"So I Won't Go to Jail": Year Two of a PROMUNDO-Adapted Program to Eradicate Gender-Based Violence

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Abstract

This paper presents evaluation results of a PROMUNDO-adapted program enacted to reduce gender-biased violence among preadolescent boys. It is a follow-up to an earlier, pilot study of the program curriculum. Outcomes that are examined include promoting critical thinking regarding masculinity, aggression, and violence; fostering skills necessary for effective communication, prosocial emotional expression, and non-violent conflict resolution. While quantitative findings in this small sample do not indicate statistically significant results, qualitative analyses indicate that participants were better equipped to express their emotions, particularly anger, and to resolve conflict in non-violent ways that may slow the school-to-prison pipeline — which the participating boys were at-risk of entering.

Keywords: school-to-prison pipeline, violence prevention, gender-based violence, gender beliefs, early intervention, PROMUNDO

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"Así No Iré a la Cárcel": Segundo Año del Programa Adaptado de PROMUNDO para Erradicar la Violencia Sexista

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Resumen

Este artículo presenta los resultados de evaluación de un programa adaptado de PROMUNDO, promovido para reducir la violencia sexista entre chicos preadolescentes. Es la continuación de un estudio piloto anterior del currículum del programa. Los resultados examinados incluyen fomentar el pensamiento crítico respecto a la masculinidad, la agresión y la violencia; fomentando las habilidades necesarias para la comunicación efectiva, la expresión de emociones prosocial y la resolución de conflictos de forma no violenta. Pese a que los resultados cuantitativos en esta muestra tan pequeña no indican resultados significativos estadísticamente, los análisis cualitativos indican que los participantes estaban mejor preparados para expresar sus emociones, especialmente la ira, y para resolver sus problemas de formas no violentas que podrían reducir el camino de la escuela a la cárcel — a la cual los chicos participantes estaban en riesgo de entrar.

Palabras clave: camino de la escuela a la cárcel, prevención de la violencia, violencia sexista, creencias de género, intervención temprana, PROMUNDO

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In 2014, PROMUNDO's Program H curriculum was adapted and pilot-tested in an implementation with a small group of elementary school aged boys in the United States. This was the first time a PROMUNDO program was implemented with participants of such a young age and with participants in the United States. This paper reports findings from a second, post-pilot implementation with a similar group of boys. The objectives of the study were to determine if the program had an impact on participants' (1) attitudes regarding masculinity, aggression, and violence and (2) abilities regarding communication, prosocial emotional expression, and non-violent conflict resolution. This paper also explores the possibilities that gender transformative anti-violence programs can hold with regard to disrupting the school-to-prison pipeline in the United States. Before outlining the research methods utilized and presenting the findings, it is necessary to explain both the school-to-prison pipeline, especially in the context of mass incarceration in the United States, and the connection between masculinity and school-based delinquency.

Theoretical Framework

Mass Incarceration and the School-To-Prison Pipeline

The prison system in the United States appears to have reached a significant turning point in recent years. Many states and the federal government have enacted policy changes designed to reduce a decades-long increase in the prison and jail population, and that growth has in fact slowed in many state prison systems and at the federal level (Porter, 2015). Presumably, policymakers are becoming aware of the problems caused by mass incarceration, which is a term scholars use to refer to the "prison boom" that resulted from the punitive policies passed during the War on Drugs and the Get Tough era of the 1990's (Alexander, 2012; Western, 2007). One of these problems is the exorbitant financial costs; corrections in the United States costs over eighty billion dollars per year (Kyckelhahn, 2015).

