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Bolstering Belonging in BAM and Beyond: Youth Guidance's Becoming a Man (BAM) Program Components, Experiential Processes, and Mechanisms

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youth development

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Table of Contents

List of Figures

List of Tables

Executive Summary

In 2001, Youth Guidance launched the Becoming a Man (BAM) program in one Chicago Public School to "help young men navigate difficult circumstances that threaten their future. Program founder Anthony Ramirez-DiVittorio created a safe space for young men. . . to openly express themselves, receive support and develop the social and emotional skills necessary to succeed."[1] The purpose of this qualitative study is to inform understanding about how this development is happening in the context of BAM programming in Chicago Public Schools. Findings from this study illustrate that BAM is not a "one size fits all" program that focuses exclusively on a single developmental process or skill. Nor does BAM work through the exact same combination of components for all youth. Rather, BAM is a comprehensive in-school program that supports adolescent developmental processes, builds social and emotional capacities, and influences youth's sense of control over their own lives. In this study, we present key findings related to (1) core components of BAM programming, (2) descriptions of youth experiences in BAM, and (3) mechanisms by which BAM seems to be assisting youth development.

Key Findings

▪ **BAM programming fosters a sense of belonging for BAM youth that influences positive identity development and, for some youth, extends to a broader sense of belonging with other prosocial networks in school and their communities.**

▪ **Three key mechanisms foster a sense of belonging in BAM:**

1. *Behavioral habits related to the social norms of BAM* Youth strive to develop a social reputation through behavioral habits and adherence to the social norms of the BAM group. This often extends to other social groups such as school, sports, work, and family.

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[1] From Youth Guidance website, https://www.youth-guidance.org/BAM/, accessed on June 16, 2016.

2. *Agency (sense of control over one's future) and decision-making skills related to the core values and activities of BAM* Some core values are expressed by youth as anchor points for decision-making. Decision-making is practiced through group activities and youth ownership over group processes. In cases where youth describe their counselor as fostering positive relationships with teachers or family members in ways that actively involve youth in the negotiation process, youth express a sense of accomplishment and control that builds agency.

3. *Emotional intelligence and empathy related to the personal storytelling in BAM* Youth noted that check-ins, the relationship with their counselor and others in their BAM group, and some activities are key drivers of increased knowledge of their own emotions, how to describe their emotions with language, and how to deal with their emotions effectively. Some youth also report feeling a stronger sense of empathy for others as members of their BAM group share their experiences and emotions.

- **Five core components of BAM programming work together to foster youth program engagement and positive development:**
   1. *Safe Space.* Youth referred to the BAM room as a place within the school yet also distinct from the school. Youth noted that the counselor created a space that was welcoming and respectful. Without the ability of the counselor to create and maintain a safe space for group activities and individual meetings, none of the other aspects of BAM would be effective. It is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for BAM's effectiveness.

   2. *Core Values.* The core values are the framework of the curriculum and provide a shared language for participants. Activities and missions introduce and reinforce the ideas of the core values, providing youth with a variety of ways of experiencing and internalizing the core values. There was significant variation in how core values were identified and defined by youth and counselors.

   3. *Activities and Missions.* In addition to providing ways of experiencing, feeling, and thinking about the core values, activities and missions also serve to generate a sense of camaraderie and belonging. They also further the sense of responsibility and ownership that youth feel to keep the space safe and supportive. Counselors talked about activities and missions being designed to help youth see challenges in new ways, build communication skills, and foster group cohesion. Youth also recounted activities that were directly related to learning about one of the core values.

   4. *Check-Ins.* Almost unanimously, youth reported that the check-ins were the most rewarding part of BAM Many youth described this as being the only place where they got to be totally honest about some of the most challenging parts of their lives. Other youth reported that although they did not like to share their own challenges in the group, they felt relieved to know that others were feeling the same way about similar challenges. It is in the conversations about the check-ins that

youth describe feeling vulnerable and emotional, caring about others in the group who are struggling, and making efforts to support others in their group.

5. *Relationships.* The key aspect of the relationships built by youth through BAM lead to a sense of belonging with a special group. "When we have a meeting, it's just. . . seeing everybody around. . . like everybody's doing this. It's like I'm doing it for everybody, not just me," said an interviewed youth. All youth reported that they respected their counselor. Some youth reported that the consistency of the relationship with the counselor is essential to their emerging sense of self and increasing self-confidence.

- **Trust is a required aspect of BAM programming that helps youth experience and express emotional vulnerability.** Understanding and accepting this vulnerability is likely key to long-term authentic self-reflection, growth, and transformation.

- **Being a part of BAM comes with benefits and responsibilities.** Youth are aware of the status that being in BAM confers on them and of the opportunities that being a part of BAM provides them. They also report a sense of responsibility to BAM that accompanies the sense of belonging with BAM Some youth talk about not wanting to let down their counselor, let down other youth in BAM, or give BAM a bad reputation among school staff by misbehaving or not achieving academically.

- **A key function of the role of counselors is to develop relationships with a variety of personnel in the school.** Some counselors reported that this is a challenging endeavor or noted that there was no training provided by Youth Guidance to prepare them for this aspect of their work.

- **Counselors reported that the amount of data and administrative work required of them is burdensome.**

- **Counselors and youth provide many examples of interactions that take place outside of school hours.** Youth note that counselor accessibility is important to them and is related to feeling that their counselor cares about them. Counselors note that this work outside of school is an important element of BAM programming but they also highlight the challenges of setting boundaries with youth. Counselors want to offer youth the availability and consistency they know youth need while also maintaining a healthy balance between their professional and personal lives.

Introduction

The study on which this report is based, funded by Youth Guidance, was designed to describe the programmatic components of Youth Guidance's Becoming A Man (BAM) program and elicit key mechanisms that fostered youth engagement in the program and youth development more broadly. We first provide background on the BAM program. In the next section, we describe the study methods. Then, we provide a review of the literature on youth development. Next, we present the findings from our analyses. We end with programmatic and future research recommendations.

BAM Program Overview

BAM Background

In 2001, Youth Guidance launched the Becoming a Man (BAM) program in one Chicago Public School to "help young men navigate difficult circumstances that threaten their future. Program founder Anthony Ramirez-DiVittorio created a safe space for young men. . .to openly express themselves, receive support and develop the social and emotional skills necessary to succeed."[2] By the time of the start of this study, the 2015–16 academic year, the BAM program was in 48 schools in 33 Chicago communities and was serving more than 2,500 young men in seventh through twelfth grades.

BAM Program Model

The Youth Guidance website[3] describes BAM as being implemented by "highly trained counselors" who meet with youth to "provide life affirming supports during very crucial points in adolescent growth and development." According to Youth Guidance, all BAM counselors have a master's degree in a clinical field, a background in education and social and emotional learning, or years of professional experience working with youth in underserved communities. We refer to BAM counselors as "counselors" in this report, regardless of their clinical training or experience.

Counselors meet with groups of youth weekly during a noncore class period. At the beginning of the year, teachers are consulted and the BAM counselors support students making up any missed work.[4] Participating youth are excused from regular class to attend the BAM group, although youth who are

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[2] From Youth Guidance website: https://www.youth-guidance.org/BAM/; accessed on June 16, 2016.

[3] From Youth Guidance website: https://www.youth-guidance.org/BAM/; accessed on June 16, 2016.

