old and lives with her mother and step father. Her family lost everything including their house due to Hurricane Katrina. Bridget has many friends and family. She loves to sing all the time and stay busy. She has attended Louisiana Middle School for one year and a half. This middle school is her first experience in a predominately White school and she is currently not an honor student.

#### *Jane (P3)*

Jane is thirteen years old and lives with her mother. She likes to play sports such as basketball and softball. Jane considers herself very athletic. She is very open to everybody and likes everyone to feel included. Jane has attended Louisiana Middle

School for four years. She has attended a predominately White school since kindergarten and has been on and off the honor roll.

*Keisha (P4)*

Keisha is fifteen years of age and lives with her grandmother. She likes to hang out with her friends, go to the movies, and the mall. Keisha also loves getting her hair fixed and cares about how she looks. She has attended Louisiana Middle School for four years. Keisha has attended a predominately White school since kindergarten. She is not currently on the honor roll, but she made the honor roll in seventh grade.

*Kim (P5)*

Kim is thirteen and lives with her mother and step father. She lost her house due to Hurricane Katrina. Kim does not like her new location and feels very bored. She does not like some of the people she has met since her move. She has attended Louisiana Middle School for a year and a half. This has been Kim's first experience in a predominately White school setting and she is currently an honor student.

*Mary (P6)*

Mary is fourteen and lives with her grandparents. She likes to have fun and hang out with her friends. She considers herself very outgoing and a fun person. Mary does not like school because she thinks school is boring. Mary has attended Louisiana Middle School for four years. She has attended a predominately White school since third grade. She is not currently on the honor roll, but she has made the honor roll in fourth and fifth grades.

*Sue (P7)*

Sue is fourteen years old and lives with her mother. Sue likes to go to the movies with her friends and laugh and talk with friends. She also enjoys playing basketball, soccer, softball, and running track. She has attended Louisiana Middle School for four years. Sue has attended a predominately White school setting since kindergarten and is not currently on the honor roll.

*Tina (P8)*

Tina is thirteen years of age and resides with her mother and father. She likes to dance. Tina has attended Louisiana Middle School for four years. She has attended a predominately White school since fifth grade and is currently not on the honor roll.

Table 1: *Profile Information of Participants*

**Students Chosen for Study**

Name	Gender	Ethnicity	Age	Grade	Resides with	Number of years attended Louisiana middle school	Number of years attended a predominately White school
Ashley P1	Female	African American	11	eighth	Step Mother & Father	4	9
Bridget P2	Female	African American	14	eighth	Mother & Step Father	1 ½	1 ½
Jane P3	Female	African American	13	eighth	Mother	4	9
Keisha P4	Female	African American	15	eighth	Grandmother	4	9
Kim P5	Female	African American	13	eighth	Mother & Step Father	1 ½	1 ½
Mary P6	Female	African American	14	eighth	Grandparents	4	6
Sue P7	Female	African American	14	eighth	Mother	4	9
Tina P8	Female	African American	13	eighth	Mother & Father	4	4

**The EGAS Experience**

The EGAS model is an innovative group counseling approach that takes into account the influence of social, psychological, and environmental factors on academic performance for adolescents. The theoretical framework for this study included the underpinnings for personal, social, academic, and career development for all students, which is emphasized by the ASCA national model (2003).

In this study, participants were given five minutes at the end of each group session to write in their diary. Each diary had three prompts to respond to: 1) My Thoughts...; 2) What was most helpful for you this session? ; 3) Is there anything else

you would like to share? Additionally, during the individual face-to-face interview the participants were also able to respond to questions as follows: 1) Please tell me about your experiences during the EGAS group sessions. 2) What helped you the most during the group sessions? The following diary and interview statements are summaries of the participants' self-reports of their perceptions of their experiences during EGAS. In addition, field notes were taken by the researcher to capture observational information. Personal, social, career, and academic development was used as subtopics to address the research questions.

### ***Personal Development***

The participants expressed enjoyment of having ownership in deciding what goals and topics they could explore each session. At the beginning of session two, participant five was very upset because her teachers expressed shock that she had made the honor roll; they had just assumed that she did not make it. Participant five felt angry because her teachers had such low expectations for her. As she explained to the group some of the hurtful comments her teachers said, her voice began to tremble. Other participants also began to reflect aloud about personal issues they have dealt with at schools. Forceful comments were made such as, "We are always treated like babies." "There are too many unfair rules and not enough choices." "I don't get to express how I feel."

It seemed as if the room was on fire given the degree of anger displayed by the participants. Fortunately, after the participants dispelled their frustrations the session ended in a positive manner. Participants expressed that they felt comfortable with talking

to the school counselor about issues and concerns. It was amazing that the participants had to be told that it's okay to go to the counselor for support and/or issues.

Similarities among the participants regarding personal development were freedom of speech and expression of feelings. Participants also repeatedly spoke about ways of dealing with racial problems and disputes. The lack of Black history was also a commonality. Comments made during group sessions included:

**(P1)**

*We were able to get a lot of things off our chest. We discussed school problems (teachers, prejudice, teased by the way we talk). We talked about how to deal with discrimination and racism.*

**(P2)**

*It was good for me to be able to talk about anything. I'm happy I joined this group. I got to talk about personal problems with the people around me. I got to talk about myself and personal things. I could talk about anything in there, that helped a lot.*

**(P3)**

*I have learned how to handle disputes with people in a mature way. I was able to talk about school issues (racism, lack of Black history celebration). I was able to talk a lot about what was going on at night. I was able to talk and say what I had to say. That is what I liked about it.*

**(P4)**

*The sessions were interesting and I think they were very helpful. I enjoyed knowing that I'm able to talk about things in life. I am able to talk about school problems (prejudice, teased by the way I talk and dress). Well, I enjoyed the sessions because it got out my feelings about school and myself. I felt good after each session. It felt good to tell someone how I feel about other students and teachers.*

**(P5)**

*I'm mad, but I learned to talk. I expressed my feelings. I'm going to miss this group. This will be the first year without having Black history month celebrated. It will be different. It will be a loss in my eyes. They have a lot of identity issues here.*

**(P6)**

*I got to talk about school issues (racism). I think this is a really good group to help people. I discussed and shared my feelings. It taught me to be a better person and choose more goals in life. I talked about school problems (discrimination, racism, racial comments and lack of Black history celebration).*

**(P7)**

*I learned to never give up. That made a difference. I'm so happy I feel like singing and stuff. I learned how to solve problems or situations and how to deal with them.*

**(P8)**

*I got to talk about different things and my goals. I really like these sessions. It was fun, like it was nice. It was helpful, like telling you about some of the stuff, and how we deal with racial problems. I think I got better. Cause normally I would just lash out at people. I learned how to handle situations.*

### ***Social Development***

Group norms were discussed at each EGAS session. During the first session it was so quiet you could hear a pin drop. Some participants seemed eager to participate, while four out of eight participants were timid and silent. During session one the participants mentioned the importance of what is said in the room stays in the room. Members two and six remarked, "Please don't judge someone by a story they might tell or share about their life during group sessions." It was apparent by the participants' comments made on day one, that confidentiality, trust, and ground rules were important.

During session two most of the girls seemed to talk more and relax. However, participant one appeared shy and disconnected. This could have been due to the age difference. Participant one was the youngest group members to participant in EGAS. To maintain order within the group, the researcher circulated a silver wand with pink stripes. The wand was the symbol for respect when someone was talking. All members had to

listen when someone was holding the wand and talking. Each member had a voice and each member was allowed to pass the wand to someone who needed to talk.

