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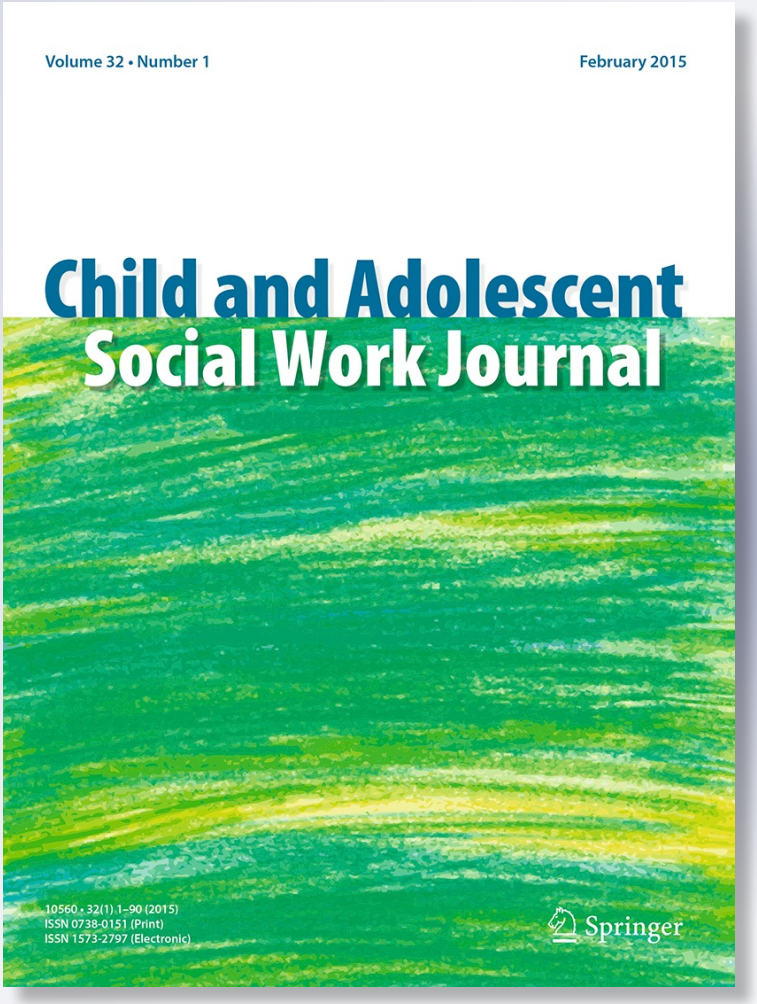

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Umoja: A Culturally Specific Approach to Mentoring Young African American Males

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Abstract This article reports that urban inner-city African American male youth residing in communities of color are at-risk and warrant interventions custom tailored to meet their unique cultural needs. This article describes a promising community and school-based intervention and prevention program utilizing Washington's (J Soc Work Gr 2006:14, 2007) pyramid mentoring model designed to foster the positive development of this group, prevent violence, and to reduce contacts with the juvenile and criminal justice system. It discusses and presents African drumming, Spir-rhythms as a Afrocentric cultural arts tool to engage, establish rapport, and provide pyramid group mentoring experiences for African American male youth.

Keywords African American male youth · Culturally appropriate · Mentoring · Violence prevention

Applied social work researchers struggled with the hypothesis: could a cultural arts (African drumming) intervention "Spir-rhythms" be designed, introduced, and implemented targeting young at-risk African American males as a component of a group mentoring project to reduce community violence? More importantly, with a focus on sustained engagement and mentoring, could an intervention with an African drumming be educational, engaging, therapeutic, fun, enjoyable, and desirable for inner-city African American male youth? While this article is not an empirical study, the researchers reached a consensus regarding "promoting wellness" as defined by activities that positively impacted self-esteem, clarified values, improved positive behavior in educational settings, increased cultural knowledge of African cultural arts, traditions, history and geography, decreased contacts with the criminal justice system, and reduced violence.