[4] In a subset of schools, where leadership and/or teacher support has been lacking, BAM groups may rotate their meeting time in order to avoid missing too much of a particular class or they may meet during students' lunch period.

struggling in the class or during periods of testing in the class do not attend BAM Most BAM groups meet in a classroom dedicated to BAM although in some schools, BAM groups meet in another classroom or even in a corner of the school's lunchroom.

BAM Curriculum

The BAM curriculum centers around six core values and related activities as developed by the founder of BAM and the BAM Curriculum Specialists.[5] These values are introduced to youth in a specific order and are reinforced through group check-ins, group exercises (called "missions"), role modeling, and mentoring. The expectation is that youth practice behaviors that align with the core values during group meetings. Internalizing the core values is meant to "raise their aspirations for the future and develop a sense of personal responsibility" among participating youth.[6]

According to the founder of BAM, the six core values and their definitions are:

1. **Integrity**: My values equal my actions. I am a man of my word.

2. **Self-Determination**: I pursue my goals in the face of adversity. I learn to conquer self-defeating thoughts and overcome obstacles.

3. **Positive Anger-Expression:** I learn that anger is a normal emotion that needs to be expressed. How I express my anger is a choice, whether as a savage or as a warrior.

4. **Accountability**: I am responsible for the consequences of my actions whether intended or unintended. I take ownership for what I do and avoid projecting blame.

5. **Respect for Womanhood**: I learn how my words and actions devalue women, including those I love. I am more mindful and respectful in how I interact with women. I strive to be a self-liberator and not an oppressor.

6. **Visionary Goal-Setting**: I create a vision for myself, for who I am, and how I want to be seen in the world. I create a vision that is focused on making my community and the world a better place. I set goals based on my vision and make responsible choices that help me achieve those goals.

Check-ins take place regularly at the start of every BAM group meeting. Each member of the group, including the counselor, shares how they are feeling, using the acronym "PIES": physically (P), intellectually (I), emotionally (E), and spiritually (S). For the rest of the period, youth participate in group

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[5] The BAM Curriculum Specialist's role is to ensure the quality and fidelity of the BAM program. The Curriculum Specialists accomplish this via three main processes: 1) training the BAM Counselors in the BAM Curricula; 2) providing on-site coaching and feedback to BAM Counselors on the quality of their work; and 3) developing and refining the BAM Curricula.

[6] From Youth Guidance website: https://www.youth-guidance.org/BAM/; accessed on June 16, 2016.

missions, watch videos, or engage in discussions around a topic presented by the counselor. Group missions are designed to challenge youth to approach problems differently and improve social skills. The counselor challenges the group to reach a goal working within a certain set of parameters and, through trial and error, youth learn the way to reaching the goal. The missions are challenging enough that youth generally fail at first. Through additional attempts, youth process what worked and what did not work, leaders emerge, communication increases, and the group successfully completes the mission. Counselors are provided a number of videos that they can use to introduce topics, invoke emotions, and generate discussion among the group. In some BAM sessions, the counselor presents a core value in a more formal pedagogical format. The counselor uses a white board to present ideas and record responses from youth. At the end of the BAM sessions, the group participates in a check-out process, often focused on the core value or experience of the day's activity, and the counselor may give the youth "homework" to work on before their next session.

One-on-one Interactions between Counselors and Youth

In addition to the group sessions, counselors also engage with youth individually. This happens in a variety of ways. Counselors may ask to meet with a youth who is struggling academically or with family or peer issues. Youth can also choose, on their own, to meet with a counselor individually or spend time in the BAM room during their lunch or a free class period. Some counselors walk the halls and visit the lunchroom when they are not leading a BAM group session and may spend time after school hours watching BAM youth's sports practices, games, or other after-school activities. Counselors may meet with a youth and their family or engage the family when they come to school for another reason, often for a disciplinary issue involving their child. Sometimes, counselors check in by phone or text with individual youth over the weekend.

Counselors and the School

Counselors broker relationships with representatives of the school by introducing themselves to teachers, security personnel, support staff, and school leadership. In some cases, counselors participate in regular meetings involving school personnel.

Research on BAM

Starting in the 2009–10 academic year, Urban Labs at the University of Chicago began a series of randomized controlled trials to study the impact of BAM on academic and behavioral outcomes. They found increases in GPA and persistence in school (Heller et al., 2013), reduction in involvement in crime (Heller et al., 2013; Heller et al., 2016), and reduction in justice-system involvement (Heller et al., 2016) as a result of participating in BAM These findings illustrate the power of involvement in BAM on the trajectories of BAM participants. However, these important studies do not explore associations between

BAM program components and the experiential processes of participants to elicit mechanisms at work in BAM programming that lead to these impressive impacts. This qualitative study was designed to do exactly that.

Study Methods

Research Motivation and Design

While Youth Guidance's BAM program has undergone randomized control trials designed to measure *if* the program is impacting youth outcomes such as academic achievement and delinquent behavior—and these studies have consistently shown significantly statistic, positive impacts (Heller et al., 2013; Heller et al., 2016)—a qualitative study aims to illustrate *how* the program is working. The motivation and purpose of this qualitative study is to bring to light the components of the program, show how they interact, and suggest possible mechanisms that make BAM effective. The research involved interviews with a purposefully selected sample of youth who participated in BAM and counselors who led BAM groups during the 2014–15 academic year. The research approach was guided by the following research goals:

1. Describe:

    o Key components of B.A.M

    o Relationships between BAM key components

    o How youth feel about their experience being in BAM

    o How counselors feel about their experience with BAM

2. Explore how BAM is working, with a focus on the:

    o Relationship between youth and counselor

    o Group processes and relationships among youth

    o Patterns in BAM curriculum and processes

3. Explore potential mechanisms by which BAM is working on developmental processes of participants

4. Present the opportunities and challenges to implementing BAM

Interviews were semi-structured in order to allow youth and counselors to lead the discussion. The interviews included prompts that sought information about experiences with various BAM components, including check-ins, core values, activities and missions, field trips and special events, and relationships with counselors and other youth in the BAM group. Protocols also asked if participation in BAM influenced the way youth thought or felt about themselves, their futures, or their social networks. Protocols for counselor interviews sought information about training and supervision, key roles, and engagement with youth and school personnel. Protocols were reviewed by Youth Guidance staff and the BAM Evaluation Advisory Committee (EAC) and updated accordingly. The University of Chicago's Institutional Review Board (IRB) and the Chicago Public Schools' Research Review Board (RRB) approved the study in May 2015.

Sample Design

The original research design called for qualitative analysis of semi-structured interviews with a purposeful sample of youth. Researchers aimed to interview a total of 40 youth for the study: 20 youth who were in their first year of BAM programming in the 2014–15 school year and 20 youth who were in their second year of BAM during the same time. Researchers also planned to interview 10 counselors. The pool of youth and counselors from which interviews were sought was purposefully varied along a number of dimensions that were thought to be relevant to how BAM was working. These included Youth Guidance's assessment of BAM's integration in the school and of the quality of BAM implementation, counselor characteristics, and youth attendance as a proxy for engagement (see Table 1).