Unfortunately, one type of punitive policy of the 1990's is still in effect throughout much of the United States. Zero-tolerance policies in schools—a product of both the War on Drugs and the heightened concern over high-profile mass shootings at schools—contribute to what is known as the school-to-prison pipeline (Wald & Losen, 2003; Wallace, Goodkind, Wallace, & Bachman, 2008). Initially, these policies mandated harsh discipline including suspension, expulsion, and even arrest for drug and weapons offenses but they now cover more common but less serious acts, such as truancy, tardiness, and general noncompliance (American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008). Because these harsh tactics do not reduce school misconduct, but rather increase it and general delinquent behavior, some assert that the principal's office has been replaced with the juvenile court, potentially pushing these youth down the pipeline into juvenile detention or incarceration and increasing the likelihood of arrest and incarceration as an adult (Lospennato, 2009). Study after study demonstrate how this pipeline disproportionately impacts non-White youth, especially African American children, even when controlling for economic factors (American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008; Wallace, Goodkind, Wallace, & Bachman, 2008).

This issue is systemic and the solution requires comprehensive and multi-faceted responses including state- and nationwide policy changes that encourage the use of community-based alternatives to incarceration and detention, as well as improved support services and teacher training within schools. Interventions that reward positive behaviors, improve school climate and students' connectedness to school, foster social and conflict resolution skills, as well as increase adult-student interactions are all showing signs of reducing harsh discipline and reversing the pipeline effect (American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008; Wallace, Goodkind, Wallace, & Bachman, 2008). Rarely, however, do these proposed solutions explicitly recognize or address two facts: (1) that males are disproportionately likely to both engage in school misconduct and to be subject to these harsh disciplinary tactics (Wallace, Goodkind, Wallace, & Bachman, 2008) and (2) beliefs about gender and masculinity are tied to

school misconduct and delinquent and criminal behavior in significant ways. The next section of this article will discuss the relevance of attitudes about sex and gender within the context of school-based delinquency and crime.

Sex, Gender, and School-Based Delinquency

James Messerschmidt (1993) significantly advanced the study of gender and crime in arguing that violence and crime are "masculine-validating resources" that allow men to demonstrate their masculinity if and when other means (such as gainful employment and serving as the proverbial breadwinner) are not available. Studies of incarcerated men reveal a significant association between strong beliefs in traditional masculinity and violent behavior (Kreinert, 2003) and hostile attitudes towards women and sexual aggression (DeGue, DiLillo, & Scalora, 2010), thus providing support for Messerschmidt's theory. These traditional gender beliefs also predict some of the very behaviors that can result in harsh school discipline, such as bullying and alcohol and drug use (Basile, Espelage, Rivers, McMahon, & Simon, 2009; Espelage, Basile, & Hamburger, 2012). They are also associated with a broad range of other negative outcomes, including lower self-esteem, poorer mental health, increased risk-taking with regard to health behavior, the avoidance of medical treatment and testing, reduced condom use, unplanned and teenage pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections, forced and coercive sex, and physical and sexual intimate partner abuse (Courtenay, 2000; Griffith, Gunter, & Watkins, 2012; National Council on Gender, 2012). These findings underscore the need for intervention programs that aim to improve behavioral health and reduce bullying and violence to address the role of masculinity in meaningful ways.

Notably, international public health organizations who work to improve sexual health have already designed and implemented such "gender transformative" interventions, which is the term used to describe such programs by the World Health Organization and Rao Gupta, Whelan, and Allendorf (2002). Many of these programs show significant impact on traditional gender beliefs and support for gender equality, and result in

significant improvements in sexual health and reductions in sexual violence (Boender, Santana, Santillan, Hardee, Greene, & Schuler, 2004; Population Reference Bureau, 2011; Ricardo, Eads, & Barker, 2011). Barker, Ricardo, and Nascimento (2007) find gender-transformative approaches to be more effective at improving sexual health than interventions that do not address gender beliefs. Virtually all of these programs target adolescents and young adults (Ricardo, Eads, & Barker, 2011), however, which is likely because sexual activity is a topic often considered inappropriate for younger children. However, results of the International Men and Gender Equality Survey, implemented in eight countries, suggest that early childhood experiences (e.g. witnessing father's involvement in domestic housework) significantly influence men's gender beliefs as adults (Levtov, Barker, Contreras-Urbina, Heilman, & Verma, 2014). This suggests that interventions designed to transform the very beliefs that lead to delinquency, violence, and poor health can and should take place during childhood. The remainder of this article will report findings from an evaluation of one such intervention, which was created by adapting a gender-transformative sexual health intervention program for use with a younger population than it was originally designed to target (see Foley, Powell-Williams, & Davies, 2015).

