Africentric Youth and Family Rites of Passage Program: Promoting Resilience among At-Risk African American Youths

Aminifu R. Harvey and Robert B. Hill

This article examines the effects of an Africentric youth and family rites of passage program on at-risk African American youths and their parents. Data were obtained from a three-year evaluation of a youth rites of passage demonstration project using therapeutic interventions based on Africentric principles. At-risk African American boys between ages 11.5 and 14.5 years with no history of substance abuse were referred from the criminal justice system, diversion programs, and local schools. The evaluation revealed that participating youths exhibited gains in self-esteem and accurate knowledge of the dangers of drug abuse. Although the differences were not statistically significant, parents demonstrated improvements in parenting skills, racial identity, cultural awareness, and community involvement. Evidence from interviews and focus groups suggests that the program's holistic, family-oriented, Africentric, strengths-based approach and indigenous staff contributed to its success.

Key words: African Americans; families; culturally competent evaluation; rites of passage; youths

African American young men are under siege. In schools they have the highest rates of detention, suspensions, expulsions, and special education placements. In child welfare they are most likely to be removed from their parents, have their parents' rights terminated, exit without being adopted or reunited with their parents, and leave to become homeless or recruited into a survival culture of crime and drugs. (Curtis, Dale, & Kendall, 1999). In juvenile justice they have the highest rates of arrests, detention while awaiting trial, being tried as adults, being more severely sentenced at all stages of the system, and being incarcerated in secure juvenile or adult correctional facilities. Criminologists predicted that African American boys born in 1991 have a 29 percent chance of being imprisoned over their lifetime, compared with only a 4 percent chance among white boys (Mauer, 1999).

The MAAT Center for Human and Organizational Enhancement, Inc. of Washington, DC, developed the Africentric Adolescent and Family Rites of Passage Program to reduce the incidence and prevalence of substance abuse and antisocial attitudes and behaviors by African American youths between the ages of 11.5 and 14.5 living in the District of Columbia. This three-year demonstration was supported by a grant from the U.S. Center for Substance Abuse Prevention. This article describes the components of this program and the program's effect on the young boys and their parents.

Literature Review

Little seems to be known about which protective mechanisms foster resilience and success among African American youths. Winfield (1995) described four protective mechanisms or processes.
(identified by Rutter, 1987) that can promote resilience among at-risk youths: (1) risk modification, either through the risk itself or the child’s exposure; (2) following exposure, diminishment of the probable negative chain reaction; (3) initiating self-efficacy and self-esteem; and (4) presentation of positive opportunities.

Although interventions must also occur within the family unit, Winfield (1995) described methods of reducing the negative outcomes associated with risk exposure in the classroom. One method involves allowing children to vent their frustrations at the beginning of a school day. Regarding the negative chain of events that occurs after risk exposure, children and adolescents must receive immediate intervention to recuperate and move on with their lives. In addition, self-efficacy and self-esteem can be developed through education and empowerment. Last, presenting at-risk youths with positive opportunities, such as athletics for African American males or other incentives for pregnant teenage girls to remain in school, can also enhance resilience.

Interventions for at-risk youths include mentoring, church-based programs, social skills training, career development education, HIV/AIDS prevention, and substance abuse prevention and reduction. Mentoring is a common approach for reaching at-risk adolescents, despite the lack of definitive research on its effectiveness. Royse (1998) described the Brothers Project, which used mentors for at-risk youths to improve self-esteem, beliefs regarding substance abuse, academic performance, and overall prosocial behavior. Participants, almost all African American, were assigned to either a mentoring group or a control group—a group without mentors. Methods included matching adolescents with mentors for periods ranging from six to 41 months and administering the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, the Drug Attitude Questionnaire, and self-report questionnaires. Royse found no statistically significant differences between the mentee group and the control group on the variables of self-esteem, attitudes about drugs and alcohol, grade point average, school absences, and disciplinary infractions.