Table 1. BAM Program Dimensions and Definitions of Dimension Categories for Sample Selection

Dimension	High	Medium	Low
BAM Integration in the School *(Youth Guidance assessment)*	School leadership, staff, and teachers actively supporting BAM; counselor integrated into school processes and communications	School leadership, staff, and teachers not hindering BAM implementation but not strongly supporting	School leadership, staff, and/or teachers putting up roadblocks to BAM implementation
Overall BAM Implementation *(Youth Guidance assessment)*	BAM groups meet regularly, follow curriculum, counselor meets with youth outside of group meetings	BAM group is following curriculum	N/A
Counselor Experience with B.A.M	Counselor has at least three (3+) years' experience as counselor	Counselor has less than three (< 3) years' experience as counselor	N/A
Counselor Formal Credentials	Counselor has a master's degree in a clinical field	Counselor has a bachelor's degree in a clinical field	Counselor does not have a bachelor's degree or the degree is not in a clinical field
Counselor Clinical Strength *(Youth Guidance assessment)*	Counselor exhibits advanced level of clinical skill	Counselor exhibits developmental level of clinical skill	N/A
BAM Bells & Whistles	(YES) Additional components such as rites of passage weekend and college trip to DC	N/A	(NO) No additional components to BAM groups
Counselor Transition	(YES) Youth in counselor's group experienced a counselor transition either during or between school years	N/A	(NO) Youth in counselor's group did not experience any counselor transition
Youth Experience with BAM	Youth in second year of BAM in 2014–15 school year (Y2)	N/A	Youth in first year of BAM in 2014–15 school year (Y1)
Youth Engagement with BAM *(Youth Guidance youth attendance records)*	Attends 80% or more of BAM groups in 2014-2015	Attends between 50% and 79% of BAM groups in 2014-105	N/A

The pool for youth interviews included 334 youth, spread across the targeted dimension categories. The outreach goal for interviews was to proportionally mirror the dimensions of the sample pool in the sample of youth interviewed. To do so, a limited number of youth were targeted in 10 selected BAM groups in nine different schools that maximized the variation in the dimension categories defined above. Because of challenges to the outreach process, we were unable to follow the initial process for targeting youth for interviews. The following section describes the actual outreach process and the section after that describes the analytic sample.

Youth Outreach

Youth Guidance distributed information packets to parents of youth identified as potential study participants in May 2015. Sealed information packets were given to counselors, along with explicit

instructions about how to hand them out to and talk about the study with potential study participants.[7] Information packets contained a letter describing the research, two copies of a parental consent form, and an envelope with the name of the counselor and school. The letter and consent form instructed the parent or guardian to indicate whether or not they gave permission for researchers to contact and interview the youth; to keep the letter and one copy of the consent form; and to return, sealed in the enclosed envelope, the other copy of the consent form. Parents were asked to return the consent form even if they did not consent for their son to be interviewed for the study.

A member of the research team picked up returned parental consent envelopes from counselors on a rolling basis as they came back to the counselor.[8] The research team developed a tracking and targeting process to prioritize outreach to youth based on the sample design.

By the end of June 2015, Chapin Hall received 64 parental consents (19% of the 340 total potential parental consents). Of these parental consents, 49 parents provided consent for the interview and the audio recording of the interview. Over the summer, Chapin Hall research team reached out to all youth with parental consent to participate in the interview, reached and interviewed 13 youth (27% of the total "yes" parental consents received), coded all 13 interviews, and began initial analysis. It is important to note that Youth Guidance had full control over the distribution of parental consents.

In the fall of 2015, Chapin Hall researchers interviewed all 10 counselors (one of whom was the developer of BAM). In an effort to obtain additional parental consents, Youth Guidance asked Chapin Hall to visit BAM groups in November 2015 to introduce the study and answer any questions. During these November visits, Chapin Hall researchers developed and dropped off parental consent packets to counselors. Between December 2015 and March 2016, 23 additional "yes" parental consents were returned to the research team and an additional 16 youth interviewed (70% of the total new "yes" parental consents received). Outreach for youth interviews was terminated on March 31, 2016. The final sample for this study includes 29 youth and 10 counselors.

Youth Sample

Rather than obtaining a sample of 40 youth across 10 different groups in 9 different schools, we obtained a sample of 29 youth across 8 different groups in 7 different schools. Despite this adaptation, we were

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[7] This instruction sheet was developed by the research team and Youth Guidance. Youth Guidance delivered these instructions to the counselors who had youth targeted for participation in the study.

[8] On some occasions the Counselor reached out to the research team directly to inform them that they had envelopes to be picked up but the research team also periodically emailed Youth Guidance to check and see if any envelopes were ready to be picked up.

able to obtain similar distribution of responses across the defined dimensions. Figure 1, below, shows the distribution of dimensions in both the youth sample pool and the actual youth sample.

Figure 1. Sample Distributions Characteristics across Sample Dimensions for Youth Interviews

Youth Sample Distributions
Original Sample Pool (n = 334)
Actual Sample (n = 29)

Other Sample Characteristics

Bells and Whistles

Fourteen youth in the sample participated in BAM groups that included what Youth Guidance refers to as "bells and whistles" as part of the programming. These "bells and whistles" described by youth included an overnight trip for a tour of HBCU institutions.[9] Only a few youth mentioned this event; one noted that only certain youth were invited to participate although he didn't know the reason why. Most of the youth who reported going on this trip said that they enjoyed it but it didn't really impact their thinking about college. One youth reported that he appreciated BAM taking him on the college tour but that the fact that

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[9] Historically Black Colleges and Universities

the colleges were all HBCUs was a turn-off. He opened up to the interviewer, "I don't have any problem with it but they were HBCU, they were like all African American kids, and there were only like three Hispanic kids. . . I would've liked more Hispanic people, white people, just like all around."

Another of the "bells and whistles" was being invited to watch a Chicago Bulls basketball game from a skybox and meeting Bulls players. The one youth who described the Bulls game highlighted the fact that it was a chance to interact with other BAM groups, which made him feel a broader connection to BAM He also excitedly recounted one of the Bulls' players participating in a check-in and discussed how it humanized this sports hero and gave him hope that he could come through difficult circumstances to achieve greatness in his life.

Year in BAM Programming

During the 2014–15 academic year, 11 youth were in their first year and 18 were in their second year of BAM programming. Of the 11 first-year youth in our sample, only one was interviewed before he began a second year of BAM programming because of the challenges with youth outreach, noted above. All other "first-year" youth were interviewed after at least one semester in their second year of BAM programming. Although we attempted to explore variation across themes based on exposure to BAM, the fact that we had interviewed only one youth prior to exposure to a second year of BAM programming complicated our attempts at these types of analyses. When we talk about "first-year" and "second-year" youth in this report, we are referring to the youth's status in the 2014–15 academic year. In reality, almost all of the "first-year" youth were at least halfway through their second year of BAM at the time they were interviewed.

Youth Attendance

Youth Guidance provided the research team with an outreach sample that included variation in youth attendance as a proxy for youth engagement in BAM programming. Youth who attended at least 75 percent of BAM sessions in the 2014–15 academic year were considered "high engagement." Youth who attended at least 50 percent but fewer than 75 percent of BAM sessions were considered "low engagement." Youth who attended fewer than 50 percent of BAM sessions were not included in the outreach sample. Counselors were also encouraged to choose up to two youth who had a particularly unique experience with BAM Our analytic sample included 18 "high engagement" youth, ten "low engagement" youth, and one "special circumstance" youth.

It should be noted that this is an imperfect proxy for "engagement in BAM" because some youth who attended BAM sessions less frequently than others may have had more challenges to attending related to

family responsibilities or school policies on lateness.[10] Nevertheless, they may have actually been more active and engaged participants than those who attended BAM sessions more frequently.

Counselor Transitions

In our sample pool, we included youth who had experienced a transition in their counselor, either during the academic year or between academic years. Youth Guidance let us know of one additional counselor transition after the 2014–15 academic year that involved youth in our sampling pool. Two (2) of the youth in our analytic sample fell into this category but a greater number of youth ended up reporting this experience during the interview (15). This may be due to the timing of our interviews with youth, many of which happened after the transition to another school year.