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Context of the Problem

Memphis is a city with a history of having some of the highest crime and youth violence rates in the country. Violence destroys quality of life and diminishes the freedom, health, and prosperity of individuals, families, and communities. Lack of public safety is linked to the city's economic health, quality of education, and other community wellness goals. Consequently, lower rates of youth violence and crime are essential to enhancing the quality of life for residents and the increased economic growth and prosperity of the city (Operation Safe Community 2011). Memphis had the second highest violent crime rate in the country in 2006. With youth violence on the rise, in 2009, more than 54 % (1,462) of those arrested for committing a violent crime were 24 years of age or younger—with some offenders as young as 9 years old. Approximately 160,000 Memphis children living in poverty face multiple risk factors for youth violence. African American male youth are among those at highest risk, including children of teen parents, youth 16–19 not in school or working, and youth with no consistently working adult in the home. For

persons ages 10–17 in the resident population of Memphis, Tennessee, the Violent Crime Index arrest rate per 100,000 persons in 2011 for black juveniles (627) was five times the rate for white (125) youth (Operation Safe Community 2011). The violent crime index includes the offenses of murder and non-negligent manslaughter, forcible rape, robbery, and aggravated assault (Fig. 1)

The African American community, school officials, and educators are well aware that public urban education is failing in its major goal of educating African American male students. In fact of all groups, African American males are affected most adversely. It is common knowledge by many that young African American males are regularly profiled and experience school adversity and hardship. Often, the profiling results in African American male youth facing a myriad of classroom challenges including socially conforming behavior. Over the years studies have shown that when black male students are compared to other students by gender and race they repeatedly rank lowest in academic achievement, have the worst attendance record, are suspended or expelled more often than other students, have the highest drop-out rates, most do not graduate from high school and do not earn a General Equivalency Diploma, and are more likely to drop out of school, (Alexander et al. 2001; Fremon and Renfro-Hamilton 2001; Ogbu 2003; Pinkney 2000; Pollard 1993; Raffaele-Mendez 2003; Roderick 2003; Voelkle et al. 1999). The more regularly a black male youth is suspended and away from school, the more opportunity he has to connect and bond with the street, gangs, and to develop a repetitive pattern of school truancy.

Out of school African American male youth become prime targets and candidates for gang recruitment efforts in inner city communities. For out of school Black boys with seemingly nothing to do and nobody to do it with, gangs provide structure through rules, symbols, close and strong peer relationships, history, guidance from older members and most importantly for economic opportunities and the hope of prosperity. For many Black male youth the gangs provide a comprehensive cultural solution replete with history, tradition, laws, order, guidance, music, dress, and language. In addition, poor or no school attendance leads to more contact with juvenile court and for some Black male youth, this may begin a journey away from school and towards jail along the cradle to prison pipeline (SHYIP 2009). It is clear that the ills which plague young Black males are not completely the responsibility of the public schools. The project discussed in this article is located in Memphis, Tennessee where in 2009 more than 54 % nearly 1,500 of those arrested for committing a violent crime were 24 years of age or younger—with offenders as young as 9 years old. Society as a whole must bear the responsibility. However, the public schools can potentially play a major role in addressing the problems of Black male students (Consilience 2011).

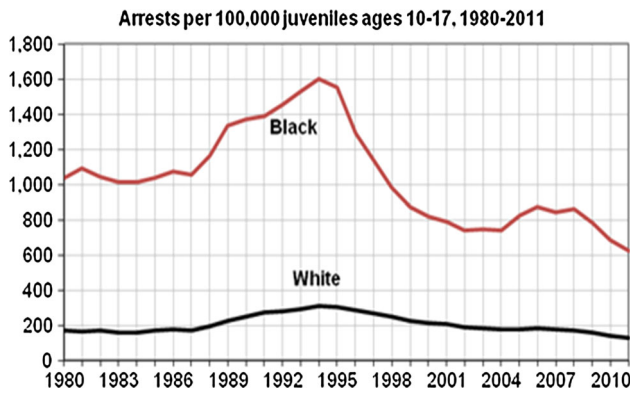

Fig. 1 Juvenile arrest rate trends for violent crime index offenses by race, 1980–2011

No doubt young African American males are under siege. In juvenile criminal justice systems across the country they are disproportionately represented. Stevenson (2003) reports that black males are twice as likely to be arrested and seven times more likely to be detained in facilities than their white counterparts. Similarly, Black males receive stiffer or longer sentences for the same convictions as white males (Children's Defense Fund 2010; Stevenson 2003). In recent years, criminologists have predicted that African American boys have approximately a 30 % chance of being imprisoned over their lifetime compared to only a 4 % chance of imprisonment for white boys (Mauer 1999). In child welfare departments they are most likely to be removed from the homes and custody of their natural parents. Similarly, African American male youth are most likely to have their parents' legal rights terminated (Curtis et al. 1999).

The condition, status, lifestyle and health of young African-American males has consistently been observed, discussed and critiqued in a wide range of settings from the barbershop to the academic laboratory. Since before the Jamestown settlement of the early 1600s, African American males have been coveted and feared because of their mystique, exploitative usefulness, strength, courage, intelligence, agility and creativity (Howard and Flennaugh 2011). Today the range of influence of African American males continues to capture the attention and imagination of the masses and extends from the political brilliance of President Barrack Obama to the perceived criminal intent of Trevon Martin. The disproportionate poor health and incarceration rates of young African-American males have proven impervious to all attempts to significantly reduce them. These males continue to be one of the most oppressed, inscrutable, underserved, and imprisoned populations in the United States (Alexander 2010).