Session three explored social issues regarding prejudice. Three participants expressed feelings of anger because their White classmates teased them about how they talk. Participant four exclaimed, "It's just our dialectic, but they (White students) just don't understand!" All participants seemed more comfortable with their group members during session three. Participant eight asked the question, "Why don't we celebrate Black history month at school?" The group erupted! Many voices chimed in, "We don't talk about Black history in our classes." "We don't have lessons about Black history." Others felt that the White students made fun of Black people. Overall, all participants seemed very open about expressing their feelings regarding wanting more Black history celebrations throughout their classes and school during Black history month. The school counselor verbally agreed to be an advocate and initiate a Black history celebration.

After Thanksgiving break (session 5), most participants seemed angry. Remarks were stated by four out of eight participants such as, "I hate this school." Some participants disclosed that they wished they could attend an all Black school so they could be treated the same and be around their culture. To directly address these concerns, students were asked to engage in role plays which explored conflict resolution.

During session seven, seven out of eight participants seemed very hyper and talkative. Participant one seemed withdrawn, quiet, and uncomfortable during the group session. Most of the participants talked about how much fun they had at the town Christmas parade during the weekend. After excitedly talking about their weekend experiences, the researcher asked each member to say one word that described them. Five

out of eight participants had a difficult time coming up with a descriptive word to describe “self.” Session seven was dominated by a few outspoken members, while two members appeared to be quiet and distant. The researcher decided to do a follow-up with the participants by immediately reading their diaries and conducted some get to know you games. All participants seemed to thoroughly enjoy learning about what they all had in common and what made them different.

The idea of being able to socialize with other girls the same age, same race, and similar life experience was reflected in all eight diary entries. Additionally, seven out of eight girls gained a closer bond with members of the group during group sessions.

Comments include:

**(P1)**

*I'm shy, but enjoyed talking and listening to other girls talk about problems and issues at home and school. Being able to talk a little more was good. I was able to talk to other students that are eighth grade girls, but that you might not have talked to before.*

**(P2)**

*I got to share my situations and socialize with the people around me. I'm going to miss this group. I liked going to the sessions. I got to talk with my friends, my special group. I like to talk about a lot of stuff.*

**(P3)**

*I got to express my thoughts about school and socialize.*

**(P4)**

*I enjoyed getting to know things about each of us and what we each like. I learned a lot about the other girls that were in the sessions. They were helpful. I was able to talk to people my age, around my age, and like with my color. They experienced the same things that I experienced.*

**(P5)**

*A lot of talking, laughing, and anger. The sessions really helped. And even though the girls in the sessions, we hang around each other, but we might not be like congregated, but the sessions gave us some time to talk about issues, it was a cool place. We called it the feelings class. Even something we wouldn't normally talk*

*about, somebody else might bring it up and it would just come back to your ears like, yeah I have a problem with that too. It felt kinda good. You didn't have to worry about somebody telling you, "You're suspended." Just being able to talk helped a lot.*

**(P6)**

*I had fun. I got to know everybody more. And the sessions made us closer as a group. It made us more friends, we gained more friendships, and we talked to each other more.*

**(P7)**

*We can talk about anything. We all got to talk. We got to talk about things we need to change. I have a lot in common with one of the participants. I got closer to some of those other girls I don't really talk to. I learned how to talk to people. I didn't know them, but I could talk to them, other girls my age.*

**(P8)**

*I'm glad that the sessions were an all Black group of us. Cause everything we do is mostly with Whites. I'm surprised they even let you do these sessions, cause everything we do has to be White. Everybody was African American, or everybody looked like me in this group.*

### ***Career Development***

During session four, seven out of eight participants mentioned a high interest in learning about careers. The researcher brought in handouts about various careers. The participants were instructed to write down three careers they want to explore. While the participants wrote career interests on a blank piece of pink paper the room was completely quiet. Some of the participants had puzzled looks on their faces. Several participants listed careers that did not require a college degree.

After the researcher shared the handouts of various careers and explained college opportunities to them, the participants started to broaden their career thinking. The participants seemed very eager and interested in the career planning ideas presented. The room was silent and calm as the researcher told the members: "You can be anything you

want to be!” “You can achieve anything you put your mind to achieve!” “All of you can be successful!”

Many participants spoke of their enjoyment and interest in various careers. Seven out of eight participants expressed their desire to plan for their future and learn about options for college and career opportunities. Comments were as follows:

**(P1)**

*I enjoyed talking about careers. I liked whenever we were talking about like big jobs, college, and the different careers that we were going to be.*

**(P2, P7)**

*I learned about careers. I got to talk about my career.*

**(P3)**

*I am struggling with what career choices I want to make. I really like the fact that we are being able to have this group. I will really miss this group because we really talk about deep stuff. Career choices helped me a lot. Yeah, cause I was like clueless, I don't even know what I want to be and I'm an eighth grader and I should know what I'm going to do.*

**(P4)**

*I enjoyed talking about careers. I learned I can be anything I want to be and go to college, instead of just be a beautician. I wish these sessions didn't end.*

**(P5)**

*No comment*

**(P6)**

*The sessions taught me to choose more career goals for myself.*

**(P8)**

*It was helpful to talk about careers.*

### ***Academic Development***

During session five, participant six expressed that school made her head hurt. Participant six, seven, and eight agreed that if they don't understand their lesson in class, the teachers don't take the time to answer questions. Others commented, “I raise my hand in class, but I still get ignored.”

Session six dealt with ACT testing questions. The school counselor educated the members about the Pre-ACT testing results/scores. The members were on the edge of their seats as the school counselor explained what their test scores indicated. Most members were concerned about what their scores meant and what they should do to improve their test scores. Participants also wanted to know what scores were acceptable for college. Five out of eight participants were relieved to discover that their Pre-ACT scores were a lot better than they thought.

The participants began to ask questions about college majors. The facilitators discussed the differences between obtaining an associate's degree, bachelor's degree, master's degree, and/or doctorate degree. Over half of the participants verbally thanked the facilitators for taking the time to explain test taking skills, college majors, and test scores. Participant five mentioned, "No one ever took the time to explain this test score stuff before... THANKS!"

In this session, more emphasis was placed on test taking skills and clarity of the meaning of standardized test scores in relationship to the preparation for college. During the course of this session two out of eight participants expressed the lack of support by teachers and boredom at school. Remarks included:

**(P1)**

*We discussed school problems. I liked when we talked about college majors.*

**(P2)**

*We got to talk about our best and worst subjects in school.*

**(P3, P4)**

*We learned about ways to do better on tests.*

**(P5)**

*I felt like a failure after taking the Pre-ACT test. Now I understand what my Pre-ACT scores mean. Thanks!*

**(P6)**

*If I don't understand my lesson, I raise my hand, but I still get ignored by my teachers.*

**(P7, P8)**

*I'm bored at school.*

### **Outcomes of the EGAS Experience**

The participants of this study appeared to be in a stage of denial regarding the closure/ending of the EGAS sessions. The members hugged the facilitators in such a way of literally not wanting to let go. During the final session, the room was filled with joy, laughter, and encouragement.

Individual, face-to-face interviews were conducted immediately after the final EGAS group session. Participants were posed questions which dealt with their perceptions of the outcome of the EGAS model. Specific questions were as follows: 1) If you were facilitator, what might you change or how would the group sessions look? 2) How have you changed as a result of participating in this group? 3) How do you think your peers changed? and 4) Do you think groups like this should continue to be offered and why or why not?

### ***Group Session Suggestions***

Three out of eight participants indicated food would be nice during group sessions. The facilitators could actually hear some of their stomachs growl. Two out of seven girls mentioned the inclusion of White eighth grade girls so that various groups could express their thoughts and feelings. Overall, participants agreed that they liked the way the EGAS group sessions were set up and they wouldn't change much. The

comments listed below were derived from the actual face-to-face interviews from each adolescent.