Counselor Sample

The pool for counselor interviews included 15 counselors, including the developer of the BAM program who served as a counselor for many years and continues to be involved in directing the recruitment, training, and oversight of current counselors.

Analytic Approach

As interviews were conducted, transcripts were reviewed by the research team and divided for coding of predetermined themes as well as open coding (two coders for each transcript for the initial 5 transcripts). Predetermined themes included discussions of: the relationship with the counselor; the relationship with others in their BAM group; each of the core values in the curriculum; group activities; ways of experiencing themselves; and changes in the way they thought about things, people, and themselves. The research team met weekly to review emerging themes and develop an initial codebook. During the first five weeks, these meetings entailed all three coders reviewing the same two documents and discussing themes and potential codes. This process continued with iterative transcript review, coding and discussion of codes, periodic double coding (three additional transcripts), and codebook adaptation until saturation of theme was reached (at 18 youth interviews). A total of 29 youth interview transcripts were coded by the research team and included in the analysis. The codebook was adapted for coding counselor interviews with two double-coded for intercoder reliability. A total of 10 counselor interviews were coded by the research team and included in the analysis.

Two researchers met weekly during the analysis process, reviewing initial analyses, challenging assumptions and seeking disconfirming evidence, and developing subsequent analytic actions. Analysis of

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[10] Some Chicago Public Schools' policy on lateness to school prohibits the school from refusing the student admittance to the school or academic classes but it leaves sanctions to the discretion of individual school leadership. Sanctions can include in-school detention or restrictions on attending non-academic activities, including BAM

the youth and counselor data involved constant comparison between codes within and across interviews to elicit the relationships between themes. In addition, researchers conducted comparative analyses exploring variation within codes across youth and counselor characteristics and dimensions of programming. However, these analyses did not yield any general patterns across the themes we explored, suggesting that variation may relate to counselor practices or youth characteristics or some combination of both. This is not to say that patterns in themes related to variation in sampling dimensions do not exist. More effective outreach or a greater number of interviews may have provided the sample needed to uncover these patterns.

Youth Development Literature

In order to understand the mechanisms by which BAM may influence developmental trajectories, one natural starting point is the literature on youth development. This review focuses on two key processes that occur during adolescence—identity development and skill development—as well as the influences of relevant factors, such as trauma, inequality, and the relationships with peers and caring adults on those developmental processes.

Identity Development

According to Erikson's adolescent identity theory, self-exploration is a key process of adolescence (Erikson, 1968). During this time, youth begin to define themselves increasingly through their personal beliefs and standards (Steinberg & Morris, 2001; Harter, 1998), suggesting that fostering change in or reinforcing personal beliefs and standards at this stage of life can influence later trajectories. The self-concept that adolescents develop during this stage of their lives includes imaginings of past, present, and future identities (Howard, 2000; Neisser, 1988, 1997; Oyserman, 2001; Oyserman & James, 2011). Erikson's developmental perspective highlights the inherent psychosocial and evolving components of identity development where the individual experiences "a sense of psychosocial well-being: a sense of knowing where one is going, and an inner assuredness of anticipated recognition from those who count" through the process of identity development and consolidation (Erikson, 1968, p. 164).

Erikson's theory posits that adolescents who are unable to develop a strong sense of personal identity encounter confusion in regards to future adult roles (1968). This confusion is associated with a host of negative economic outcomes (Gushue, Scanlan, Pantzer, & Clarke, 2006; Hirschi & Lage, 2007; Holland, Johnston, & Asama, 1993) as well as negative well-being outcomes (Christiansen, 1999; Kroger, 2007; Raskin, 1985; Vondracek, 1995; Munson, 1992; Saunders, Peterson, Sampson, & Reardon, 2000). Without a strong self-concept in the present it may be challenging to imagine a future self and set the goals to get there. Oyserman and James (2011) suggest that imagining a future identity that is more congruent with the conceptualization of the present self, including concrete strategies for getting there,

can lead one to persist in the attainment of that future self, rather than give it up when facing obstacles. These identities are social products, influenced not only by the individual who imagines them, but also through a social context of relationships and culture (Oyserman & James, 2011; Erikson, 1968).

Based on a review of the empirical literature, Oyserman and James (2011) argue that proximal possible identities, those that would exist in the more immediate foreseeable future, can serve to motivate an individual towards attaining pragmatic goals that align with the desired possible identity. Possible identities that are perceived to be most immediately attainable are more likely to influence behaviors in the present. A conceptualization of the future as beginning later is less likely to motivate current behaviors than the understanding that the future is directly connected to the present. However, possible identities of the distant future can motivate the development of values, which are less restricted by present obstacles or limitations (Oyserman & James, 2011, p. 129). Possible identities can be either positive imaginings that are desired or negative imaginings that are feared. A study by Oyserman and Markus (1990a, 1990b) found that teens who reported more balanced (positive and negative) possible identities also reported less delinquent behavior. This study also found that the possible identities of 13-to-16 year olds focused primarily on school and extracurricular activities. Other studies have shown that teens who reported more balanced possible identities also used more strategies to work on school-focused goals, were more engaged with school, and obtained better grades (Oyserman, Bybee, & Terry, 2006; Oyserman, Bybee, Terry, & Hart-Johnson, 2004; Oyserman, Coon, & Kemmelmeier, 2002; Oyserman, Gant, & Ager, 1995).

Nagaoka et al. (2014) draw on Bandura (2006) to develop a concept of an integrated identity as the foundation for the development of the agency that youth need in order to succeed in achieving their goals. They proposed five questions for thinking about the factors that contribute to integrated identity: "(1) Who am I and what do I value?; (2) What is my purpose and what are my goals and do I know what I need to accomplish them?; (3) Do I believe I can accomplish them?; (4) Am I capable of accomplishing them; and (5) Who are my allies and how can they help me?" (Nagaoka et al., 2014, p. 16). Youths' reflection on topics such as these contributes to the meaning-making process of constructing a narrative identity to connect their past experiences with an imagined future (McAdams, 2013; Lansing, 2016a). Narrative identity can provide a sense of stability, allowing one to adapt and adjust as needed to changing situations and times without losing one's sense of self (McAdams, 2013, Lansing, 2016b). According to McAdams (2013), there are three layers of identity that develop—first, the self as social actor emerges; second, the self as a motivated agent emerges; and third, the self as an autobiographical author emerges. By early adolescence, all three layers have emerged and continue to interact with each other as they develop throughout the life course. This timing of the emergence of the three layers of self suggests that

adolescence is the most appropriate time for interventions that focus on identity development: any earlier and the self as autobiographical author is not yet a part of the constellation of self. It also suggests that layer of self that is essential to intervention is the self as autobiographical author. By influencing the stories about self, interventions can affect changes in the other two layers as well.

A likely mechanism through which positive identity development occurs is in the sense of belonging that an individual feels with his or her social group. A challenge for many low-income youth who have been exposed to violence in their communities is to foster a sense of belonging with a social network that supports a future identity that involves self-confidence, self-sufficiency, and satisfaction in social arenas that require different behaviors than those exhibited (and sometimes rewarded) in low-income communities. Individuals must first embrace the idea of social mobility in dominant society before aligning their sense of self with an imagined future that is very different from their historical past. For individuals seeking upward social mobility, it has been long understood that their attempts at repositioning themselves in society are accompanied by additional strains such as disruptions in established social relationships and uncertainty in integrating into new social worlds (Durkheim, 1951; Sorokin, 1927). In essence, they feel as if they don't belong in this new world—and that feeling has real consequences. The social-psychological literature on stereotype threat illustrates empirically that there are real consequences to how an individual believes they "should" perform and how they actually do perform that can be mediated by conditions of the setting (see Steele, 2010 for a review of the literature on stereotype threat). A recent study (Yeager, 2013) illustrated that fostering a sense of belonging for first-time college students at an elite four-year university increased low SES students' academic achievement without affecting higher SES students' academic achievement. Osterman (2000) identifies belongingness as a psychological need that is associated with motivation and success in secondary school.