Rationale and Purpose of the Study

Despite the scant research and literature that can be found on the specific area of mentoring African American male youth using cultural arts interventions, the problems and challenges facing this population required the design of a creative, bold, and practical intervention. African American male youth experience cultural disorientation as a result of Eurocentric oppression and have most often been victimized by Eurocentric oppression (Ani 1994; Kambon 1992; King 1997; Oliver 1989; Schiele 2000; Schiele 1998; Wilson 1992). From a practical standpoint, there is a need to understand the promise and possibilities of a cultural specific community-based mentoring program targeting young African American males. The purpose of this study is to document, describe, and explain the structure, implementation, and usefulness of the Umoja (Unity) Mentoring Project and the Spir-rhythms African drumming circle as a component and element of a community-based violence and juvenile delinquency intervention and prevention initiative targeting young African American males.

Implications for Use of the Study

The role of violence prevention and intervention mentoring programs in communities of color are promising and remain critically important. According to research evidence, mentoring programs are capable of successfully reducing African American male youth violence. A large-scale social science research study by a partnership of the University of Chicago Crime Lab, Chicago Public Schools, and local nonprofits, found that group mentoring in point of fact works. The Chicago study was the first documented claim and scientific evidence of its type targeting young African American male youth confirming that a violence reduction program could actually lead to a significant decline in violent crime arrests among youths who participated in such a mentoring initiative (U. S. News and World Report 2012).

Other studies addressing mentoring programs focused on educational attainment, positive youth development, and improved positive social performance. An analysis of mentoring program evaluations conducted by Jekielek et al. (2002) discovered that youth in mentoring relationships present more positive attitudes and appropriate behaviors at school and are more likely to go on to college than their counterparts. Research has clearly demonstrated that mentoring has significant positive impacts on two early indicators among high school youth dropouts: (1). High levels of absenteeism (Kennelly and Monrad 2007) and (2). Repetitive social and behavior problems (Thurlow et al. 2002). A groundbreaking (2007) public/private ventures' evaluation of the big brothers big sisters programs demonstrated that students who attended mentoring sessions regularly improved positive social functioning and were 52 % less likely than their peers to skip a day of school. Mentoring programs are effective tools to promote positive and healthy youth development.

The current study focusing on the Umoja Project is relevant and important for the African American community, the larger surrounding city, administrators, researchers, educators, public health professionals and social workers engaged in efforts to reduce violence in communities of color.

Limitations of the Study

This study was limited to a single mentoring program utilizing a cultural arts approach, Spir-rhythms African drumming circles targeting young African American males at two sites in Memphis, Tennessee. The study involved backyard research where applied researchers investigated programs where they also served as elder mentors. The researchers were aware of the potential implications involving bias and subjectivity that could influence the research evaluation process and subsequent outcomes or findings. Similarly, they recognized the importance of disclosing their dual roles as participants and researchers in order to create open and honest discussions regarding the project.

While the researchers sought to ensure the rigor, integrity, and robustness of the evaluation, the study failed to create and define common indicators of success versus outcomes to conclude if pre-determined positive changes last over time. Another limitation was the allocation of insufficient funds to evaluate the program. Funders did not consider evaluation to be a priority, using the vast majority of the financial resources to implement program activities. Without a comprehensive evaluation, the program was limited in substantiating lessons learned from the strengths and weaknesses arising during the execution of the strategies. In addition, researcher/practitioners did not have the benefit of an ongoing evaluation to inform the prompt application of course corrections during the implementation of the project. Finally, the evaluation of the project was limited to exploration and at best description. The quality of the research design and implementation was not comprehensive enough to validate the generalization of the intervention or the results. It should be noted that this does not preclude nor disqualify the promise and benefits resulting from the project.

Afrocentric Cultural Arts: An Asset and Strengths-based Approach

Surely we have identified the multitude of issues and challenges facing African American male youth. We

recognize the structural and systemic problems facing Black boys in the current and recent public education system. We also are well aware of the historic deficiencies of child welfare and family service systems. Similarly, the need for corrective action to stem the tide of disproportionate representation of African American boys in the juvenile justice system is well documented across the United States. Cowger (1994) contends that the efforts of social service providers and community workers have historically focused on problems, dysfunction, disease or pathology, and inadequacies. He maintains that if initial evaluations and assessments focus on problems and deficits, it is probable that deficits, not solutions will continue to be the motivation of both the worker and the person(s) receiving services throughout the treatment experience. "Concentrating on deficits or strengths can lead to negative and destructive self-fulfilling prophecies" (1994, p. 264). Simply put, it is unproductive for African Americans to expend the totality of their energy on defining, describing, diagnosing, and debating these problems, challenges, and issues of concern. On the other hand, centering attention on strengths can produce the structure, subsequent content, assets and resources for those most impacted by problems and challenges. This approach can also help them to identify their issues and to discover and design realistic goals, alternatives, and solutions.