**(P1)**

*Hmm, I wouldn't really change much. But I like to eat. I would bring food. Okay, I would like a field trip.*

**(P2)**

*I would have a mix of white, like Black and White people, instead of just like Black people so, you know, so it wouldn't look so – it's a good group having Black people, but I would have Black and White people to socialize. I would have Black and White people to socialize as long as it's not negative. Everybody would get a chance to talk about what different colors deal with. I'd probably have like more people than just four Whites and four Blacks or something, I'd just have like 10 or 12 people maybe that would come.*

**(P3)**

*I like how it's set up, I wouldn't really change anything. I like how it was. I liked how everybody got to say what they had to say, you know, and everything, I liked how we basically, everybody showed respect for everyone. I like that.*

**(P4)**

*I would have some White people so we can like tell them, express how we feel to them and they can express how they feel about us, I would change that. But the other stuff we did, I think that was good.*

**(P5)**

*I would bring food. That's about it. You did fine to me.*

**(P6)**

*Umm. I wouldn't change anything. Keep them just how they look. Maybe meet more often so we got to know each other better, or maybe for a longer period of time, we could have told each other more stuff and got closer and talk more.*

**(P7, P8)**

*I would have food.*

### ***Changes in Participants***

There were similarities and differences regarding how participants changed as a result of participating in the EGAS group. Six out of eight girls have stayed out of trouble due to behavior problems, negative attitude, and anger management issues. They

repeatedly commented about how they have learned how to handle problems and situations in a positive manner. The members appeared to really enjoy the role plays which dealt with conflict resolution. Some members seemed able to handle anger better and demonstrated a happier attitude and school work completion. One member indicated an increase of completing and turning in homework assignments. On the other hand, one member said she really didn't change much because of EGAS. The participants' self-reports were as follows:

**(P1)**

*I really haven't changed much, I'm still the same.*

**(P2)**

*Um. I have talked a lot. I changed with friends and different thinking about friendships. I learned to take it to another level instead of getting upset or something. Instead of getting all upset about what somebody's saying, like take it to another level and sort of like solve that problem, or something like that.*

**(P3)**

*I believe I changed. It made me think about things more, 'cause I found that with the career stuff, I really...at first, I really didn't care if I go on to next grade, but once you started to talk to us about careers, I started to care. I do want to get to college when it's time. Because of this group, you made me think early about; okay I need to start thinking about my career now. Versus before this group, I didn't really care about careers.*

**(P4)**

*Well, I realized when White people say prejudice stuff, I realized not to take my anger out on them and just to like ignore them, or just go up to them and tell them a little about what they did. And if I have a problem, I definitely want to talk to Ms. White (School Counselor) or my grandma. I kind of think I changed the way I act. I'm trying not to act so rude to people. 'Cause I really like don't know them, but I know the people in the group now, like now I know that I have someone to talk to.*

**(P5)**

*I watch how I talk to people. People say I tend to come on strong. I haven't been in the principal's office for awhile. I used to stay up there about every other day, just about everything. I haven't been up there in like a month. Since this group, I have been staying out of trouble.*

**(P6)**

*I do my homework more often because I listened to you talk about a career and education.*

**(P7)**

*I don't talk back to my teachers and I get in trouble less. My attitude changed.*

**(P8)**

*Basically, I learned not to lash out at people.*

### **Peers**

Seven out of eight participants disclosed that their peers changed because of the EGAS group sessions. Commonalities included attitude change, a better problem solver, learned how to communicate more, and express feelings better. However, one participant felt the other participants seemed the same.

**(P1)**

*I think they stayed the same, too, they're all the same.*

**(P2)**

*Oh, I think they've changed by not fighting and going to the group sessions every Monday, and just like basically socialize and they would just say what they want. They have changed their attitude or the way they act or something. Like they wouldn't be frustrated when they come in or like if they were mad, the group helped solve their problem. They have changed the way they act and their behaviors in class. They act differently in class instead of being mean to other students and they talk more to them.*

**(P3)**

*Maybe with how to deal with situations. Instead of being ignorant or loud, we talked about how to handle it in a different way.*

**(P4)**

*They realize not to take their anger out on others and just like walk away or just tell others how they feel. And they know that they have some other girls to talk to about their problems, or they know now they can go to the counselor.*

**(P5)**

*I don't really think they changed too much, the people I'm around. It was a help to some people. It was a help to participant number four, a lot. Just about her feelings. And she hasn't been getting in trouble.*

**(P6)**

*The other participants in the group may think to do the right thing. Don't lash out at people.*

**(P7)**

*They don't talk back to the teachers as much as they used to. We're friends and we talk about it. We didn't talk at lunch break. Everybody was talking more. Not little groups anymore, it's like a big group.*

**(P8)**

*They learned more about me. I know at this school people talk about me and stuff and they like really got to know me like how I really was. The other girls in the group are talking to me more. They were all little groups but now it's a bigger group.*

### ***Continuation of EGAS***

Five out of eight participants had watery eyes during the individual interviews immediately following the last group session. All eight participants explained that EGAS groups should continue to be offered. Members agreed that EGAS is a helpful group which enables its members to freely talk about various topics and/or problems and develop communication skills among others. Comments were as follows:

**(P1)**

*Yes, because there are a lot of predominantly White groups and not many Blacks in them. I think I was able to talk to the other girls in the group a little more, but I still like my other friends and I talk to them a little bit more than I used to.*

**(P2)**

*I think they're good. They may have helped some students be able to communicate with one another socialize more, some people may not have talked to each other, but they probably do now since we've been to the group. I'd just like to thank the group because they have helped me a lot.*

**(P3)**

*Yes, because it's a good group. I think it would help open the minds, like let the Blacks in predominantly White schools see that we could achieve, Black or White. When we talked about careers, I think eighth grade is a good grade to start.*

**(P4)**

*I think they should be offered because it really helps people, like all the prejudice in this world and a lot of other stuff within the schools, so I think they should. It really*

*helped. It helped me, and I know it helped other girls too. When I go to that group, I just expressed how I feel.*

**(P5)**

*Yes I do. It helps. It makes the Blacks feel different and have something to talk about. It helps to talk about situations.*

**(P6)**

*Yes, Definitely! Because it can make people change their lives and make people set their goals more. It was very helpful because it helped me to like look at more choices in careers and make me a better person. I had fun and it helped the group and I don't want it to end.*

**(P7)**

*Yes, I think so. They really make a difference. You could see what kids inside of an all white school think and if they're being treated the same way or being treated fair. We talked about everything, basically, without anybody interrupting; I think that is good everybody wasn't just cut off. I thank you (Ms. Hilton-Pitre) for helping me.*

**(P8)**

*Yes. 'Cause it helps you, we can't talk about some things in class. It helps you get your feelings out and stuff without being scared you might get written up or something like that.*

### **Summary of Themes**

Table 2 is a display of the cross case analysis of the themes and findings of the research study. In this study, most participants acknowledged the enjoyment of having social support, discussing racial relations, identity development, conflict resolution, and career preparation during the EGAS process. Additionally, Butler and Bunch (2005) identified that the goal of EGAS is to help students resolve “difficult personal and interpersonal issues” (p.396). Under the umbrella of personal and interpersonal issues, all members had a need to discuss racial relation issues, identity development and conflict resolution. Findings also implied the importance of career preparation at the eighth grade level. Most of the participants commented on the enjoyment of learning about various

careers, talking about career interests, college aspirations, and setting goals for themselves.

Table 2. *Cross-case analysis display*

What are the experiences of minority adolescent girls in a predominately White middle school setting who participate in the EGAS model?