This theoretical and empirical literature highlights the salience of identity development during adolescence as a mechanism by which interventions can impact life trajectories for at-risk youth. This work needs to be done during adolescence—not only is it not too late, it is the most appropriate time for interventions aimed at influencing the sense of self. This research also highlights the importance of social interactions and belonging in a social network in the identity formation process. As such, fostering meaningful relationships will be an integral part of any effective intervention for youth that aims to promote positive identity development.

Skill Development

During adolescence, youth begin developing the skills they will rely on in their adult lives. In recent years, the gap between the skills that young people have and the skills that are required for entry-level jobs has been widening (International Youth Foundation, 2013; Roderick, Coca, Moeller, & Kelley-

Kemple, 2013). There has been increasing demand from business and political leaders for schools to better prepare youth for the labor market by helping them develop the skills needed to succeed in today's labor market (Pellegrino & Hilton, 2013; International Youth Foundation, 2013). In order to address this need, the National Research Council (NRC)[11] formed a committee charged with defining and making recommendations for the development of these skills. This committee classified the types of necessary transferable skills into three domains: cognitive, interpersonal, and intrapersonal (Pellegrino & Hilton, 2013; Robles, 2012). The committee wrote the following about these three domains in Pellegrino & Hilton (2013, pp 3–4):

> The cognitive domain involves reasoning and memory. . . [it] includes three clusters of competencies: cognitive processes and strategies, knowledge, and creativity. These clusters include competencies, such as critical thinking, information literacy, reasoning and argumentation, and innovation.
>
> [The] interpersonal domain involves expressing ideas, and interpreting and responding to messages from others. . . [it] includes two clusters of competencies: teamwork and collaboration and leadership. These clusters include competencies, such as communication, collaboration, responsibility, and conflict resolution.
>
> The intrapersonal domain involves the capacity to manage one's behavior and emotions to achieve one's goals (including learning goals). . . [it] includes three clusters of competencies: intellectual openness, work ethic and conscientiousness, and positive core self-evaluation. These clusters include competencies, such as flexibility, initiative, appreciation for diversity, and metacognition (the ability to reflect on one's own learning and make adjustments accordingly).

The NRC, in Pellegrino and Hilton (2013, p. 9), recommended the following research-based components be included in programs that aim to develop transferable competencies. It should be noted that this recommendation is primarily based on research on the cognitive domain, and the NRC hypothesizes that these same methods will promote transferability in the interpersonal and intrapersonal domains. However, more research in these areas is needed.

> **Use multiple and varied representations of concepts and tasks**, such as diagrams, numerical and mathematical representations, and simulations, combined with activities and guidance that support mapping across the varied representations.

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[11] The National Research Council was organized in 1916 by the National Academy of Sciences, a private, nonprofit, self-perpetuating society of distinguished scholars engaged in scientific and engineering research, dedicated to the furtherance of science and technology and to their use for the general welfare. Upon the authority of the charter granted by the Congress in 1863, the Academy has a mandate that requires it to advise the federal government on scientific and technical matters. The Council has become the principal operating agency of the Academy in providing services to the government, the public, and the scientific and engineering communities. More information is available at www.national-academies.org.

Encourage elaboration, questioning, and explanation—for example, prompting students who are reading a history text to think about the author's intent and/or to explain specific information and arguments as they read—either silently to themselves or to others.

Engage learners in challenging tasks, while also supporting them with guidance, feedback, and encouragement to reflect on their own learning processes and the status of their understanding.

Teach with examples and cases, such as modeling step by step how students can carry out a procedure to solve a problem and using sets of worked examples.

Prime student motivation by connecting topics to students' personal lives and interests, engaging students in collaborative problem solving, and drawing attention to the knowledge and skills students are developing, rather than grades or scores.

Use formative assessment to: (a) make learning goals clear to students; (b) continuously monitor, provide feedback, and respond to students' learning progress; and (c) involve students in self- and peer assessment.

Although the research investigating interpersonal and intrapersonal skills is much more limited than research into cognitive skills, some studies have successfully demonstrated links between programs that work to develop these skills and positive outcomes. In a meta-analysis of after-school and social and emotional learning programs (SEL), Durlak, Weissberg, and Pachan (2010) found that programs that (1) provide a sequenced, step-by-step training approach; (2) emphasize active forms of learning, so that youth can practice new skills; (3) focus specific time and attention on skill training; and (4) clearly define goals, showed statistically significant relationships with self-perceptions (including measures of self-esteem, self-concept, self-efficacy, and racial/cultural identity or pride), bonding to school, positive social behavior, problem behaviors, drug use, achievement test scores, grades, and attendance. In another meta-analysis of school-based SEL programs, Durlak, Dymnicki, Taylor, Weissberg, and Schellinger (2011) found that social and emotional learning programs with the above four characteristics improved outcomes for social and emotional skills, attitudes toward self and others, positive social behaviors, conduct problems, emotional distress, and academic performance. Those programs with a higher quality of implementation fidelity were most likely to impact these outcomes.

Using National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY79) data, Heckman, Stixrud, and Urzua (2006) linked measures of locus of control[12] (the degree to which individuals feel they have control over their lives) and self-esteem[13] (the degree to which individuals feel a sense of self-worth) in adolescence to

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[12] Measured by the Rotter Locus of Control Scale (Rotter, 1966)

[13] Measured by the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965)

positive adult outcomes at age 30. Outcomes included competencies on schooling decisions, wages, employment, work experience, choice of occupation, and a wide variety of high-risk behaviors.

In an age of growing economic inequality (Goldin & Katz, 2009), promoting the positive development of and access to opportunities for those at the bottom of the socio-economic divide grows increasingly important. Since much of the adolescent development research has focused on affluent white youth, it is important to consider the ways the intersection of socioeconomic status, racial, environmental, and other inequalities might influence skill development (Steinberg & Morris, 2001).

Effects of Trauma and Inequalities on Development

There is increasing evidence of the complex developmental and societal consequences of exposure to childhood trauma and adversity (Cloitre et al., 2009; Felitti et al., 1998; Hodges et al., 2013). Research shows that exposure to violence and other types of trauma can lead to attachment issues, regressive behavior, anxiety and depression, aggression, future victimization, and perpetuation of cycles of intergenerational violence (Finkelhor et al., 2009). These issues can present severe challenges to developing trusting relationships.

In addition to the higher likelihood of exposure to trauma, youth who live in segregated minority communities find themselves forced to navigate through structural inequalities and cultural differences between their community and the dominant society. This may lead to confusion, complicating their ability to imagine positive future possible identities to successfully bridge both worlds within the context of negative stereotyping and systemic inequalities in access to opportunity (Steele, 1997). In addition, the process of seeking a future possible identity that diverges from one's family and community brings with it disruptions to the individual's established social relationships and support network (Durkheim, 1951; Sorokin, 1927). Indeed, the behavioral norms associated with the social worlds of school and the neighborhood for disadvantaged youth are not only different but often contradict each other. Behaviors that are sanctioned or incentivized on the streets are prohibited or detrimental in the school setting. Heller et al. (2016) posit that since disadvantaged youth experience greater situational variability, their automatic responses may be better suited to some situations than others, and by using cognitive behavioral approaches to slowing down their response times they may be able to better consider how, for example, a disagreement with a teacher at school may require a different reaction than an altercation on the street.