Included in the comprehensive review of research, Jemmott and Jemmott (1994) cited an intervention study by Jemmott, Jemmott, and Fong that addressed African American male adolescents. The participants in the project were placed in either a risk-reduction condition or a control condition. The risk-reduction condition consisted of a five-hour intervention addressing AIDS educational information and condom use, whereas the control condition consisted of a five-hour intervention addressing career opportunities. The results revealed that adolescents in the risk-reduction condition reported enhanced knowledge about AIDS and had a more negative outlook on high-risk sexual activity than adolescents in the control group.

African American churches also offer programs to foster resilience in African American youths. Rubin, Billingsley, and Caldwell (1994) surveyed 635 northeastern and north central African American churches to determine the number and types of programs offered for youths. The authors found that 176 (28 percent) of the churches provided at least one program for adolescents. Of these churches, 39 percent offered teen support programs, 15 percent provided substance abuse programs, 16 percent provided financial support for college, 14 percent offered parenting and sexuality services, 3 percent provided AIDS support programs, and 14 percent provided services for at-risk youths. These services included counseling, delinquency prevention, and residential treatment. This research suggests that the African American church is not sufficiently addressing some of the most significant risk factors facing African American youths, especially in HIV/AIDS services, substance abuse programs, parenting, and sexuality services.

Johnson and colleagues (1998) predicted that their comprehensive alcohol and drug (AOD) abuse prevention and reduction program would increase family resilience through knowledge of AOD abuse, increased community involvement, awareness of community resources, and improved family communication. This research was part of a larger study performed for the U.S. Center for Substance Abuse Prevention. Although the larger study addressed the church community, the family, and the individual regarding resilience, the work by Johnson and colleagues addressed only the family. The authors concluded that family resilience can occur through “youth training, early intervention, and case management services throughout a one-year period” (p. 305). The researchers found that the program obtained statistically significant gains in parents’ knowledge about AOD use, the setting of AOD rules by youths, and the use of community resources by the family.
Banks, Hogue, and Timberlake (1996) compared the success of two social skills training (SST) methods: an Africentric approach and a non-Africentric but culturally relevant method. A total of 64 inner-city African American boys and girls ages 10 to 14 participated in the study. One-half of the youths received SST using the Africentric approach, and the other half received SST using the non-Africentric cultural approach. The Social Skills Rating System was used to assess social skills. The State-Trait Anger Expression Inventory was used to assess anger management. The Afrocentric Beliefs Measure (ABM) was used to assess the degree to which the participants internalized the Seven Principles of the Nguzo Saba (a spiritual and cultural vehicle that allows individuals to draw on their African past and leads them into the future). Although the authors hypothesized that participants in the Africentric design would demonstrate higher levels of success in SST, they found no statistically significant differences between the two groups. The results indicate that at-risk African American youths who participated in both “culturally relevant” programs demonstrated statistically significant improvements in their social skills. The authors also mentioned that the ABM, although showing promise as valid and reliable for older populations, may not be developmentally appropriate for early adolescents.

Hammond and Yung (1991) hypothesized that culturally relevant SST programs for at-risk African American youths can be successful in violence prevention. The authors argued that very few examples of successful culturally relevant violence prevention programs exist. They analyzed the Positive Adolescents Choices Training (PACT) program, which was designed to teach social skills and reduce and prevent violence. PACT included groups of 10 to 12 students who received training in peer interaction to address behavioral concerns such as managing aggression and “victimization by violence.” The results revealed that youths improved in each of the desired “target skill areas”: giving positive feedback, giving negative feedback, accepting negative feedback, resisting peer pressure, solving problems, and negotiating (p. 365).

D’Andrea (1996) described the “I Have A Future Program” (IHAF), a community-based service in Tennessee that focused on career development in urban African American youths. IHAF also used an Africentric perspective in the provision of services. The author chose participants between ages 14 and 17 who lived in two community centers in the low-income housing areas that were the sites for the program. The services included career development classes, counseling, and job preparation training. Integrated with these services was the Africentric perspective and, specifically, the Nguzo Saba. The author argued that services for at-risk youths must include community involvement and neighborhood change. Influential individuals and organizations, such as elected officials, other human services agencies, church leaders, and positive role models in the African American community, were identified as important collaborators in an attempt to educate the youths to advocate on their behalf. The author did not present outcome data but did emphasize the importance of multicultural considerations, including the incorporation of the Seven Principles of the Nguzo Saba (Karenga, 1965).