Clearly, we must insist on action that builds on the historic strength and resilience demonstrated by people of African descent over the past several centuries. We must build on our legacy of self-help, race and ethnic loyalty, and the maintenance of cultural integrity. We know that all is not lost as African American social scientists and practitioners seek solutions and respond to these desperate situations, experienced by African American male youth, by utilizing asset and strength-based interventions and approaches. Invoking the Sankofa spirit of "going back and fetching it" we reach back to our history and culture to create, develop, nurture, and implement Spir-rhythms African drumming as a mentoring component. Spir-rhythms calls for the commitment of local community adult men as resources. Adult men in the community are resources that are rarely utilized to address the issues experienced by Black boys.

The progenitors of modern asset based community development Kretzman and McKnight (1993) remind us that only when community residents are committed to investing in themselves, as assets and resources in identifying and solving their own problems, does significant progress take place in their communities. Furthermore, Kretzman and McKnight (1993) confirm that help from sources external to the community is very unlikely. Funding from governmental sources is constantly diminishing, slow at best, and rarely forthcoming. It is increasingly futile to depend on and wait for federal, state, or local funding to solve the challenges faced by the community. The key to the success of the Umoja Mentoring Project and Spir-rhythms African drumming would be first to recognize cultural arts as a resource and asset and secondly to connect the Afrocentric cultural arts asset to other available assets in the community i.e. master artists residing in the community, local public schools, institutions of higher education (colleges and universities), elder men that reside in the community, community residents as cultural brokers, college students, and existing social service programs. Stevenson (2003) recognizes the value and usefulness of cultural elements to shape socialization strategies that fit within protective and proactive categories.

Thusly, we effectively multiplied the power and subsequent impact of mentoring and harnessed the power of local individuals (cultural brokers, master drummer, griots, educators, elders), and institutions, previously unavailable to address the issue of violence among young African American males in the community. The impact was positively synergistic.

The Umoja Mentoring Program

The Umoja (Unity) mentoring program had a primary goal of utilizing evidence based practice principles to provide culturally appropriate mentoring services to African American male youth between the age of 11–19 years old to prevent violence and juvenile delinquency. Youth participating in Umoja were identified and selected using the following criteria: (1). At risk for or previously exposed to violence; (2). Previous history of incarceration or contact with the criminal justice system; and/or (3) Educational attainment issues, in-school behavioral problems, truancy in school attendance and/or current school dropout. The youth were engaged in an ongoing process to identify their assets, strengths and needs. The primary goals of the Umoja project was to help the participants to learn conflict resolution skills, make positive social decisions, and to reduce illegal, unlawful, and violent behavior. In addition to participating in life skills training during group mentoring sessions, youth participants and their families benefitted from the networking with other services provided by their community. In order to accomplish the project goals, mentors aimed to:

1. Increase participants' connection to positive relationships and social support related to the healthy development.
2. Improve the healthy life skills of participants.
3. Provide a support mechanism for caregivers (i.e., parents and guardians) of youth.

4. Educate, train and support community institutions to enhance their one-on-one, group, family, and culturally-centered group mentoring capacity.

The project was designed by integrating a diverse set of evidence-based, best practice, and promising mentoring models. The Umoja mentoring project utilized Dr. Carl Bell's (2002) "Seven Principles for Health Behavior Change and Cultivation of Resiliency" as a model to design and structure the project. Dr. Bell's model includes the best practice approaches that employ culturally-centered interventions which promote the healthy development of youth that may be at risk. Furthermore, Umoja followed the evidenced-based standards of the national mentoring movement, MENTOR (2009).

The Sankofa Framework higher education-community partnership was utilized to support and facilitate the success of the program (Watson 2006). The partners included: Cummings Elementary School, the University of Memphis-Center for the Advancement of Youth Development, Lemoyne Owen College Community Development Corporation and Man-Up Program, the University of Mississippi-Social Work, Union University-Social Work, Families of Incarcerated Individuals, the Gang Reduction Assistance for Saving Society's Youth (G.R.A.S.S.Y) initiative, and the cultural broker/griot/master drummer (see Fig. 2).