Developmental Relationships

It has been posited that developmental relationships during adolescence can strongly influence life trajectories and outcomes (Li & Julian, 2012; Search Institute, 2014). Li and Julian (2012) posit that these relationships are in fact the "key ingredient" that make interventions for vulnerable youth work or not.

The concept of "developmental relationships" applies to both relationships with peers and with influential adults, although the salient features may differ between these types of developmental relationships.

Peer relationships

It is during adolescence that youth are most influenced by their peers (Brown, 1990; Steinberg & Morris, 2001). Individuals put more stock in the opinions of their peers during adolescence than at any other life stage and, in some circumstances, peers have more influence on adolescents' attitudes, activities, and emotional well-being than other individuals (Brown & Larson, 2009). Adolescents spend more time with friends and less with parents. During this time, peer friendships can become more intimate and communicative as youth become more trusting and self-disclose more (Steinberg & Morris, 2001). Moreover, adolescents choose friends who are similar to themselves in terms of behaviors, attitudes, and identities (Akers, Jones, & Coyl, 1998; Steinberg & Morris, 2001), and the similarity of these friendship groups is both a product of and influence on friendship selection. Peers can influence youth in both positive and negative ways (Hodges, Boivin, Vitaro, & Bukowski, 1999; Steinberg & Morris, 2001). While self-perceptions of peer relations can be unreliable, inferences about the significant impact of peer influences may be exaggerated in the empirical literature. Kandel and Andrews (1987) found that adolescents tended to overestimate the congruence between themselves and their peers. Prinstein and Wang (2005) found that adolescents overestimated peer involvement in "negative" activities such as drug use, sexual activity, or neglecting school work. Moreover, configurations of peer relationships are less stable than relationships that adolescents have with others, such as family members, teachers, and coaches (Brown & Larson, 2009). Nevertheless, peers can influence each other's decision-making in important ways, which can result in momentary behaviors that lead to a lifetime of consequences.

Adolescents are also highly attuned to status differentiations in friendships (Updegraff et al., 2004) and within peer groups (Dunphy, 1969; Adler & Adler, 1998). Understanding and successfully navigating these peer relationships requires further development of social and emotional skills during adolescence. Among adolescents, sociometric data of social acceptance has been found to be a good indicator of social adjustment (Cillessen & Mayeux, 2004). Stronger social adjustment may be an indicator of an individual's ability to read and respond to social cues and motivation to enact the types of behaviors that they know will be rewarded with higher status among their peers.

In addition to the influence of individual friendships, feeling a sense of belonging in the school community also facilitates positive development (Osterman, 2000). Peer groups, in the form of crowds and cliques, influence identity development and self-esteem (Brown, Mory, & Kinney, 1994; Steinberg & Morris, 2001), especially when the crowd or clique enjoys a higher social status (Brown & Lohr, 1987; Steinberg & Morris, 2001). Crowds influence behaviors as well, through the norms that they establish

(Sussman et al., 1994; Sussman, Pokhrel, Ashmore, & Brown, 2007; Steinberg & Morris, 2001). This dynamic can make in-school interventions during adolescence particularly tricky where the in-school norms, disciplinary policies, and academic tracking structures contribute to black and Latino minority youth's equating school success with "acting white" and creating a subculture that embraces and enacts the behaviors and attitudes that inhibit success in school (Tyson, 2011).

Mentoring

The mentoring literature shows that positive mentoring relationships that are close, consistent, and enduring have been modestly associated with a variety of positive developmental, behavioral, social, emotional, and academic outcomes (DuBois, Portillo, Rhodes, Silverthorn, & Valentine, 2011; DuBois & Karcher, 2005; Rhodes, 2002; Zimmerman, Bingenheimer, & Behrendt , 2005; Tierney, Grossman, & Resch, 1995). One possible explanation for the modest effects of mentorship on the social, emotional, mental health, and academic outcomes is that not every mentor relationship influences these outcomes positively. In order for mentoring to be effective, a strong bond must form between mentor and mentee through a relationship based in mutual trust, understanding, and respect (Rhodes & DuBois, 2006). Even when these factors are present, mentor relationships can still negatively affect youth if expectations are unclear or unfulfilled, if personalities or interests are incompatible, if the mentor's behaviors are not appropriate for the youth's developmental needs, if the duration of the relationship is briefer than expected, or if contact is infrequent or irregular (Rhodes & DuBois, 2006).

Some factors that have been shown to influence the closeness of the relationship between mentor and mentee include empathy and authenticity (Spencer, 2006), having fun together (Spencer & Rhodes, 2005), as well as compatible personalities, interests, and expectations (Larose, Bernier, & Soucy, 2005; Madia & Lutz, 2004). Other factors that can influence the closeness of the mentoring relationship include the background characteristics of the mentor, the ability of the mentor to meet the mentee's developmental needs, and the context of the program and community in which the mentoring relationship occurs (Rhodes & DuBois, 2006). Similarity in ethnic or racial background has not been found to be a significant factor in the mentoring relationship (DuBois et al., 2011; Rhodes & Dubois, 2006; Rhodes, Reddy, Grossman, & Lee, 2002; Sanchez & Colon, 2005).

In Rhodes and Lowe's (2008) review of the mentoring literature, they found specific mentor characteristics that can also contribute to a mentor's effectiveness with youth. These characteristics include an ability to understand socioeconomic and cultural influences on relationships (Hirsch, 2005), the mentors' sense of their ability in their role (DuBois, Neville, Parra, & Pugh-Lilly, 2002; Hirsch, 2005; Karcher, Nakkula, & Harris, 2005; Parra, DuBois, Neville, Pugh-Lilly, & Povinelli, 2002), the ability to model healthy habits (Rhodes & DoBois, 2006; Hamilton & Hamilton, 2005) and the ability to refrain

from unhealthy behaviors (Rhodes & DuBois, 2006; Beam, Gil-Rivas, Greenberger, & Chen, 2002). Another important practice that has been found to lead to better relationship quality is a youth-centered approach to mentorship, which focuses on the mentee's developmental needs as opposed to being driven solely by mentor interests. Youth-centered goal setting has also been found to be a helpful mentoring practice (Rhodes & Lowe, 2008; Rhodes & DuBois, 2006).

Consistency and duration are also important dimensions of the mentoring relationship (DuBois et al., 2011; Rhodes & DuBois, 2006). An empirical study of mentorship in the Big Brothers, Big Sisters program found that those youth who experienced longer-term mentoring relationships had better outcomes (Grossman & Rhodes, 2002; Rhodes & DuBois, 2006; Rhodes & Lowe, 2008). DuBois et al.'s (2011) meta-analysis of 73 mentorship evaluations did not produce the same findings, and they suggest that the *fulfillment of the expectation of the duration* may be more important than the duration itself.

Some studies have also shown the ability of youth to transfer the positivity of a mentoring relationship to relationships with others, such as parents, teachers, and peers (Rhodes & Lowe, 2008; Tierney, Grossman, & Resch, 1995). Studies have also shown that the effectiveness of mentoring can be enhanced by connecting with parents, peers, or other important people in the youth's social network (Hirsch, 2005; Rhodes & DuBois, 2006). In a meta-analysis of 53 programs, DuBois, Neville, Parra, and Pugh-Lilly (2002) found that mentorship programs that integrate mentorship into a multifaceted program with other support services can enhance the effects of programs that solely offer mentorship as a stand-alone practice (Flaxman, Ascher, & Harrington, 1988).