Warfield-Coppock (1992) suggested that an appropriate cultural intervention for youths at risk is an African-centered rites of passage program. She conducted a survey of 20 rites of passage experts and others affiliated with agencies or organizations that sponsored rites programs. These respondents reported having conducted 87 rites of passage programs between 1984 and 1992 and having initiated 1,616 youths. Ninety percent of the respondents indicated that knowledge of self and culture is crucial for youths in confronting the problems they face.

Harvey (1997) provided a model for group work with delinquent African American youths that uses a psychosocial Africentric approach. The author emphasized the importance of inculcating the values expressed in the Nguzo Saba and the Principles of Africentricism, or RIPSO. The principles include “responsibility, reciprocity, respect, restraint, reason, reconciliation, interconnectedness, interdependence, inclusivity, participation, patience, perseverance, sharing, sacrifice, spirituality, cooperation, discipline, and unconditional love” (p. 164).

**Philosophy**

This model uses a multifaceted approach that intervenes with the youths in various domains: individual, peer group, immediate family, extended family, and community (Harvey & Rauch, 1997). The desired outcomes are to influence youths to be cooperative, to understand and respect the
sameness of self and of other individuals, and to have a high sense of responsibility for the well-being and harmonious interconnection between self and community.

From a practice perspective the social worker should have confidence in the youth’s ability to change, demonstrate a genuine interest in the youth, not label the youth with institutional connotations, make early connections with the youth’s family, and not become intimidated by conflict or when differences arise from the youth. Thus, most at-risk youths are not viewed as “bad”; they are seen as children who lack proper supervision, care, and direction.

Program Description

The MAAT Adolescent and Family Rites of Passage Program has a strengths-based perspective grounded in an ecological framework and is designed to promote resilience in at-risk African American youths through a multifaceted Africentric approach (Harvey, 2001). It aids youths in the development of emotional strength to become self- and community advocates through peer support, use of the Nguzo Saba, and Africentric principles. The group process consists of an eight-week preinitiation or orientation phase followed by weekly meetings emphasizing African and African American culture. The final phase consists of the “transformational ceremony” during which the youths demonstrate their personal growth, knowledge, and skills to an audience consisting of family members, friends, staff members, and significant other individuals. The Rites of Passage program has three interventions: (1) an after-school component, (2) family enhancement and empowerment activities, and (3) individual and family counseling.

After-School Activities

The after-school component taught interpersonal skills, fostered positive peer relationships, and cultivated high self-esteem among the youths. It always began with African-based rituals: a unity circle, a drum call, the pouring of libation to the ancestors, a blessing for the day, and the review of the Nguzo Saba (Harvey & Rauch, 1997). The youths met three hours each day for three days each week. Youths were provided with healthy snacks (which they helped prepare), after which they formed a unity circle, announced by the playing an African drum; recited a manhood pledge; read from a spiritual nonsectarian book; and poured libations (a ritual to honor all their personal and historical ancestors). After these rituals, the youths proceeded to their designated module activities. After completion of the activity, the young people helped clean up, and the activity closed with a unity circle and a recitation of the Seven Principles of the Nguzo Saba:

(i) Umoja (Unity): To strive for and maintain unity in the family, community, nation, and race; (ii) Kujichagulia (Self-Determination): to define ourselves, name ourselves, and speak for ourselves instead of being defined and spoken for by others; (iii) Ujima (Collective Work and Responsibility): to build and maintain our community together and to make our brothers’ and sisters’ problems our problems and to solve them together; (iv) Ujamaa (Cooperative Economics): to build and own stores, shops, and other business, and to profit together from them; (v) Nia (Purpose): to make as our collective vocation the building and developing of our community in order to restore our people to their traditional greatness; (vi) Kuumba (Creativity): to do always as much as we can, in the way we can, in order to leave our community more beautiful and beneficial than when we inherited it; (vii) Imani (Faith): to believe in our parents, our teachers, our leaders, our people, and ourselves, and the righteousness and victory of our struggle (Harvey & Rauch, 1997, p. 34).