Methods

Intervention

The current study reports findings from a school-based implementation of a PROMUNDO-adapted program. PROMUNDO is an organization based in Brazil that works to engage men and boys in efforts to reduce gender-based violence. Studies reveal its Program H has significant impact on gender attitudes and sexual health behaviors (Pulerwitz, Barker, & Segundo, 2004). The current authors designed the curriculum with assistance from the director of the local rape crisis organization (who has ties to PROMUNDO) and the two school teachers who would deliver the curriculum. Table 1 provides an overview of the curriculum, which was adapted from Program H and, in the

case of Lesson 4 ("What is Expected of Boys and Girls"), PROMUNDO's Program M (Ricardo, Nascimento, Fonesca, & Segundo, 2010). These adaptations made the program content more culturally and age appropriate for the current study's participants (Foley, Powell-Williams, & Davies, 2015). Prior to this adaptation, PROMUNDO had not been implemented in the United States or with elementary school children.

Table 1
Program Curriculum Outline

Lesson	Lesson Title	Lesson Objective
1	Kickoff Party	Introduce program and all those involved in it
2	The Talking Stick	Promote respectful communication and dialogue
3	Violence Clothesline	Identify the forms of violence that we perpetrate or experience
4	What is Expected of Boys and Girls	Recognize challenges we face in trying to fulfill societal gender role expectations and convey the possibility of changing these expectations
5	A Live Fool or a Dead Hero	Discuss how male "honor" is associated with violence and think of alternatives to violence when we feel insulted
6	Field Trip	Promote bonding outside the classroom context and participate in activities designed to reinforce program lessons
7	What Do I Do When I am Angry	Learn to identify anger and express it through prosocial means
8	Expressing my Emotions	Recognize the difficulty sometimes involved in expressing certain emotions and identify the suppression or exaggeration of emotions and how this can impact our lives.

Table 1 (Continued)

Program Curriculum Outline

9	The Four Phrases	Propose a model for creative and non-violent conflict resolution
10	Graduation Day	Present a model for creative and non-violent conflict resolution

Source: Foley, A., Powell-Williams, T., & Davies, K. (2015). Engaging boys in eradicating gender-based violence: A pilot study of a Promundo-adapted program. *Masculinities and Social Change*, *4*(1), 26–43. doi: 10.4471/MCS.2015.59

Collectively, the adapted lessons (1) promote critical thinking regarding masculinity, aggression and violence and (2) foster the skills necessary for effective communication, prosocial emotional expression, and non-violent conflict resolution. The curriculum relies on interactive role-playing exercises that build upon one another, culminating in a final play that program participants write and perform themselves upon program graduation. A kickoff party and a field trip involving the local university were included in the program in response to feedback from a pilot study (Foley, Powell-Williams, & Davies, 2015), wherein program facilitators requested more activities to promote group interaction outside of the instructional context. After the pilot study's completion, staff members of the school and rape crisis organization expressed interest in developing a mentoring component; as such, the current study's program implementation was designed to include both fourth and fifth grade boys. The majority of the fifth grade boys participated in the pilot test implementation and study. The remaining participants were selected by school administrators after fourth and fifth grade teachers nominated students. To achieve a relatively heterogeneous group of participants, these teachers were asked to nominate male students with a high number of disciplinary problems, with moderate disciplinary problems, and with virtually no disciplinary issues.

The current study's program implementation was taught by two male teachers during the school year with the help of a male employee of the local

rape crisis center. The curriculum was delivered once per week for one hour during the school day. Most lessons were delivered in the Spring 2015 semester. To provide flexibility to instructors and account for the relatively short time period in which the group could meet each week, lessons could be implemented over the course of more than one week's session.