The empirical evidence on the mixed and modest effects of mentoring relationships on youth outcomes highlights the importance of understanding how positive mentoring relationships are enacted and developing programmatic practices that ensure that mentoring relationships do not cause harm to the youth they are intending to help.

The areas of youth development literature reviewed here, although not exhaustive, shaped our orientation to the questions about program components, youth experiences, and mechanisms for youth development that were the focus of this study.

Findings

In the following sections, we describe the findings from our analyses of BAM youth and counselor interviews. First, we illustrate the key components of the BAM program model. Next, we highlight the ways in which BAM youth experience the process of BAM Then we highlight the ways in which BAM youth know BAM is working. After that, we report the key mechanisms at work in BAM programming and how they relate to positive development for BAM youth.

Finally, we report findings related to BAM implementation and provide some recommendations for Youth Guidance as they consider the implementation and scaling of BAM We end with suggestions for future research on BAM that would be relevant and beneficial to Youth Guidance.

Key BAM Program Components: Definitions and Variation

According to the founder of BAM, clear expectations are set with youth from the beginning of the program through a set of three questions:

- Are you willing to come and have fun?
- Are you willing to be safe and respectful?
- Are you open to being challenged to look at yourself, look at the man you want to become?

According to most youth, the key to initial youth engagement in BAM was the fact that youth were excused from class once a week to attend BAM sessions. Youth reported having little or no information about BAM programming before they showed up for their first session. Some youth thought it would be a tutoring program and other youth thought it would be learning how to talk about their problems. However, all youth noted that it is the ability of the counselor to make BAM fun and interesting that fostered real engagement in the program. Some youth and counselors noted that the expectations outlined above were set forth and reinforced at the beginning of BAM sessions but that other behavioral

expectations were determined together by the group. These included no talking while another member of the group is checking in, no cell phone use during BAM sessions, no making fun of other participants, and keeping whatever is said in BAM sessions confidential.

While the counselor's ability to be perceived as relatable and authentic fostered youth engagement in BAM programming, deeper relationships with the counselor and among youth in the group were not achieved until later. Our analyses identified four main components to BAM programming that youth and counselors considered to be related to effective group work and individual youth development: (1) safe space, (2) core values and activities, (3) check-ins, and (4) relationships. These components are interrelated although they are experienced progressively by youth. Figure 2 illustrates a model of the key components of BAM programming. The illustration is not meant to suggest that each component is separate from the others; indeed, they work in tandem. But it is meant to convey the progression of experiences for youth as they work toward deeper engagement with the core values, the counselor, and each other. Youth link this deep engagement to self-reflection and transformation. In the counselor and peer relationships that make up BAM, fun and safety serve as the foundation upon which challenge and reflection/vulnerability stand.

Figure 2. BAM Core Components Model

In order to examine each of the programmatic components, we will first explore the ways in which the program creates a safe space, with particular attention to the relationship between safe space and humor. Then we will examine BAM's strategies for challenging youth, from the core values and activities, to check-ins, and finally to the important relationships built through BAM It is essential to note that peer and counselor relationships are at the core of each of these programmatic components, which are both constructed by these relationships and contribute to them. Youth report that these relationships deepen as they progress through activities and check-ins.

Safe Space

The safe space of BAM is made up of three necessary dimensions: (1) a group culture of expected and practiced nonjudgment and confidentiality; (2) the actual physical space where BAM activities occur; and (3) a sense of humor or fun. Consistency is integral to the functioning of each of these components.

Nonjudgment and confidentiality

Counselors establish a sense of safety from the first BAM session by setting expectations and then modeling and monitoring group-determined behavioral norms which are established in collaboration with

group. One BAM youth spoke about the importance of these agreements to his initial impression of the program, "[When I first started BAM] I thought it would be good because whatever you say in that room, it don't come out" (youth interview). This quote stresses the role of confidentiality in creating a space in which youth feel comfortable with opening up. Youth not only discussed the importance of the understood agreement that anything they share stays within the group, they also spoke of the maintenance of this trust as a symbol of the fact they respect and even care about each other. "Everybody is like usually on their own thing, but everybody, when we come to the circle and we come together, everybody get personal, talk about personal stuff. They never went back and told anybody anything that I have actually said. So I'm pretty sure they care about me, just like I care about them," said one youth. Another young man discussed the importance of knowing that his counselor would not judge him:

> I think that's what made me actually want to talk to him even more, be with him more, because he gave me that good vibe. . . saying, "Hey, you can be yourself. . . I ain't gonna judge you. Be who you are because that's gonna help me in the long run. If you just pretend. . . I won't get to know you as much, and I won't be able to help you.". . . That's what I appreciated a lot.

This quote demonstrates that a setting of nonjudgment was a prerequisite for him to desire to open up.

Maintaining this level of respect, through the practice of confidentiality and nonjudgment, is an active and constant process. These expectations must be practiced and actualized consistently in order to foster a trusting environment. The presence of this consistency is illustrated by interviewees' common use of words such as "always" and "never" when describing group practices. Part of this active and constant process of maintaining a trusting environment includes immediately addressing instances where expectations may be not be met. One youth shared, "It's cool, because the people that are there we're able to talk to them because they're not the people that'll. . . sit there and judge you. . . . [The counselor] is really cool about that because he's the type to if someone is making fun of you about it he wants to tell them right then and there that's not right." Youth also spoke about coming to recognize when they or their peers might be out of line and discussing these situations, such as in this story:

> We had this group one time and we were trying to respect the other people. Out of nowhere, this kid starts bursting into tears. . . we're all in a serious situation, and for some reason. . . I don't know what some other guy did, he did like a face, and then he wanted to make me laugh and. . . I tried to laugh. . . but I'm like, "You know what? I'm going to try to respect this guy because he's over here crying and I'm just like going to be laughing while he's crying, so I'm just like let it be.". . . .I didn't move. Then, after the whole group, I stayed five minutes after the period. I go up and I'm like, "Man, why you. . . ? . . . . We're going to respect the guy because he's over there crying away. We're going to respect him because he's not expecting just laughing at someone. He's going to think we're laughing at him, because he's crying . . . I'm like "Did you want to laugh too?" He's like, "Yeah, but not at

him, because this guy's over here messing around." Then we started talking. . . "Isn't that a crazy thing? You're in a serious situation and they're just trying to laugh.". . . . He's like "Oh yeah. You got to think. You got to try to hold it. . . to respect other persons who's in a situation.

Many of the youth and counselors also discussed the uniqueness of BAM as a nonjudgmental and confidential space within the school environment. This psychological safe space can transform the setting where BAM takes place into a physical safe space as well.

Physical Space

Although not all schools with BAM have dedicated "BAM rooms," youth in schools that did referred to the physical space of the BAM room as a "safe haven" in their school. It meant a lot to these students to know that they could go to this room if necessary at any point during their school day. One second-year member of BAM shared:

> Youth: At lunch like, not safe, so you could just eat right there [at the BAM office]. . . . Like somebody's messing with you or causing problems, talking.

> Int: Okay, that's cool. Do you ever have to do that? Just go hang out at the BAM office instead of going. . .

> Youth: Last year, yeah. . . it was kind of crazy for me. . . . Last year was like too much gang problems.