The after-school component consisted of three major activities: (1) the knowledge and behavior for living activity; (2) the learning motivation activity; and (3) the creative arts activity. The knowledge and behavior of living activity fostered knowledge and behavior of a healthy self, family, and community. Its modules focused on the following topics: dangers of drug and alcohol abuse; strategies to avoid contracting HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases; holistic health practices and nutrition; manhood and male–female relations; entrepreneurial development; oppression and racism; and African American culture and heritage. The average number of youths who regularly participated in the after-school activities was 15 during the first year, 12 during the second year, and 20 during the third year.

The learning motivation activity stimulated the youths’ interest in learning through a holistic
approach. An important program module was the *Ujima ya Fundisha*, a living skills laboratory operated in a MAAT Center apartment. This lab enhanced the youths' life skills through direct experiences in painting, plumbing, electrical work, and home repair. Hands-on learning experiences that emphasized the use of mathematics and science in everyday activities. For example, the youths were taught principles of geometry and physics through such activities as developing model rockets from kits and launching those rockets. Percentages and fractions were taught through the reading of musical notes. The youths learned about the importance and power of different herbs growing in their community. They were taught that some of these herbs could have positive effects on their health when properly prepared and consumed or combined in a talisman to be worn around their neck.

The creative arts activity permitted the youths to explore their creative talents to build their sense of self-confidence and self-esteem. An experienced craftsman taught them to develop and design leather belts, key chains, and amulets for themselves and family members. An African musician and drummer taught them the functions of different instruments and how to play various African instruments, first by learning to play various songs, then by learning to read music. The D.C. Youth Ensemble, a mostly female African American dance and theater arts organization, taught *Taritibu*, South African boot dancing and theater.

During the first eight weeks of the program, the youths received an extensive orientation about Africentric values. They were taught to refer to adult men as "Baba," adult women as "Mama," and to their young peers as "Brothers." At the end of the first eight weeks, a youth retreat was held over a three-day weekend. The retreat helped the youths bond more closely with the MAAT Center staff and each other. The youths were exposed to intensive skill-building activities, African cultural practices, and physically challenging activities, such as hiking, rope climbing, caving, and canoeing. At the end of the retreat, a naming ceremony took place in which the youths received an African name, which might be based on the day of the week that they were born, or on a distinctive character trait.

The culmination of the after-school component each year was the *kuumba*, or graduation, ceremony, at which the young men demonstrated what they learned during the year to an audience of more than 150 parents, relatives, and friends. For example, at the end of the second year, they explained the science of building rockets, the importance of the type of launching fuel, and the aerodynamics of launching rockets. At the end of the third year, they performed musical selections and the *Taritibu*. At each closing ceremony, they would also recite the *Nguzo Saba*, and state how the program affected them and their families.

**Family Enhancement and Empowerment Activities**

The family enhancement and empowerment component consisted of family enhancement and empowerment sessions that were held for about two hours once a month and a retreat for parents and guardians. An average of eight parents participated in the family enhancement and empowerment activities each year over the three-year period. Other parents were unable to attend because of family emergencies. The family enhancement and empowerment sessions helped family members enhance their parenting skills, their bonds with their children, their ability to serve as advocates for their children, their participation in the activities of their children's schools, and their involvement in the political or social affairs of their communities.

During the first two years, the parents' retreats were held toward the end of each program year. The feedback from the parents revealed a need for more focused activities for them. In the third and final year, a joint parent-youth retreat was held at the end of the first eight weeks to enhance parenting skills, family involvement, bonding, and cultural identity. This retreat exposed the family members to intensive self-esteem and skill-building activities, African cultural practices, and wholesome recreational activities. At the end of the retreat, in naming ceremony the parents and youths received African names.

Staff for the program originally consisted of an MSW African American man who was the program director and a bachelor-degreed African American male youth worker. During the last nine months of the project, the director was an African American bachelor-degreed woman and the youth worker was an African American man with years of experience working with youths. All staff were African Americans who lived in the African American community, had knowledge of the
culture, and years of experience working with youths and families.