Study Design and Measures

Once school administrators had finalized program participants, totaling 15 boys, the current authors obtained parental consent via a letter from the principal for their child to participate in the research study. Those who did not consent could still allow their child to participate in the program itself. All parents provided consent; next, the boys were asked to assent to participate in the study themselves. Those who did not provide assent to the research study would still be able to participate in the program; however, all boys assented. All 15 boys were then scheduled to complete a pretest assessment prior to the implementation of the first lesson. Posttest assessment occurred after the program implementation was complete.

Pre- and posttest measures relied on items utilized in evaluations of the Men Can Stop Rape organization's Men of Strength Clubs. These items assess gender-equitable beliefs, support for traditional masculinity, acceptability of fighting and violence, and intent-to-act upon witnessing mistreatment (Anderson, 2011). Items regarding rape myths and sexual activities and behaviors were omitted, given that this content was not included in the PROMUNDO-adapted curriculum. Measures typically used to evaluate PROMUNDO—the GEMS (Gender Equity Men Scale)—were not utilized here for the same reason. Attitudes towards emotional expression were assessed by constructing additional items, both closed and open-ended. At posttest, the boys were also asked open-ended questions regarding how they liked the program, what they learned, and how the program could be improved.

Sample Characteristics and School Context

Fifteen boys started the program and thirteen (86.6 percent) completed the program; one moved out of the school district and thus did not complete, while another dropped out of the program fairly early on. Additionally, one participant was absent for the pretest, while another was absent for the post-test; thus, eleven boys completed both the pretest and posttest and are included in analysis (73.3 percent of all boys selected to participate; 84.6 percent of program-completers). The boys ranged in age from 9 to 12 with an average age of 10.55 years. All of the boys were African-American, which was to be expected given that the school is 96 percent African American. While specific socio-economic data was not collected from the boys or their parents, this school is located in an impoverished area and 100 percent of its students are eligible for free/reduced meals.

It is worth noting that the school district wherein this program was implemented houses a standalone law enforcement agency which is charged specifically with intervention in issues of criminal conduct which take place on school grounds during school hours. It is further telling that a local television station relies on this agency to provide them with content and information for inclusion in their "School Crimes" segments which air every weekday during the evening broadcast.

Results

Quantitative Findings

A comparison of means utilizing paired t-tests reveals no statistically significant changes from pretest to posttest. This is not surprising considering how many of the boys gave the "right answers" in the pretests. For example, as can be seen in Table 2, in both the pre and post-test, over 90 percent of the boys indicated that girls and boys should be treated the same; only a third indicated that boys should not cry and most boys reported it was okay for boys to feel afraid, affectionate, sad, happy, and angry.

Still, it seems the PROMUNDO lessons were reaching the boys; for instance, twice as many boys agreed at posttest that men should not have problems expressing their emotions. Moreover, though not significant in this small group of boys, there are several changes in the right directions regarding the use of violence. As can be seen in Table 2, after the PROMUNDO program, fewer boys agreed that they should not back down from a fight. Other positive changes were evident in that fewer agreed that their friends would think less of them if they walked away from a fight; that it was important for them to be right in an argument; and that it was important for them to be ready to fight when challenged. Finally, one young man chose both yes and no for his answer to the question regarding whether it was ever okay to hit another male, which suggests the complexity with which they might have been thinking after the PROMUNDO program. Because of the small sample size, the true impact of the program may be best seen in the responses to the open-ended questions that were asked of the boys, the teachers involved in the program, and school administrators (the principals).

Table 2.
Results of Comparison of Means Test (n = 11)

Question	Pretest % Agree	Posttest % Agree	Significance Level of T-Tests
Girls and boys should be treated the same.	90.9	100	.341
Young men should be brave.	100	90.9	.341
Young men should have no problem expressing their emotions.	45.5	90.9	.167
Young men should be the ones in control.	45.5	36.4	.343

Table 2. (Continued)
Results of Comparison of Means Test (n = 11)