	Social Support	Racial Relations	Identity Development	Conflict Resolution	Career Preparation
P1	"I'm shy, but enjoyed talking and listening to other girls talk about problems." "Being able to talk a little more was good."	"We were able to get a lot of things off our chest (teachers, prejudice, teased by the way we talk)."	"I was able to talk to other students that are eighth grade girls, but that you might not have talked to before."	"We talked about how to deal with discrimination and racism."	"I enjoyed talking about different careers, big jobs, and college."
P2	"I got to socialize with my friends/ my special group." "I'm going to miss this group."	"I got to talk about how to deal with people at school."	"I got to talk to my special group."	"I got to talk about problems and how to deal with them at school."	"I learned and got to talk about careers."
P3	"I got to socialize and express my thoughts."	"I was able to talk about school issues (racism, lack of Black history celebration)."	"I got to talk about the lack of Black history celebration."	"I learned how to handle disputes with people in a mature way."	"I am struggling with what career choices I want to make." "We talked about careers and we went over the career packet." "Career choices helped me a lot."
P4	"I was able to talk to people my age, my color, and people who experienced the same things."	"I am able to talk about school problems (prejudice, teased by the way I talk and dress)."	"I was able to talk to people my age and color."	"I was able to talk about how to handle prejudice and teasing."	"I enjoyed talking about careers."
P5	"Even something we wouldn't normally talk about, somebody else might bring it up and it made you think, Yeah I have a problem with that too."	"This will be the first you without having Black history month celebrated."	"Black history month will be loss in my eyes." They have a lot of identity issues here."	"My attitude and behavior is better with my teachers and other students."	No Comment

	Social Support	Racial Relations	Identity Development	Conflict Resolution	Career Preparation
P6	"I had fun." "I got to know everybody more." And sessions made us closer as a group." We gained more friendships."	"I got to talk about school issues (racism)."	"I gained more friendships; we talk to each other more."	"I got to talk about how to handle racism."	"The sessions taught me to be a better person and choose more goals in life. I enjoyed talking about career goals."
P7	"We can talk about anything. "We all got to talk." I had a lot in common with one of the participants."	I talked about school problems (discrimination, racism, racial comments, and lack of Black history celebration."	"I talked to other girls my age." "I think we should learn about Black history."	"I learned how to solve problems or situations and how to deal with them."	"I got to talk about what I want to be later in life." "I want to be a doctor."
P8	"I had fun!" "I enjoyed finding out things about each other."	"It was helpful, like telling about racial problems."	"It was nice to have an all Black group, everything we do is White." "Everybody was Black and looked like me."	"It was helpful to learn how to deal with racial problems." "I think I got better, cause normally, I would just lash out at people."	"It was helpful when we talked about careers."

### Themes

The themes emerged as a result of reading and rereading participants' transcribed interviews, diaries, and research's field notes. The researcher coded themes, and then clustered these themes into major themes (Willig, 2001). This procedure was performed with data of each participant (within-case analysis) and then all the participants' themes were compared and contrasted (cross-case analysis). This allowed for the essence of the participants' experience with EGAS to emerge.

### Summary

This chapter presented the adolescents' perceptions of their experiences during EGAS and the outcome of EGAS on the participants' personal, social, academic, and career development. Themes emerged during this study which included: social support, racial relations, identity development, conflict resolution, and career preparation. Finally,

the data were analyzed within and cross-cases for comparisons and contrasts among adolescents regarding their experiences in a predominately White middle school setting who participated in the EGAS model. Chapter 5 provides a summary of these findings with a discussion, implications for further research, recommendations for middle school counselors, teachers, administrators and conclusions to the study.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to describe the experiences of minority adolescent girls in a predominately White middle school setting regarding the influence of the Empowerment Groups for Academic Success (EGAS) Model (2005). EGAS is an innovative group counseling approach that takes into account the influence of social, psychological, and environmental factors on academic performance for adolescents. This model is supported by research which finds that group counseling is a much preferred intervention strategy for school-aged children than individual counseling (Bemak, Chung & Siroskey-Sabado, 2005; Butler & Bunch, 2005; Lee, 2005). Counselors often deliver group counseling to address issues of academic, career, personal, and social development.

The goal of this research was to communicate the lessons learned as a result of the experiences of minority adolescent 8<sup>th</sup> grade girls in a predominately White middle school setting who participated in the EGAS model. The study followed the theoretical framework which included the underpinnings for personal, social, academic, and career development for all students (American School Counselor Association, 2003). The ASCA national model places emphasis on school counseling programs providing encouragement and promoting academic, career and personal/social development for students in preparation for the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In support of the ASCA national model, the EGAS model is a unique group counseling approach to address the depth and level of the personal, social, academic, and career problems of students identified as being at high levels of risk for school failure. The perceptions of minority adolescent girls in a predominately White middle school setting who participate in the

EGAS model was examined to assess application in a school setting not previously explored.

In addition, the study was developed through reading literature about the EGAS model. The aim of this approach was to explore the meaning of the lived experience of a small group of people from the standpoint of the EGAS concept or phenomenon (Creswell, 1998). The researcher focused on what an experience means for persons who have had the experience and are able to provide a comprehensive description of it (Schram, 2003). The adolescents' perceptions regarding EGAS presented the researcher with evidence of the world, not as the world is thought to be but as it is lived. Schram noted that understanding the everyday life of a group of people is a matter of understanding how those people perceive and act upon objects of experience.

### **Summary of Findings**

The eighth grade adolescents in this study were all African American females with diverse ages ranging from 11-15 years of age. Seven out of eight participants changed in some aspects due to the participation in the EGAS model. All participants agreed that EGAS should continue to be offered. In the same way, their experiences also varied to some extent. Personal, social, career, and academic development issues were evident and varied among participants. Personal, career, and social development issues were higher for most of the participants. Academic development issues were discussed, but not as frequently mentioned as the above development categories. Similarly, themes emerged through the use of the adolescents' weekly diaries, individual face-to-face interviews and the researcher's field notes. The themes include social support, racial

relations, identity development, conflict resolution, and career preparation. A summary of these themes follows.

### ***Social Support***

Minority students may be faced with the challenges of not being accepted by their peers and teachers when they first enter a predominately White school system (James, 1997). Adolescent girls are more likely to seek social support from friends and family, engage in wishful thinking, use avoidant techniques in responding to problems, and ventilate feelings (Plunkett et al., 2000; Williams & MGillicuddy-DeLisi, 2000). In the same way, peers can help develop feelings of intimacy or connection and social competence (Ransom, 2003). Many participants in this study commented, “I got to socialize and express thoughts and feelings with others.” “Group sessions really helped to make us a closer group.” Research has demonstrated that adolescents perform better academically, have more achievement-oriented goals, and think more about their future when they have access to mentors (Zirkel, 2002). Some participants remarked, “The sessions taught us to be better people and choose more goals in life.” “It also helped to have two positive African American female counselors/role models during the EGAS group sessions.”

Friendships allow adolescents to explore new and different aspects of themselves (Youniss & Smollar, 1990); in a way, friendships provide adolescents with the opportunity to try on different hats without the threat of negative feedback. Participants indicated, “Even something we wouldn’t normally talk about, somebody else might bring it up and it made you think ... I have a problem with that, too.” Groups can provide the support, understanding, acceptance, companionship, and opportunity for growth that

these students may need (Berkovitz, 1975). In this study participants discussed the appreciation of being able to talk to people their age and their race with similar experiences/problems. Ford (1997) suggested that the opportunity to speak with other students who share their concerns may help minority students become more comfortable with “being different.” Group counseling offers understanding and support, which promotes the students’ willingness to explore problems/assets they have with the group (Cory, 2004).