A licensed African American female social worker provided the individual and family counseling component for the duration of the program. She provided counseling to the youths and their families by themselves or together to enhance their self-esteem, sense of efficacy, and bonding. The youths were counseled individually during the after-school component or at their homes, and the parents and guardians were usually counseled individually at home. The social worker spent an average of 30 minutes to an hour each day providing individual counseling to the youths or their parents, and the average total amount of individual counseling each week was six hours. Family counseling was provided in the home for an average of two hours per week and involved the young boy, his parent or guardian, siblings, and other family members in discussions about issues that affected family functioning. These counseling sessions might focus on problem solving, decision making, awareness and identification of feelings, appropriate expression of feelings, improvement of communication skills, strategies for conflict resolution, and expressing appreciation and understanding of family members.

Method

Target Population

The primary target group of the MAAT Rites of Passage Program was African American adolescent boys between ages 11.5 and 14.5 years and their parents and other family members. We chose young boys between ages 11.5 and 14.5 because it seemed they would benefit most from a primary substance abuse prevention program because they (based on our experience) were open to adult influences. Moreover, the youngest age of the youths in the juvenile court was 11.5 years.

The boys were recruited from the juvenile justice system, diversionary programs, and the public school system. They were referred on the basis of the primary criterion that they did not have any history of drug use. Other referral criteria could include that they had been arrested by the police, but the prosecutor did not have sufficient evidence to take the case to court; they had a first charge but no prior convictions; they were consent decree youths; or they were on regular proba-

Program Evaluation

The Institute for Urban Research (IUR) at Morgan State University evaluated the MAAT Center’s Rites of Passage Program over its three-year span. The IUR collected data on 57 African American male adolescents over the three-year period: 17 from the first cohort, 13 from the second cohort, and 27 from the third cohort. Each youth cohort equaled a program year that corresponded with a school year—from approximately September through June. Comparison group data were collected for 30 youths. Family data were collected from 12 parents. Pretest and posttest data were obtained from participating youths about the following outcomes: self-esteem, academic orientation, drug knowledge, racial identity, cultural awareness, and perceived impact of the Rites of Passage Program. Pretest and posttest data were obtained from participating parents and guardians about the following outcomes: parenting skills, community involvement, racial identity, cultural awareness, parental advocacy, PTA participation, and perceived impact of the Rites of Passage Program. It is important to underscore a major limitation of this analysis: the pretests and posttests do not accurately assess the effectiveness of the program.

The evaluation team was composed of the IUR director, who coordinated the implementation of the process and outcome evaluation activities; an IUR senior research associate, who supervised the coding and processing of evaluation data for analysis; and an IUR research assistant, who had primary responsibility for implementing the process evaluation through participant observation. The observer used a standardized form to systematically record his observations. After the activities were completed, he prepared a detailed report of his observations. He observed the first and last day of the three days each week that the after-school program operated, because the major enrichment activities were held on those days. He observed the family empowerment and enhancement activities once a month and attended the youth and family retreats.

To assess the accuracy and reliability of the participant observations, the research assistant
prepared a report of his activities at the end of each month. This report was reviewed by the project director, the senior evaluators, and other program staff in face-to-face meetings held with the research assistant each month. During these sessions, program staff raised questions about the accuracy of some observations and often suggested modifications to enhance their quality. The researcher's observation reports were subjected to periodic critiques, not only by the program staff, but also by the senior evaluation staff.

To use appropriate instruments for collecting data from the youths, the IUR conducted a comprehensive review of the literature to determine the existence of measures of the project's outcome variables that had been validated on African American youths. This review revealed that culturally sensitive measures existed for the following variables: self-esteem (Rosenberg, 1965), academic orientation (Johnston, O'Malley, & Bachman, 1987), and drug knowledge (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 1991; Kolbe, Kann, & Collins, 1993). Items from these sources were used to develop indices for those three variables. The only measures of racial identity found for African American youths had been validated on college students and not at-risk adolescents. We found no measures of cultural awareness that had been validated on African American male adolescents. We developed new indices of racial identity and cultural awareness for the youths in this demonstration. Most of the items selected for these two indices came from surveys that had been used in earlier IUR studies of at-risk adolescents. Inter-item reliability tests revealed strong Cronbach alphas for the five indices: self-esteem (.91), academic orientation (.82), drug knowledge (.88), racial identity (.84), and cultural awareness (.87).