Another important component of the Mentoring program was the culminating activity where program leaders, staff, mentors, family members, and community stakeholders recognized participants. The participants were awarded completion certificates by the city of Memphis officials and played the African drums during the ceremony proudly demonstrating their newly found musical skills. Forty-seven parents and family members attended the event, along with funders, staff members from the Mayor of the City of Memphis' Innovation Delivery Team, and mentors. Community affirmation of the youth's positive efforts was an important program activity.

Profile of Umoja Site Partners

The Umoja program site partners were Cummings Middle School and the GRASSY project. Cummings Middle School is public middle school located in Soulsville, South Memphis, Tennessee, a low income, crime ridden African American community. One hundred percent of the students at the school are African American. Ninety-eight percent of Cummings' students are eligible for free or reduced lunch, more than three times the number of students in the district twenty-eight percent. Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program test results reveal that students at Cummings School are consistently lower than county and state averages. In fact, county averages in math and science were two times higher than Cummings while Reading scores averaged three times higher in the county than at Cummings (See Table 1).

On average, Cummings' students had low academic performance. Dedicated teachers and outstanding parental and community involvement contributed to the success of the Cummings students. The entire Cummings staff worked collaboratively with a number of community partners to provide students with the resources they needed in order to succeed (Zillow 2011).

GRASSY is based on an Office of Juvenile Justice and delinquency prevention (OJJDP) model and has been proven to reduce gang involvement among youth. GRASSY was acknowledged by the White House as an effective program to curb youth violence and gang activity. Currently, GRASSY has gang intervention teams in two schools and outreach teams in 12 schools to help form connections and provide support services to students. Compared to 2011 rates, gang related incidents decreased by 60 % in 2012 in schools where GRASSY was present. GRASSY partnered with the Umoja project to provide 6 weeks of culturally specific group mentoring to African American male youth referred by the juvenile court for participation in the program (Consilience 2011).

Profile of the Umoja Youth Participants

Thirty-four African American young males participated in the Umoja project at two sites in Memphis, Tennessee. Fifteen sixth through eighth grade students took part in the program at the Cummings middle school site. Cummings participants ranged in age from 11 to 15 years old. Nineteen GRASSY project African American male youth between the ages of 15 and 19 years old participated in the project at an alternative high school site. Participation in the Umoja project served as partial fulfillment of their juvenile justice requirements for prior offenses. Eight of the GRASSY participants were high school students; nine were high school graduates; and two were high school dropouts; and all of the GRASSY participants were juvenile offenders. Nine of the GRASSY participants self-reported the current incarceration of a parent, five reported a history of prior parent incarceration, and five had no history of parent incarceration. Fifty percent of the youth lived in the South Memphis community and 50 % reported living in the Frayser Community (North Memphis, Tennessee). The mean age of all participants was 15 years old.

Spir-rhythms African Drumming

The notion of group drumming as a recreational music making activity that builds social and emotional assets is