Some participants were angry and socially withdrawn prior to participating in EGAS group sessions. Those particular participants actually gained more friendships during the EGAS group and their attitude toward others became positive. In the past, it has been reported that the significant impact of social withdrawal on students’ adjustment received particular attention from highly publicized incidents of school violence in which the juvenile offenders were known for being socially isolated or withdrawn. Adolescents who do not have close, positive peer relationships are less socially connected, and consequently are less likely to receive emotional support in the face of negative events or stress (Hussong, 2000). Group counseling is an important vehicle through which adolescents can be empowered to develop key social and emotional skills (Cory, 2004). The group dynamic, making use of peer influence and peer support, can allow adolescents to develop pro-social skills (Schmidt, 2003).

### ***Racial Relations***

“Adolescents’ struggle for independence and identity often makes them ‘hypersensitive’ to circumstances where they feel others are asserting power over them or simply talking about them” (Lambie, 2004, p.269). As a result, this period of the child’s

life is the period where some students come into contact with issues of racial relations (Ransom, 2003). In this study, most participants talked about the various school issues. These issues included comments about the lack of Black history, prejudice, and discrimination. James (1997) explained that the lack of acceptance might occur because of misunderstanding based on the differences in language and patterns of speech. Many participants in this study complained about being teased by White students for the way they talk. Adolescents who are teased by peers are at high risk for the development of behavioral disorders (Moroz & Jones, 2002). Lack of social acceptance may also occur because of unwillingness by peers and teachers to accept, understand and learn what makes minority students unique (James, 1997).

Many patterns of racial group relations in our schools are based on the ways that members of a given racial group have been included or excluded within American society (McLemore & Homo, 1998). During EGAS group sessions, members were enraged about the lack of Black history celebration and their exposure to racism and discrimination at school. Some psychologists believe that exposure to racism and discrimination leads to low academic achievement in some individuals (Crocker & Quinn, 1998).

### ***Identity Development***

A large part of early adolescents' social-emotional growth is tied to identity development (Lambie, 2004). Classic Ericksonian psychosocial theory described early adolescence as a drive toward industry and identity versus inferiority and role confusion (Cobb, 2001). Accordingly, questions like "What am I like?" "Who am I?" "How good am I?" are devoted higher importance by adolescents (Hansen & Maynard, 1973).

Adolescents are trying to discover their own identity and yet realize that they are a part of a social group (Cobb, 2001). Members of the EGAS group talked about the importance of being able to talk to other African American eighth grade girls. Additional comments included, "It was nice to have an all Black group, because everything we do is White." "Everybody was Black and looked like me."

White and Parham (1990) defined identity as "the adoption of certain personal attitudes, feelings, characteristics, and behaviors and the identification with a large group of people who share those characteristics" (p.42). During the study a participant remarked, "Black history month will be lost in my eyes." "They have a lot of identity issues here." A lack of a sense of connectedness or identity leads to a "profound sense of psychological depression, personal worthlessness and social despair" (West, 1993, p.13). One's identity is paramount in understanding self. The identification with one's societal designated group occurs in response to environments in which societal resources are differently allocated on the basis of racial group membership (Helms, 1994). Minority adolescents are looking for the answers for who they are in terms of their race.

### ***Conflict Resolution***

Adolescence is a period in which new situations, new settings, and new demands are constantly being encountered, and yet the adolescent may be ill-equipped with the knowledge or skills necessary to effectively respond to these confrontations (Tyszkowa, 1990). Coping with peer status and self-doubt, as well as struggling with turbulent emotions are all a part of the lives of the emerging adolescent (Wolman, 1998). During the EGAS group sessions, all participants wanted to learn ways of dealing with discrimination, teasing, prejudice, and racism. As a result of EGAS, members learned

how to handle situations or disputes in a mature way. A participant commented, “It was helpful to learn how to deal with racial problems.” “I think I got better, ‘cause normally, I would just lash out at people.”

Group counseling allows adolescents the chance to pool their expertise so that they may jointly strategize ways to resolve problems and cope with negative situations (Schmidt, 2003). There is a need for services that help minority students cope with challenges with others. Often, the culture of the home and the culture of the school remain unsynchronized for minority students (Patton & Day-Vines, 2003).

### ***Career Preparation***

Urban minority adolescents may have limited knowledge of themselves and their career interests (Day-Vines, 2003). This study, however, indicates that suburban minority adolescents in a predominately White middle school setting may also have limited knowledge of themselves and their career interests. Participants commented, “The EGAS sessions taught me to be a better person and choose more goals in life.” “I enjoyed talking about career goals.” One member discussed, “I am struggling with what career choices I want to make, but the career choices information packet helped a lot.”

Lack of career planning may further limit minority student perceptions and knowledge of available job opportunities. Without solid career planning programs at the middle school level, many students will make poor educational and career choices in high school (Sears, 1995). One EGAS participant mentioned, “I enjoyed talking about careers.” “I learned I can be anything I want to be and go to college instead of just be a beautician.”

## **Recommendations**

The findings of this study indicate recommendations for middle school counselors, administrators, and teachers who work with minority adolescents. Many of these recommendations come directly from the minority adolescents in the study; others are findings based upon the EGAS perceptions, review of literature, and the breadth of information collected.

### ***Recommendations for Middle School Counselors***

***Intervention.*** While the number of minority students in public school is increasing, minority students' personal, social, career, and academic needs are still not being met. Their needs, as well as cultural diversity, should be addressed within comprehensive school counseling programs. It is important to promote cultural diversity in school counseling interventions.

The Empowerment Groups for Academic Success (EGAS) model is a good intervention to implement in a diverse urban school setting, in addition to the current findings of the application in a predominately White suburban setting. If middle school counselors plan to better serve minority students and their needs, it is likely that counselors will need to revise their theories, techniques, and interventions.

Some of the recommendations made to assist middle school counselors who work with minority adolescents include:

1. Partner with other middle school counselors who are actively engaged in conducting group counseling in urban and suburban public schools. Introduce the EGAS model.

2. Educate and partner with other middle school counselors in local school districts about the importance of addressing needs of all adolescents. Introduce the EGAS model.
3. Educate and partner with college and university counseling programs about the lessons learned in the use of the EGAS model.
4. Broaden thinking of teachers and administrators as to the importance of time-allotment for group counseling intervention techniques such as EGAS and its potential impact for minority adolescents.

*Student advocacy.* Lee (1998) defined advocacy as “the process or act of arguing or pleading for a cause or proposal” (p.8). The EGAS group sessions during this study exposed some of the challenges minority adolescents are faced with in a predominately White middle school setting. After conducting EGAS grouping counseling sessions, middle counselors are given ideas as to what issues may need to be addressed individually or school-wide. School counselors, as advocates for students, may have a huge impact on individual student achievement and school climate. Recommendations to assist school counseling advocacy for minority adolescents include:

1. Conduct EGAS group counseling sessions to assist with identifying potential academic, career, personal, and social advocacy needs.
2. Educate teachers and administrators about the importance of having a multicultural school climate.
3. Conduct in-service workshops for teachers and administrators (e.g., multicultural education, conflict resolution, peer support groups, institutional barriers and cultural insensitivities).

4. Develop mentoring programs for minority students; help students build support/advocacy networks with teachers within the school.

***Career preparation.*** The goal is to meet the needs of career development for all students. However, this study has shown that some minority adolescents have not had a solid foundation in the area of career planning. Without a career plan, minority students tend to make poor educational and career choices. Recommendations include:

1. Conduct EGAS sessions to gain ideas of the level of career preparation individual members have.
2. Educate and expand students' thinking about goals and careers during EGAS sessions.
3. Develop a mentoring program to build career interest. Students may be able to shadow a career professional for a day.
4. Implement a career fair during school time which should include guest speakers of various professions and various cultures represented as role models.
5. Partner with teachers and administrators to plan and implement career-oriented mini-lessons.