Young men should not back down from a fight.	45.5	27.3	.138
Young men should not cry.	36.4	45.5	.588
Young men should not show their true emotions.	72.7	90.9	.104
Young men should never hit another young man.	72.7	54.5	.724
Young men should never hit a woman or girl.	81.8	81.8	1.00
It is okay for boys to feel afraid.	81.8	90.9	.341
It is okay for boys to feel affectionate.	**72.7**	**72.7**	1.00
It is okay for boys to feel sad.	90.9	100	.341
It is okay for boys to feel happy.	100	100	*
It is okay for boys to feel angry.	72.7	63.6	.341
Men are born to be tough and in control.	SA 36.4 A18.2 N 18.2 D 27.3	SA 36.4 A 9.1 N 18.2 D 27.3 SD 9.1	.493
It is important for me to be right in a discussion or argument.	SA 9.1 A 45.5 N 36.4 D 9.1	SA 18.2 A 9.1 N 45.5 D 18.2	.242

Table 2. (Continued)
Results of Comparison of Means Test (n = 11)

Sometimes violence is the only way for me to express my feelings.	A 27.3 N 9.1 D 27.3 SD 36.4	SA 9.1 A 27.3 N 9.1 D 27.3 SD 27.3	.563
If I walk away from a fight, my friends will think less of me.	SA 18.2 A 45.5 N 18.2 D 9.1 SD 9.1	SA 18.2 A 27.3 N 27.3 D 27.3	.553
It is important for me to speak up in support of people who are not being treated right.	SA 63.6 A 18.2 N 9.1 D 9.1	SA 63.6 A 36.4	.465
It is important for me to be ready to fight when challenged.	SA 45.5 D 36.4 SD 18.2	SA 9.1 A 18.2 N 45.5 D 18.2 SD 9.1	.742
It is important to me that men and women are treated the same.	SA 45.5 A 45.5 D 9.1	SA 54.5 A 36.4 SD 9.1	1.00

*Standard error of the difference is 0 so the correlation and T cannot be computed.
SA = Strongly Agree A = Agree N = Neutral D = Disagree SD = Strongly Disagree

Qualitative Analysis: Self-Reported Outcomes

When asked how they liked being in the PROMUNDO program and to discuss what they learned from it, a solid pattern of positive reports emerged.

The boys were in agreement that the program—especially the skit they wrote and performed—was enjoyable and taught them something of importance. Specifically, the boys' responses reflected growth and learning in terms of emotional expression, anger management, and non-violent conflict resolution. For instance, one participant explained that the program taught them "how to feel your emotions," while others stated they learned "that it's okay for boys to cry" and "how to express feelings without violence". More often, however, the boys discussed learning to "control anger," "take your anger out in other ways," and "stop taking my anger out on other people". Others learned "not to bully people," "not to beat on girls," "to stay out of fights," and "how not to fight when I'm angry". Notably, just as many responses showed that the boys learned "to stop being bad" and to "be a better person". One particular boy's response reflects growth in nearly all of the above areas; when asked how he liked the program, he reported that it taught him "a lot. [It] taught me to control my anger [and] helps me to be kind to other people and help them when I'm in a bad mood". The boys also reportedly enjoyed the discussions of anger, violence, the "negative and positive responses to it" and exploring "alternatives" or "options" to their feelings manifesting in violence.

Furthermore, it became clear that the boys recognized the connections between maladaptive emotional responses, violence, and negative sanctions. When asked about the importance of what they had learned in the program, four of the boys specifically referenced school suspension or jail as negative consequences of violence, while two others referenced getting into trouble more generally or the possibility of hurting oneself or others. As one participant stated, "I learned to get along with other people [and] how not to always do violence or fight. Because if you always fight or do violence, you could go to jail, and some stuff is not worth fighting for". Several other boys connected non-violence with more positive outcomes, stating "if you want to be a good person, you have to control emotions, do things to stay out of troubles, and keep out of fights".