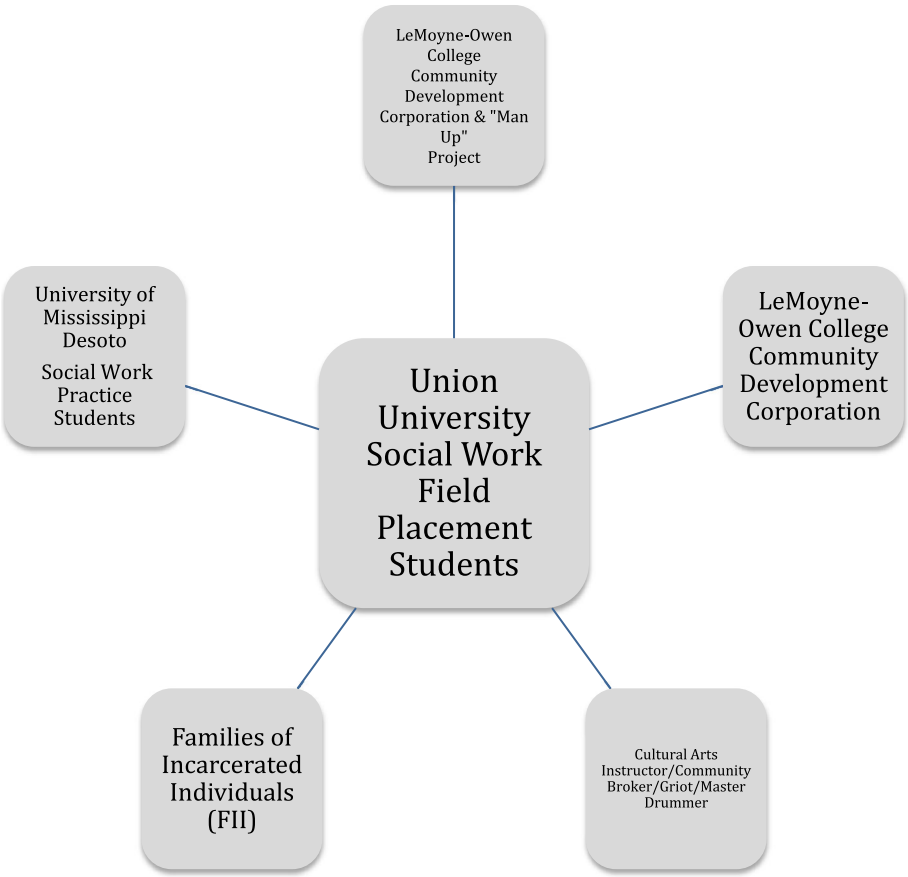

Fig. 2 Umoja mentoring higher education-community partnership

Table 1 Tennessee comprehensive assessment program average percentage of 3rd through 8th grade students who met or exceeded standards (2013)

	Math (%)	Reading (%)	Science (%)	Social sciences (%
Cummings	32	21	33.8	64.3
Shelby County	64.2	64.8	73.5	84.8
Tennessee	51.4	53.3	62.7	84.8

consistent with a positive youth development approach. It is conducted in a circle and often led by a facilitator whose role is to maximize a sense of community through rhythmic, verbal, and inclusive discussion (Ho et al. 2011). As an integral part of African culture, group drumming has proven to support the social values related to collectivism. Previous research has shown that the bio psychosocial efficacy of group drumming utilizes reflection and self-disclosure during discussion and improves social emotional functioning in adolescents from court-referred programs similar to Umoja participants (Bittman et al. 2001, 2003, 2004, 2009).

Spir-rhythms was implemented in a five-step process: (1). Environment/space preparation; (2). Engagement of participants through introductions of the master drummer/griot, elder mentors, and youth; (3). An introduction to the different types of African drums along with the role of the drum in traditional African communities; (4). The master drummer leads the group in drumming; and (5). The elder mentor(s) facilitate a reflective discussion period where youth are encouraged, supported, and challenged to share their feelings and thoughts related to an assortment of topics determined jointly by the elder mentors and youth participants.

Spir-rhythms focuses on social engagement in the cultural context of drumming, learning about African history and traditions, self-improvement and positive relationship building with mentors and peers. The primary focus of the drumming is on the youth's ability to participate, not the youth's drumming or musical skills. Participation receives positive affirmation from the mentors. This teaching method emphasizes the importance of collective participation in drumming. Youth are encouraged to overcome the initial anxiety that many of them experience by drumming for the first time. The mentors and master drummer use the analogy of overcoming the anxiety of drumming for the first time to explain the importance of trying new and positive social behavior that may not be popular at school or in the community. Similar to research

conducted by Longhofer and Floersch (1993) each session provided a way to measure progress as the youth could see and hear their drumming improvement.

The African drumming circle facilitates a spiritual-therapeutic milieu (Tumbo) translated in Kiswahili as matrix or womb. Tumbo, synonymous with matrix or womb, is defined as a sacred catalytic space consisting of three essential qualities: safety, energy or power, and potential. Mensah (circa 1980) describes the matrix as a place of great potential for development, growth, and change. The matrix or tumbo is intentionally and carefully created and developed to facilitate the introduction and subsequent re-connection of the youth with their African culture of origin. The construction of the drumming circle includes the circular positioning and placement of the seats along with the artful and strategic seat assignments of the various participants in the Spir-rhythms experience. The space or room design and set-up is critically important to the success of engaging the youth participants, encouraging immersion in drumming, and maximum interaction during the discussions and instruction phases of Spir-rhythms. The room structure creates an environment that fosters, supports, and promotes intimate group interaction on the visual, verbal, emotional, spiritual, and musical levels. The African drumming experience sets the stage for the group to move into the topic discussions on conflict resolution, building positive relationships, goal setting, and developing a positive self-identity. Figure 3 shows the Spir-rhythms drumming circle, a pictorial for the structure of the room set-up and roles of the participants required to create the appropriate ritual space for Spir-rhythms.