### ***Recommendations for Teachers***

Some suggestions were implied by participants after participating in the EGAS group sessions. During some of the discussions regarding personal, social, academic and career development, some of these recommendations emerged. The researcher added more recommendations based on an overview of this study's findings. Recommendations include:

1. Attend professional development in-service workshops (e.g. multicultural education, cross-cultural insensitivities and conflict resolution).
2. Partner with school counselor to advocate for minority adolescents.
3. Partner with school counselor to plan for designated times for group counseling interventions such as EGAS for minority students.
4. Integrate multicultural curriculum within the content standards and academic subject matter on a regular basis.
5. Teach tolerance for all students.

### ***Recommendations for Administrators***

The school administrator is often considered the heart-beat of the school. The regulations, mission, academic goals, and school climate is enforced by the administrator. As a result of this study's findings, it is important that the administrator also plays an active role in all students' academic, personal, social, and career development; in particular, minority adolescents. Recommendations were given by participants during EGAS group sessions. The researcher added more recommendations based on the study's findings. Recommendations are as follows:

1. Allow professional development hours for teachers in the areas of multicultural education, institutional racism and conflict resolution.
2. Review curriculum and master plans to ensure that cultural diversity is reflected in all areas related to academic, career, personal, and social development.

3. Assess school climate by doing a walk through of hallways, classrooms, library, and the cafeteria. What students are being represented on posters and bulletin boards throughout the school?
4. Allow time allotment for school counselors to conduct group counseling such as EGAS.
5. Send a questionnaire home to parents to assess school climate (e.g., inclusion or exclusion of their child).
6. Oversee a school-wide multicultural fair and invite the community.

### **Implications for Further Research**

There are several areas of further research from which this study can provide a platform. Future researchers should complete a similar study of male minority adolescents and then do a comparison of results between the two studies. Another study could involve a comparative study of similarities and differences of influence of the EGAS model in urban vs. suburban middle school adolescents. A multiple case study involving two to three school counselors who have implemented the EGAS model at their school is a viable option. Also, it might be valuable to allow the school counselors to tell their perceptions/stories regarding the influence of the EGAS approach. This study would give school counselors a voice.

Researchers could explore in more depth some of the findings of this research by using quantitative analysis to measure the levels of academic achievement of each participant at the end of the EGAS sessions. Additionally, it may be useful to include reports from teachers regarding the students involved. Lastly, future researchers could

complete a similar study with diverse minority adolescents within the EGAS group sessions and conduct a longer intervention.

### **Conclusion**

The need for interventions for minority adolescents has become increasingly important through the years. The academic success rate of minority adolescents is significantly lower than that of the dominant culture. It is time to hold schools accountable for not fully addressing the personal, social, academic, and career development needs of all students.

This study evolved after reading the literature about the challenges of minority adolescents, school counseling techniques, and Empowerment Groups for Academic Success (EGAS) Model (Bemak Chung & Siroskey-Sabdo, 2005). The past research conducted by Bemak et al., noted thick descriptions about the impact of the EGAS approach on seven African American high school girls in an urban school setting. Based upon the self-reports supplied by the seven girls, some participants reported an improvement in their academic achievement and in their behavior after EGAS. Similarly, this current study also included self-reports of participants' improvement of behavior and increased homework completion.

According to Bemak, et al., the EGAS approach was developed based on the belief that structured group interventions that narrowly target only one of many problem areas for students of high risk and approaches that do not allow ownership of the group, fall short of dealing with the complexity of problems that many urban adolescents face. However, this current study adds to the research by expanding the applicability of this

model to not just urban minority adolescents but also suburban minority adolescents in a predominately White middle school setting.

Some of the key factors that EGAS addressed were the personal, social, academic, and career development needs of minority adolescents. More importantly, the group offered freedom of speech and expression of feelings due to the unique EGAS model which allows the adolescent participants to have ownership of the group's agenda based on the defined goals for the group. The EGAS approach to group counseling is unique in its emphasis on empowerment through group process, moving away from psycho-educational and traditional structured groups filled with exercises and activities planned by the facilitator (Lee, 2005). In this study, minority adolescents seemed to thoroughly enjoy having a certain degree of control and an actual say in how a group is run. As a result of the EGAS model, true empowerment emerged.

### ***Lessons Learned***

This study has expanded the applicability of the EGAS model in several ways: 1) it can also be used in a suburban vs. urban public school; 2) predominately White school vs. diverse school populations; and 3) with middle school minority adolescents vs. high school adolescents.

It has also been documented by author/researcher Holcomb-McCoy that in her opinion empowerment groups for African American girls should be led by at least one African American female.

The presence of a White male, in particular, could symbolize the White male-dominated society that African American females are oppressed by and this potentially could create the same denigrating dynamic that occurs in the general society. An African American female counselor who has an understanding of Afrocentric or Black feminism would be the most effective leader [for] an

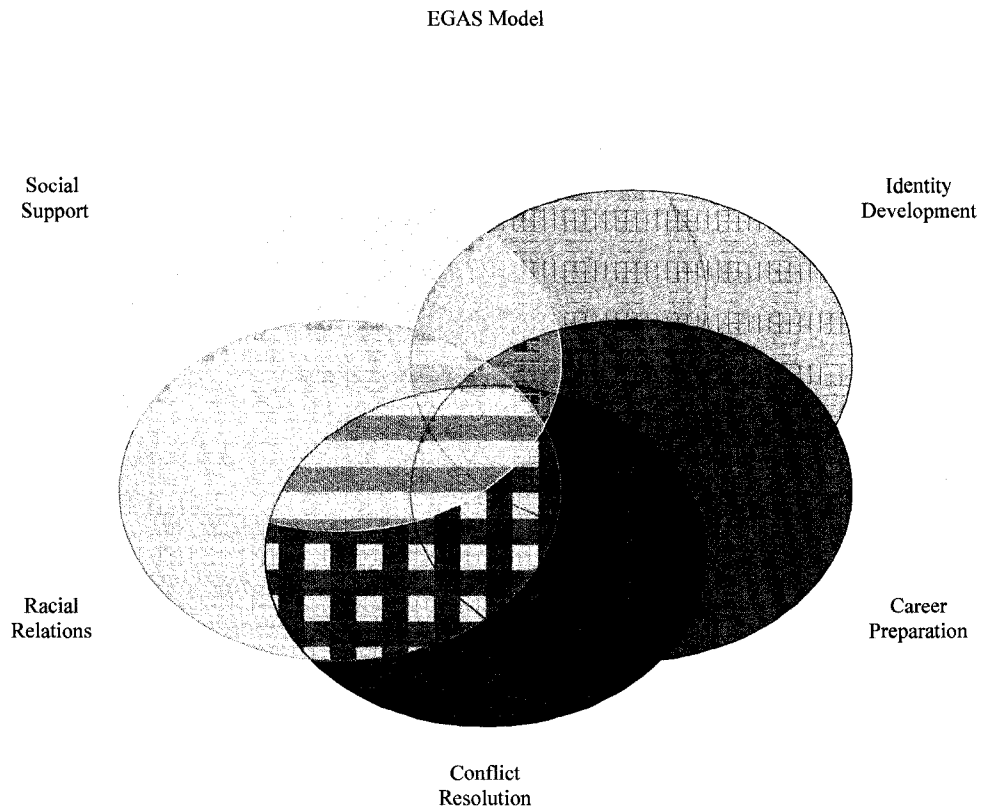
empowerment group for African American girls because she can act as a role model and can offer emotional support for the girls in identifying and responding to racism (Holcomb-McCoy, 2005, p.392).