The IUR conducted an extensive review of the literature to identify measures that could be used to assess outcomes for parents in five areas: parenting skills, parental advocacy, community involvement, racial identity, and cultural awareness. Because no appropriate measures in these five areas were found that had been validated on African American parents, we developed new indices. Inter-item reliability tests revealed strong Cronbach alphas for the five parent indices: parenting skills (.88), parental advocacy (.83), community involvement (.80), racial identity (.78), and cultural awareness (.76). The racial identity index for the parents contained items different from those in the racial identity index for youths. On the posttest, the youths and parents were asked to gauge the degree of effect ("very much," "somewhat," or "a little") that the program had on them in 10 areas. These items were asked to obtain the perceived effects of the program based on the self-reports of the youths and their parents or guardians.

Discussions between the IUR and the referral agencies revealed that the target group of African American boys between the ages of 11.5 and 14.5 was small. The IUR proposed a quasi-experimental design because it was not possible to randomly assign sufficient numbers of at-risk youths into participating and control groups. To ensure that adequate numbers of target youths were available to participate in the Rites of Passage Program, we selected for each cohort the first 30 youths between 11.5 and 14.5 years who qualified for the program by not having a history of substance abuse. Although the target number was between 15 and 20 youths, the MAAT program staff actually recruited more youths to allow for attrition. The IUR had been assured by the juvenile justice system that adequate numbers of youths between the ages of 11.5 and 14.5 would be available for the comparison group. But the referral agency was unable to refer sufficient numbers of youths in the same age range for inclusion in a comparison group. Therefore, in the third year, a comparison group was used from a public school in a low-income community in Washington, DC. Cooperating teachers administered pretests and posttests to those youths in the school and returned the completed forms to the IUR.

Findings

Effect on Youths

The effect of this program was understated because the pretests were not administered until the youth retreat, which occurred at the end of the first eight weeks of orientation to allow adequate time to obtain sufficient numbers of participating youths. The youths acquired much knowledge and positive values during the first eight weeks. Thus, any gains that the youths experienced between the
pretests and posttests demonstrate that the MAAT program had remarkable positive effects on these at-risk youths and their parents. Participating youths had statistically significant gains between the pretests and posttests in self-esteem and knowledge about drug abuse. Self-esteem increased more among participating youths than comparison youths. High self-esteem among participating youths in the three cohorts rose from 40 percent to 81 percent (Table 1), whereas self-esteem among comparison youths rose from 59 percent to 68 percent between the pretests and posttests. Eight of 10 (83 percent) participating youths reported that the MAAT program helped increase their self-esteem “very much.” Accurate knowledge about drug abuse increased more among participating youths than comparison youths. Youths with accurate knowledge about the dangers of substance abuse and HIV/AIDS increased from 60 percent to 85 percent between the pretest and posttest, but there was no increase among comparison youths, which remained at 75 percent.

Although youths experienced sizable increases in racial identity and cultural awareness between pretests and posttests, those gains were not statistically significant. If the pretest had been administered at the beginning of the program, it is possible that significant results might have occurred in these areas. Nevertheless, racial identity increased more among participating youths than among comparison youths. Positive racial identity among youths rose from 49 percent to 57 percent, positive racial identity declined from 59 percent to 52 percent among comparison youths.

On the other hand, the participating youths had no significant gains in their academic orientation between the pretest and posttest. Nevertheless, the proportion of youths with high academic orientation remained at six of 10 (Table 1). The program also enhanced the youths’ motivation for learning by using creative strategies to promote their appreciation of reading, biology, science, and mathematics and by enhancing skills in home repairs, plumbing, and carpentry. In the peer group domain, seven of 10 (69 percent) participating youths reported that the MAAT program helped “very much” to increase their abilities to resist negative influences from their peers. The program helped create a positive peer group for the at-risk youths by increasing positive bonding with their program peers. The after-school component, and especially the youth retreat, promoted collaborative activities and enhanced bonding among the participating youths by increasing trust and respect for one another.