Discussion

The purpose of this research was to explore and describe a culturally specific mentoring intervention targeting young African American males utilizing Spir-rhythms African drumming to reduce violence and crime. The Umoja (Unity) mentoring project was designed to improve conflict resolution skills, promote and build positive relationships, and to develop positive self-identities among participants. We discovered that African drumming can be very accessible to youth, unlike playing the saxophone or piano. In addition, Spir-rhythms experiences were comparable to the Whittier drumming project described in new directions (2005) where people with no experience were able to very quickly learn to drum. Like Spir-rhythms, the drumming circle turned out to be a highly effective way to engage with young people.

The first question raised was: Could a cultural arts (African drumming) intervention "Spir-rhythms" be designed, introduced, and implemented targeting young at-risk African American males as a component of a group mentoring project to reduce community violence? In follow-up focus groups and discussions with teachers, administrators and staff members, we found that program participants indicated that the mentor relationships were helpful and instrumental in teaching them how to get along with other people and how to communicate their thoughts, feelings, and plans with others. At the end of the project, GRASSY site partner leaders and participant self-reports informed the researchers that none of the Umoja participants committed any new criminal offenses. Teachers and administrators at the Cummings middle school site reported that program participants were engaged in several minor non-violent arguments that represented an improvement on their history of repeated and often physical fights or altercations.

Researchers also asked, could an intervention with an African drumming be educational, engaging, therapeutic, fun, enjoyable, and desirable for inner-city African American male youth? Mentor-researchers reported that Umoja participants often expressed enjoyment in participating in program activities, especially the drumming circle and the community performances. Spir-rhythms provided a non-threatening and fun-filled environment to communicate openly with peers, mentors, and staff. While these findings suggest that there were some improvement in pro-social decision making, conflict resolution and that the youth felt connected to the mentors, the researchers were unable to reliably report a causative relationship between the African drumming, decision making, and the development of conflict resolution skills. We can however posit that the resulting youth experiences were illuminating in regards to rapidly building social relationships with both peers and mentors. We observed youth repeatedly participating in positive social interactions with their peers and mentors. Consequently, further evaluation is needed to identify, clarify, and confirm the determinant factors resulting from the African drumming experience. Since this was a brief program it is difficult to say with any degree of certainty if the improvements will have any long-term impact. It has been suggested that repeating the program across the school year or for multiple years should be considered.

To assess the effectiveness of the Umoja Mentoring Program, researchers asked participants to indicate the overall helpfulness of the program. Several domains were assessed including: behavioral changes, mentor effectiveness, help-seeking skill, awareness of career opportunities, and whether the program would be recommended to same-age and younger males. The level of learning about conflict resolution and violence prevention was assessed to determine how effective the mentors were in conveying information. All of the participants indicated that they learned a lot from the mentors. Ability to make decisions that facilitate healthy decision-making and compliance with