Perceptions of Program Instructors and School Administrators

To further contextualize these findings, visits were made to the school upon program completion to conduct semi-structured, individual interviews with the program's instructors. On a separate visit, a party was thrown for parents to celebrate the achievements of the boys in the program; this allowed for informal discussions with the school's principal and assistant principal. It was during these interactions that a great deal of supplementary information emerged about the perceived impact of the boys' exposure to the program content, as well as more details related to the boys' lived experiences and some of the unique challenges this group of boys are presented with in their daily lives. What emerged from these interactions and interviews described above, were more nuanced insight into the experiences of the boys included in the study—in general, an unobtrusive, yet subjective way of understanding the sample.

All of the adult respondents at the school found value in the PROMUNDO-adapted program as it relates to the boys who participated. At the recognition ceremony held upon the conclusion of the program, the vice principal reported that a number of the boys have not only made positive gains due to their participation in the program, but that the skills they developed were having impact on other non-participating students. As the boys were playing immediately following the recognition program, the vice principal pulled an author aside and said "I know they're goofing now and excited to be playing around, but I want to tell you that they really took away some of the program with them. I hear it from them when they have their conflicts. Some of the others are picking parts of these skills up from them. Now, that's a good thing". This suggests that the PROMUNDO-adapted program may be impacting those outside the program and may have potential to shift the school culture in a meaningful way, especially if more resources can be directed toward the program to facilitate its growth.

When the principal and program teachers were queried about the day-to-day and home experiences typical of the boys in the program under study, a number of composite characteristics emerged. Based on their reports, the

average boy lives in a single-parent household, often with other children. Most of these parents work outside of regular business day hours, including weekends and nights; therefore, many of the boys are, for all intents and purposes, cared for and socialized by grandparents. Of those who do have siblings, many of the program participants are the eldest child and often responsible for the care of their younger siblings (this is reported to cause a general problem with authority and teachers when they try to wield it). Their neighborhood and personal lives are often characterized by exposure to drug sales and use, interpersonal violence of varying degrees, as well as witnessing punitive outcomes of encounters between family members and the criminal justice system. Experiences with illness, injuries, and death suffered by those around them are not uncommon. Suffice to say, a number of these children are at risk for a variety of negative emotional and physical health issues, especially without access to the resources and means by which to address them. As one of the teachers reported, "for many of them, positive role models, help dealing with their emotions, and decent meals are hard to come by".

Conclusion

While no statistically significant findings emerged from analysis of quantitative data from this small sample of program participants, the findings do indicate some changes in line with program goals, specifically in regards to participants' views on the acceptability of physical fighting. The small sample size makes statistically significant findings more difficult to detect, and is certainly a limitation of this study. Another limitation is the homogenous nature of the program participants with regard to race, sex, and socioeconomic status. That being said, it is precisely this study's population—African American boys of low socioeconomic status attending schools in impoverished neighborhoods—who are in increased need of interventions designed to disrupt the school-to-prison pipeline (Christle, Jolivette, & Nelson, 2005). The program could still be of value for lower risk youth and/or in more advantaged schools and this is an important opportunity for future research. More importantly, findings from analysis of the

qualitative data in this study show promise in this regard. The boys discuss how the program better equipped them to express their emotions, particularly anger, and to resolve conflict in non-violent ways. The participating boys also understood the importance of these abilities as preventive of suspension and jail time. This awareness is particularly relevant, given that suspension is a major entry point into the school-to-prison pipeline (American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008; Lospennato, 2009). Additionally, insight from the program instructors and school administrators as to the family and neighborhood experiences of the boys at the school similarly suggest they are at-risk and that school-based interventions as described in this article are useful and appropriate.

The problem associated with the school-to-prison pipeline is systemic and solutions that do not include policy changes will be insufficient; however, research demonstrates that interventions designed to improve school climate show impact, as do those that improve conflict resolution skills (American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008; Christle, Jolivette, & Nelson, 2005). The current study of a PROMUNDO-adapted anti-violence program clearly shows impact on conflict resolution, given that the participating boys reported learning these very skills. Furthermore, perceptions of the school administrators suggest the program may be having impact beyond its participants. Collectively, these findings suggest that intervening with boys early on can potentially effect change that is necessary to combat the school-to-prison pipeline that we know to be a contributor to the problem of mass incarceration in the United States.

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