This study utilized two African American female facilitators during the EGAS process. Participants acknowledged the appreciation of having two positive African American role models which also helped with emotional support and being able to relate to the participants during times of disclosure about racism and discrimination. Participants articulated that their comfort level to disclose various issues was high due to the fact that the facilitators looked like them. In my opinion this added richness and a level of understanding for everyone, including the facilitators.

The overarching research question for this study dealt with the experiences of minority adolescent girls who participated in the EGAS model in a predominately White middle school setting. In my opinion, group counseling, in particular EGAS, is an effective intervention for addressing the various needs of minority adolescents. The EGAS model satisfies the requirements emphasized by the ASCA national model (2003) which addresses the importance of personal, social, academic, and career development for all students within a comprehensive school counseling program.

The commonalities of the participants' experiences were combinations of the following: 1) social support, 2) dealing with racial relations, 3) identity development, 4) learning conflict resolution, and 5) career preparation. In this study, the EGAS approach was powerful in allowing the minority adolescents to address personal, social, academic, and career concerns during weekly sessions. Participants self-reported improvements in their behavior, attitude, friendships, test-taking skills, homework, and career knowledge. The group sessions gave individual participants a sense of identity

and belonging. During group sessions, members were able to release anger and other strong feelings, and learned how to tactfully resolve conflicts.



*Figure 4. Conclusion of Study*

Of central importance is the need for careful attention to interventions which address the personal, social, career, and academic needs of all students. EGAS is a viable start. The EGAS model and the themes that emerged during this study were interrelated. The themes began to overlap and influence each other. A unique quality of EGAS is that it enabled minority adolescents to be instrumental in one another's growth in the areas of identity development, career preparation, conflict resolution, racial relations, and social

support. Minority adolescents struggle with high rates of school failure, dropping out, violence, racism, drug use, teenage pregnancy, parent neglect, and teacher low expectations. EGAS group counseling can be a supportive environment and an opportunity to explore these issues. The approach also allows minority adolescents to experience a true sense of empowerment and control over their destinies.

### ***Academic Achievement***

Our adolescents are in an era of high-stakes testing and accountability. Therefore, school counselors as well as teachers, administrators, and school districts should do everything in their power to ensure academic success for all students. Academic achievement is the primary measure of empowerment for adolescents in the school setting. However, society must remain mindful of the influence of social, psychological, and environmental factors on academic performance for adolescents.

While implementing a new intervention such as EGAS may not be easy due to time allotment, testing and other school counseling obligations, it is crucial to address the needs of all students, particularly students at high risk of school failure. A model such as EGAS can help get to the core and beneath the surface of what problems or issues may be hindering the academic achievement of various minority adolescent students. It is evident that this model can aid in the success of African American female adolescents to become empowered to improve the personal, social, and academic aspects of their lives. Due to group ownership and the open structure of the EGAS model, this intervention may have the greatest benefit for minority adolescents. As a result, school counselors and the EGAS model will positively impact the lives of so many adolescents.

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## APPENDIX A

### HUMAN SUBJECTS APPROVAL



Office of Regulatory Compliance  
Office of Vice President for Research  
Fort Collins, CO 80523-2011  
(970) 491-1553  
FAX: (970) 491-2293

### Notice of Approval for Human Research

**Principal Investigator:** Laurie Carlson, Education, 1588  
**Co-Principal Investigator:** Twana Hilton-Pitre, 150 W. 9<sup>th</sup> Street #4301 Denver, CO 80204  
**Title:** Counseling Minority Adolescent Girls in a Predominately White Middle School Setting: Perceptions of the Empowerment for Academic Success (EGAS) Model  
**Protocol #:** 06-229H **Funding Source:** N/A  
**Number approved:** 10 adolescent girls  
**Committee Action:** **Approval Date:** October 12, 2006 **Expires:** September 20, 2007  
**HRC Administrator:** Janell Meldrem *Janell Meldrem*

#### **Consent Process:**

The above-referenced project was approved by the Human Research Committee with the condition that the attached consent form is signed by the subjects and each subject is given a copy of the form. *NO changes may be made to this document without first obtaining the approval of the Committee.* Subjects under the age of 18 years old must obtain parental permission.

#### **Investigator Responsibilities:**

- It is the PI's responsibility to obtain consent from all subjects.
- It is the responsibility of the PI to immediately inform the Committee of any serious complications, unexpected risks, or injuries resulting from this research.
- It is also the PI's responsibility to notify the Committee of any changes in experimental design, participant population, consent procedures or documents. This can be done with a memo describing the changes and submitting any altered documents.
- Students serving as Co-Principal Investigators must obtain PI approval for any changes prior to submitting the proposed changes to the HRC for review and approval.
- The PI is ultimately responsible for the conduct of the project.
- A status report of this project will be required within a 12-month period from the date of review. Renewal is the PI's responsibility, but as a courtesy, a reminder will be sent approximately two months before the protocol expires. The PI will be asked to report on the numbers of subjects who have participated this year and project-to-date, problems encountered, and provide a verifying copy of the consent form or cover letter used. The necessary continuation form (H-101) is available from the RCO web page [www.research.colostate.edu/rcoweb/](http://www.research.colostate.edu/rcoweb/).
- Upon completion of the project, an H-101 should be submitted as a close-out report.
- If approval did not accompany a proposal when it was submitted to a sponsor, it is the PI's responsibility to provide the sponsor with the approval notice.
- **Should the protocol not be renewed before expiration, all activities must cease until the protocol has been re-reviewed.**

Please direct any questions about the Committee's action on this project to me for routing to the Committee.

attachment

Date of Correspondence: October 30, 2006

CERTIFICATE OF COMPLETION  
HUMAN RESEARCH PROTECTION

*This certificate verifies that*

**Twana Yvette Hilton-Pitre**

completed Colorado State University's human research protection training on February 27, 2006. Attending this workshop will maintain your active status for human subjects protection training at Colorado State University through February 2009.

Your next training should be completed before February 2009.

The training included the history of human subjects protection, the Belmont Report, the 45 CFR 46 regulations, state regulations, institutional procedures, and ethics.

**Colorado  
State  
University**

*Knowledge to Go Places*

*Janell Meldrum*

Instructor, Regulatory Compliance, in conjunction with the  
Human Research Committee

Issued: February 27, 2006

## APPENDIX C

### INFORMED CONSENT FORM



School of Education  
1588 Campus Delivery  
Fort Collins, Colorado 80523-1588

#### Consent to Participate in a Research Study Colorado State University

**TITLE OF RESEARCH:** Counseling Minority Adolescent Girls in a Predominately White Middle School Setting: Perceptions of the Empowerment Groups for Academic Success (EGAS) Model

**EGAS stands for Empowerment Groups for Academic Success!**

**PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:** Dr. Laurie Carlson

**CO-INVESTIGATOR:** Twana Hilton-Pitre

#### **WHY AM I BEING INVITED TO TAKE PART IN THIS RESEARCH?**

Girls in 8<sup>th</sup> grade deal with many complex challenges in predominately White middle school settings. Some challenges may include poor school attendance, disruptive behavior, low grades and problems at home. The goal is to prepare your child for academic, personal, career and social success.

#### **WHO IS DOING THE RESEARCH?**

This research will be conducted by Mrs. Twana Hilton-Pitre, Doctoral Candidate, Colorado State University. Olivia White (school counselor) and Twana Hilton-Pitre (researcher) will facilitate each group counseling session.

#### **WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS RESEARCH?**

The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) (2003) national model has placed emphasis on school counseling programs providing encouragement and promoting academic, career and personal/social development for students. The EGAS model is a unique group counseling approach to address the depth and level of the personal/social, academic and career problems of students. The EGAS model has been used by school counselors to strive to positively impact the behavior and academic achievement of students. In support of the ASCA national model, the perceptions of minority adolescent girls in a predominately White middle school setting who participate in the EGAS model will be examined to assess application in a school setting with diverse minority adolescents not previously explored.