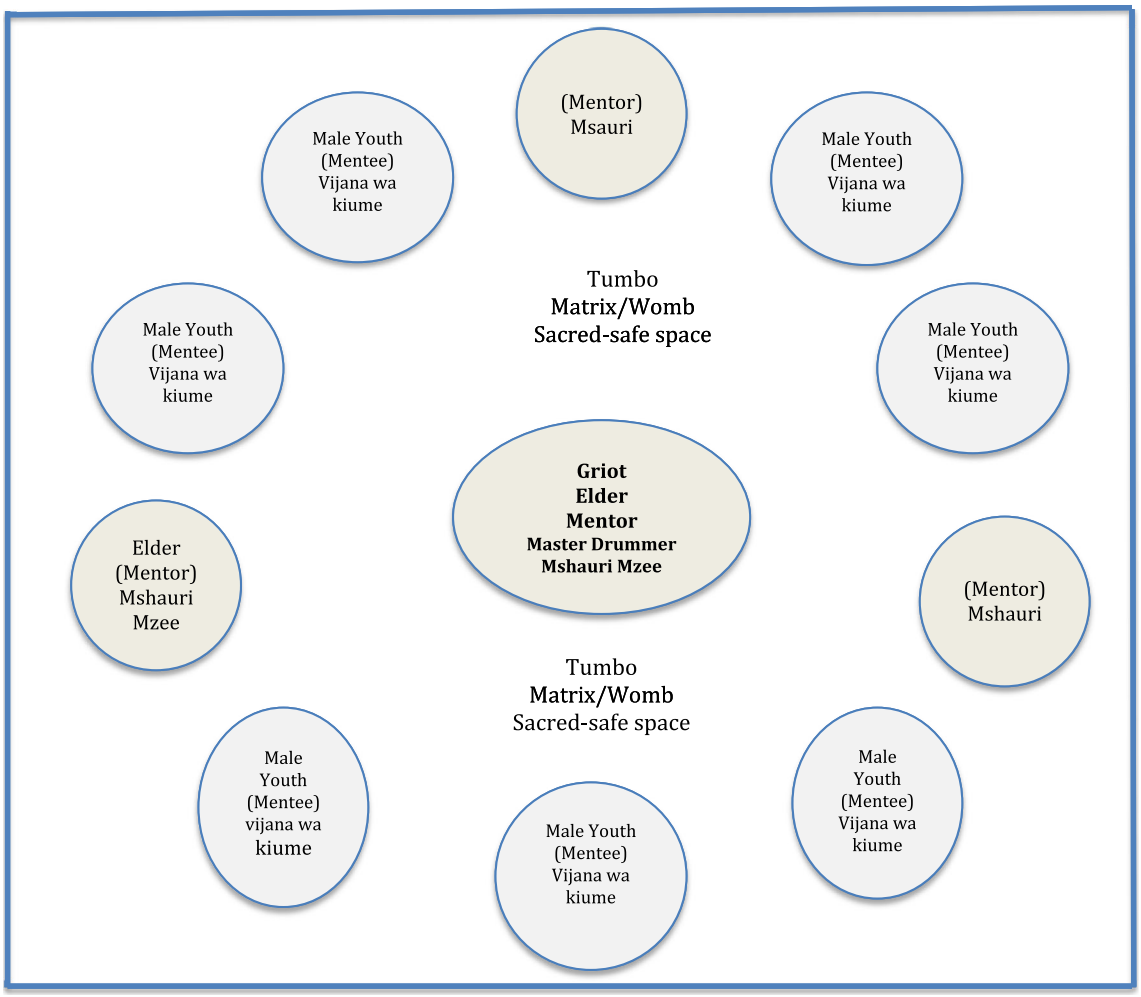

Fig. 3 Spir-rhythms drumming circle

rules and legal authority was also assessed. At the GRASSY site, all nineteen of the program participants agreed that they felt better equipped to make good decisions and stay out of trouble. All nineteen of the participants also agreed that they felt better prepared to make improvements in their lives. Overall, the participants felt that the program was a good fit for youth their age, and also indicated that the project would be helpful for younger African American boys.

Mentoring has grown in popularity and is widely accepted as a valuable support for at-risk children and youth. As for most social service programs, the majority of mentor program evaluations continue to be based on anecdotal information, participant reports and observations (Foster 2001). This joint program evaluation is based upon a review of the Umoja Project's implementation, informal discussions with partner site leaders, project participants, and researcher-mentors. The lessons learned are based on the challenges and successes encountered during the Umoja implementation experience. As a direct result of this study, the following recommendations are offered to improve upon the successfully delivery of culturally specific mentoring programs targeting African American male youth:

1. Spir-rhythms was a critical component of the EASI Project. Spir-rhythms provided energy, enjoyment, spurred curiosity, and facilitated a greater sense of purpose among youth. Spir-rhythms successfully created learning opportunities for mentors and youth program participants.
2. In order to ensure that a pool of African American male mentors are available to implement mentoring programs targeting African American male youth, it is imperative to develop, maintain, and nurture multiple higher education partnerships with historically Black

colleges and universities, majority white colleges and universities, community-based organizations, and faith-based institutions in communities of color.

3. African American females played critical and significant support roles behind the scenes including logistics, forming relationships with participants' parents and families, procurement of resources, organizing activities, scheduling rooms and space, and administrative assistance. Their importance must be recognized, valued, and included in the overall planning and implementation of the project.
4. Insertion or addition of African language especially group and individual names and Adinkra symbols into the activities could compliment or enhance the development of positive group and subsequent individual identities. Special symbols, language, group and personal names are important to youth as they contribute to their individuality, uniqueness, meaning, and understanding of themselves and the world around them.
5. Be certain to obtain adequate levels of financial resources requisite to successfully implement the mentoring programs. Under resourced efforts lead to unexpected disruptions in activities, negatively impact the quality of programming and ultimately failure in consistently providing high quality services to youth.
6. Incentives in the form of stipends for cultural brokers (griots), cultural artists (master drummers), and elder and junior mentors would enhance the projects' ability to attract, recruit, retain, and train a cadre of mentors willing to participate in the programs over time.
7. In addition to operating funds, procure adequate funding designated specifically to develop and conduct well-designed participatory and capacity building evaluation efforts in addition to operating funds.
8. At the beginning of the mentoring project, move away from a process evaluation approach to a scientific outcome evaluation by identifying measureable outcome goals along with timelines and strategies to track outcomes over time along with a long term follow-up.
9. The after school mentoring programs have notable positive impacts on school attendance, in school behavior and academic performance. Partner with the local school authorities to create funding streams to share the support of on-site after school mentoring program activities.

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