**Effect on Parents**

An analysis of the outcome evaluation data revealed that the program had positive effects on the parents and guardians of the youths. However, none of the pretest and posttest results for the five measures used for the parents were found to be statistically significant. Although large differences in these tests occurred on four parenting measures—parenting skills (+37 percent), community involvement (+25 percent), racial identity (+33 percent), and cultural awareness (+36 percent)—none of those differences was statistically significant. A major reason for the lack of

<p>| Table 1 |
|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| <strong>Outcomes for At-Risk Youths in MAAT Adolescent and Family Rites of Passage Program</strong> |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% above Median Score</th>
<th>Pretest (N = 57)</th>
<th>Posttest (N = 36)</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Self-esteem</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Academic orientation</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>NS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Drug knowledge</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Racial identity</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>NS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Cultural awareness</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>NS</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NOTES: NS = nonsignificant and refers to relationships that are greater than .05.
significance was the small sample size \((N = 10\text{ to }12)\) of the parents and guardians. Nevertheless, the magnitude of these differences between pre-tests and posttests suggests that the program had positive effects on parents (Table 2).

The parents reported that their bonds with their sons were strengthened. Eight of 10 (80 percent) parents felt that the MAAT program increased ties between them and their sons "very much," and seven of 10 (71 percent) youths felt the same way. Observation revealed closer bonding between the youths and their parents at various activities. Parents who attended family enhancement and empowerment sessions demonstrated increases in their knowledge about effective strategies for child rearing, self-development, and empowerment. Individual and family counseling also contributed to stronger family bonds between parents and their children.

**Discussion**

Although the pretests were administered at the end of the first eight weeks of the program, the findings suggest that the MAAT Adolescent and Family Rites of Passage Program had some positive effects on both the at-risk youths and their parents or guardians. The program produced significant gains in the youths’ self-esteem and accuracy of knowledge about drug abuse. Participating youths had higher gains in self-esteem and accurate knowledge than comparison youths. On the other hand, there were no significant gains on racial identity, cultural awareness, and academic orientation. The participating parents exhibited sizable gains between the pretests and posttests in parenting skills, racial identity, cultural awareness, and community involvement, although none of those differences was statistically significant.

The evaluators used an elaborate process to identify the program’s success factors as perceived by the youths, their parents, program staff, and other stakeholders. Success factors were identified through in-depth interviews with program staff, focus groups with the youths, focus groups with the parents, focus groups with court staff and probation officers, and intensive discussions with the research assistant about the program attributes identified in the participant observations. All sessions were recorded on tape. After carefully reviewing the tapes, the evaluators discerned five themes that stakeholders repeatedly identified as contributing to the program’s success: They were holistic, family-oriented, Africentric, strength-based, and had an indigenous staff. Evaluations have revealed that the most effective youth interventions are holistic or multifaceted approaches that focus on the individual, family, peer group, and community. Programs that target only the youths have not been found to be as successful (Harrell, Cavanagh, & Sridharan, 1999). African-based rituals increased the positive racial identity and cultural awareness of the youths and their parents. For example, parents and their sons were excited to receive African names. The combination of these five factors had enduring effects on a so-called “intractable” group of inner-city youths. These results demonstrate that African American young boys who have contact with the criminal justice system can be reclaimed and transformed into productive citizens when culturally sensitive

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome</th>
<th>% above Median Score</th>
<th>Pretest ((N = 12))</th>
<th>Posttest ((N = 10))</th>
<th>Significance Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Parenting skills</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>NS</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Community involvement</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>NS</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Racial identity</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>NS</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Cultural awareness</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>NS</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Parental advocacy</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>NS</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Attend PTA</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>NS</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** NS = nonsignificant and refers to relationships that are greater than .05 percent.
interventions are implemented to empower them and their families.

**Implications for Social Work**

The findings suggest that programs with at-risk youths should use culturally competent interventions. There are implications that the race of the workers can play a significant role in positive outcomes. More evaluative research, both qualitative and quantitative, is needed with larger populations to test the significance of culturally competent programs. We hope that further research will ascertain the variables that define culturally competent programs.

**References**