Participant's initials \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Page 1 of 4

**WHERE IS THIS RESEARCH GOING TO TAKE PLACE AND HOW LONG WILL IT LAST?**

The research will be conducted at Prairieville Middle School. The eight week group counseling sessions will be held in a classroom at the school. The group will meet once a week for 45 minutes, during elective classes.

**WHAT WILL I BE ASKED TO DO?**

**Your Child Will:**

- Get parent's permission to participate
- Sign and return informed consent forms (parent and student signature required before participation)
- Keep what is said during and after the group sessions private
- Actively participate in 45 minute group counseling sessions once a week for eight weeks
- Write thoughts in a diary after each session (diary will be provided for each participant)
- Participate in a 30 to 60 minute individual face-to-face audio taped interview at the end of the eighth week

**ARE THERE REASONS WHY I SHOULD NOT TAKE PART IN THIS RESEARCH?**

There aren't any known reasons why your child should not participate in this study.

**WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS?**

It is not possible to identify all potential risks in research procedures, but the researcher and the counselor will take reasonable safeguards to minimize any potential risks and discomforts. Pseudonyms will be used for the confidentiality process to reduce the risk of others knowing who the participants are.

**WILL I BENEFIT FROM TAKING PART IN THIS RESEARCH?**

**Your Child Will:**

- Have the potential to explore academic, career, personal, social success and/or concerns.
- Be encouraged to see themselves as a part of the larger social community.
- Learn healthy ways to deal with issues can be discussed
- Have opportunities to speak with other students during the group sessions who share their concerns (peer support)

**DO I HAVE TO TAKE PART IN THE RESEARCH?**

Your child's participation in this research is voluntary. If she decides to participate in the study, she may withdraw her consent and stop participating at any time without penalty.

**WHAT WILL IT COST ME TO PARTICIPATE?**

There IS NO cost to participate.

Participant's initials \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**WHO WILL SEE THE INFORMATION THAT I GIVE?**

We will keep private all research records that identify your child, to the extent allowed by law. Your child's information will be combined with information from other students taking part in the study. When I write about the study to share it with other researchers, your child will not be identified in these written materials. I may publish the results of this study; however, I will keep your child's name and other identifying information private.

**CAN MY TAKING PART IN THE RESEARCH END EARLY?**

YES,

- Refusal to answer interview questions, failure to complete the group process, and failure to complete diary.

**WILL I RECEIVE ANY COMPENSATION FOR TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?**

NO

**WHAT HAPPENS IF I AM INJURED BECAUSE OF THE RESEARCH?**

The Colorado Governmental Immunity Act determines and may limit Colorado State University's legal responsibility if an injury happens because of this study. Claims against the University must be filed within 180 days of the injury.

**WHAT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS?**

If you have questions about the study, you can contact the investigator, Dr. Laurie Carlson at 970-491-6826. If you have any questions about your rights as a volunteer in this research, contact Janell Meldrem, CSU Human Research Administrator at 970-491-1655 or Jeff Forrest, Chair of MSCD Human Subjects Committee, at 303-556-4380. I will give a copy of this consent form to you.

**WHAT ELSE DO I NEED TO KNOW?**

A 30 to 60 minute individual face-to-face interview will be audio taped with permission and transcribed.

Group sessions will not be tape recorded, however, the researcher will keep fieldnotes to document and summarize each group session.

Participant's initials \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**PARTICIPATION:**

Your signature acknowledges that you have read the information stated and willingly sign this consent form. Your signature also acknowledges that you have received, on the date signed, a copy of this document containing 4 pages.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Parent or Guardian                      Date \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed name of Parent or Guardian

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of person providing information to participant                      Date \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Researcher

Participant's initials \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**APPENDIX D**  
**ADOLESCENT ASSENT FORM**



*Knowledge to Go Places*

**ADOLESCENT'S ASSENT**

School of Education  
1588 Campus Delivery  
Fort Collins, Colorado 80523-1588

**A Research Project**

Hi!

I'm a teacher and counseling student at Colorado State University. I study adolescent girls and group counseling. This is called research. My research is about what would help minority adolescent girls in middle school. I am asking you if it is OK that I study you while you participate in group counseling to talk about personal, social, academic, career, concerns and success. I want to know if this group will be helpful to you.

I am asking adolescents like you if you would be willing to do 3 things for my research.

1. Attend and participate in group counseling sessions for eight weeks. (45 minutes each)
2. Write thoughts in a diary after each session. (diary will be provided for you)
3. Participate in an individual face-to-face audio taped interview at the end of the eighth week.(no longer than one hour)

I don't think doing these 3 things will hurt you. I can't be sure if our research will improve your experience.

You don't have to do this. Even if you say yes to it now, you can change your mind any time. Just tell me you want to stop then, and you can.

- If you want to do this, write your full name on the line.
- Your name \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Researcher's name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## APPENDIX E

### PARENT INTEREST LETTER



*Knowledge to Go Places*

School of Education  
1588 Campus Delivery  
Fort Collins, Colorado 80523-1588

#### INTEREST LETTER TO PARENTS/GUARDIANS

October 16, 2006

Dear Parent /Guardian:

Your child can volunteer to be apart of an educational research study at Prairieville Middle School. This study will begin in October and will continue for eight weeks. The purpose of this research is to describe the experiences of minority adolescent girls in a predominately White school who participate in group counseling. During group counseling, your child may talk about personal, social, academic, career, concerns and success. As apart of this study, students will participate in eight group counseling experiences that will be led by Olivia White (school counselor) and Twana Hilton-Pitre (Ph.D. candidate). This group will meet 45 minutes once a week, during elective classes. If your child participates in the group, she will be individually interviewed at the end of the study. Participation in the study is voluntary and attendance is extremely important for the success of the study, but participants will not be penalized should they need to leave the study before its completion.

Let me assure you that the names of the girls involved in the research study will remain confidential. Your child's name will be changed before being released in written research. Furthermore, the issue of confidentiality in counseling situations, including group counseling situations, must be understood by both parents and students. Whatever the students say or write during and after group sessions must remain confidential. Neither the counselor, nor the other students in the group may reveal anything that is said during the group sessions to any persons outside of the group. The only circumstances in which confidentiality may be broken are if a student indicates that she may hurt herself, that she may hurt another or that she is being hurt by someone else. If any student were to indicate any of these situations, then I would need to inform the responsible authorities.

Because your child is a legal minor, I need your signature indicating that you give your permission for your child to participate in this study. Once you have read and signed the consent form, please return the form to the school counselor (Olivia White) in the envelope provided. I (Twana Hilton-Pitre) will pick-up the consent forms from the school counselor one week from the date that they are distributed. You may call me (Twana Hilton-Pitre) at (225) 803-4794 if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Twana Hilton-Pitre, M.Ed.

Dr. Laurie Carlson (Principal Investigator)

**APPENDIX F**  
**PARTICIPANT WEEKLY DIARY**

Participant # \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Session \_\_\_\_\_

MY THOUGHTS ...

What was most helpful for you this session?

Is there anything else you would like to share?

## APPENDIX G

### STUDENT INTERVIEW FORM

The following questions will guide the interview as well as assist the researcher with the investigation of the study:

“Student Interview Form”

Interview Protocol

Project: Minority Adolescent’s EGAS Experiences/Perceptions

Time of interview: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Place: \_\_\_\_\_

Interviewer: \_\_\_\_\_

Interviewee: \_\_\_\_\_

Questions:

1. Please tell me about yourself.

2. Please tell me about your experiences during the EGAS group sessions.



(Thank individual for participating in this interview. Assure participant of confidentiality of responses.)