As shown in the exchange above, this physical safe space is important for youth who have trouble with harassment, bullies, or gangs while at school.

Youth also spoke about how access to the safe space of the BAM room throughout the day prevents conflicts with teachers or peers from escalating into more serious problems. One youth said, "It prevent a lot. It prevent fights, people getting kicked out of class, problems with they teachers, all type of stuff. If it's a problem, [the counselor], he can go and talk to the teachers or help you get out of trouble or try to resolve it." Another youth emphasized the importance of consistency in the provision of safe space, suggesting the significance of having a dedicated and staffed room that youth can access when needed: "I can always go to the office. I think everybody would be upset if it's a day that [the counselors are] not there. . . that's like a safe haven for everybody. . ."

While the presence of a physical safe space and a psychological safe space are both necessary for youth to feel truly safe, their coupling does not in itself produce a complete safe space without the presence of youth who *want* to participate. It is the final aspect of "fun" that encourages the early stages of participation and allows youth to see BAM as a place where they can relax and feel comfortable, which was a major theme throughout the interviews.

The Role of Fun

Counselors use humor to establish nonjudgmental group norms and build trusting relationships. Creating a space that is fun can help keep youth wanting to return each week so that they can begin to trust and open up to each other. Youth also talk about how fun is necessary for breaking up the monotony and stress of the school day. Youth and counselors both talk about fun as a necessary ingredient for creating a trusting safe space where youth can feel comfortable and open up. They also talk about fun as a byproduct of the relationships that develop within a safe space—feeling safe allows youth to relax and have fun together. However, it is important to note that fun does have boundaries and can also take away from a sense of safety when humor is practiced disrespectfully, as noted by a few youth who talked about the issue of laughing at inappropriate times or youth making fun of each other.

Safe space cannot exist without a desire from the participants to be in the space of their own volition. When youth first start in BAM, fun is essential for helping youth want to continue attending. "[The counselor] would make us laugh and all that stuff, and I was like 'Whoa, this is cool, man. I like this.' But I didn't think it was gonna be that cool," one youth said. Humor was a crucial element in helping this youth to decide that he enjoyed participating in the program more than he thought he would. Another BAM member talked about the desire of his friends who were not in BAM to join the group: "They were always like 'I want to be in BAM because it's fun.'" Fun is clearly the primary external appeal of BAM, extending even to youth who are not in the program. This student further elaborated on the fun of BAM from inside the program, "It was really fun. It was always a happy environment, unless somebody was upset about something that was going on in their personal life, but other than that it was fun, always." This emphasizes the consistency of the fun, setting it as an expectation to encourage youth to return for more.

A counselor elaborated on the importance of the perception of the program being fun as a prerequisite before youth begin to feel safe and open up to each other. Creating a fun environment can give youth a space to test each other and the counselor out in order to determine if it is safe to place trust in each other. The counselor noted:

> When I first started, it's like anything else. I was pulling teeth. I was trying to. . . you're doing a lot of field trips. You're playing a lot of silly, team-building games, trying to convince them BAM is fun. That worked for a while, but it was when they finally felt safe that they started coming all the time.

Humor is important for creating a comfortable space where youth feel safe sharing without being judged. One youth explained, "I like the connections that we have with the counselors. . . . They make you feel like, it's supposed to be serious, but they can like joke with you and make you feel comfortable." This youth's description illustrates how he sees his counselor as actively creating a space that is fun in order to

create the comfort necessary to cover more serious topics. He acknowledges that it is the joking that ultimately makes him feel comfortable enough to have serious conversations. Other interviewees shared this sentiment. One youth said, "I still kind of felt like shy to share out. Once I seen that the counselor was really cool, and he kept it fun and goofy, it just helped me not care anymore and just talk to everyone."

Youth also speak about the inverse relationship between fun and trust. Not only does fun create a space where they can build trust, but having built trust also creates fun. "I thought it was going to be boring at times. Really it's fun. And you trust the guys around you, and they trust you. It's like family kind of," said a youth. In this quote, the respondent suggests that the trusting relationships and group belonging he has developed with his peers are part of what make BAM fun. In this way, fun is simultaneously an input and output of the safe space it helps create. Another youth talked about the process of the group circle as being fun in itself, "We were talking, we were doing our group circle and it was really fun. I was like, wow, this is actually really cool, because we get to talk about what we do over the weekend. . . and how we go through certain things."

In addition, levity serves as a form of relief from the stress of the day and from more serious topics. Laughter helps youth relax and feel more comfortable. "I like how we did the ice breakers then go into like a serious. . . sometimes some people don't like it all serious. I've been in the class with close to like 8–10 hours, you just like to do something fun. So [the counselor will] make it fun for us for a little bit and then go into some serious stuff so we can go deep inside our emotions," stated a youth. Here, fun is important in distinguishing time at BAM from time spent in classes. A counselor spoke about how this relief worked in conjunction with the other components of the program, "Only why I say all of [BAM is helpful to me is] because all of them bring their own unique thing. The check-ins, you check in how you feel. . . the ice breakers, you trying to have fun, trying to get loosened up, you go to a serious note, then you go to the videos and stuff. It breaks down how you really think about stuff." In this example, "loosen[ing] up" with fun activities actively contributes to the process of metacognition, "break[ing] down how you really think about stuff."

Nonjudgment and confidentiality, the physical space of the BAM room, and fun work together to create the safe space that is the foundation of BAM Once this safe space has been established, counselors talk about being able to push and challenge youth to learn more about themselves and grow. One counselor said, "The relationships are basic. When you're in BAM, it's fun. There is respect and safety in that circle, but there's also challenge. I think the challenge is mentally and physically to a point where it's tough."

Core Values and Activities

According to the founder of BAM, the main purpose of the program is "for the youth to internalize the six core values and have them as something to rebound off of, something to refer to, something to have a foundation for when making decisions in every aspect of their lives." BAM's six core values are integrity, self-determination, positive anger expression, accountability, respect for womanhood, and visionary goal setting.

These values are taught through a variety of group activities and by exploring them in check-ins as a way for youth to analyze their decisions and behaviors. Counselors and youth use questions such as the ones in Table 2 (below) to push and challenge each other on the values that they learn. In general, youth and counselors use similar questions for the core values of integrity, accountability, self-determination, and positive anger expression. On the other hand, the core values of respect for womanhood and visionary goal setting are described slightly differently by youth than by counselors. While counselors' questions for these core values show the type of reflective work that can serve as guideposts for action and decision-making broadly, youths' questions for these core values are grounded in concrete terms.

Table 2. Anchor Questions for Making and Reflecting on Decisions

Core Value	Anchor Questions for Making and Analyzing Decisions
Integrity	Am I in or out of integrity? Am I keeping my word? Am I being a man of my word?
Self-Determination	Am I giving up or staying focused on what I want to achieve?
Positive Anger Expression	Am I reacting like a savage or like a warrior? Am I expressing my anger through constructive or destructive means?
Accountability	Am I blaming others or accepting blame? Am I taking ownership for my actions?
Respect for Womanhood	Am I a liberator or an oppressor? Am I respecting the women and girls in my life? *Youth interpretation: Am I calling girls out their name? Am I treating girls the way I would want my mom treated?*
Visionary Goal Setting	Who am I and how do I want to be seen in the world? Am I following the goals I set to get there? *Youth interpretation: Am I working toward what I want?*

These core values are meant to be taught in a specific order through a curriculum provided to counselors by Youth Guidance. The curriculum includes a variety of activities designed to allow youth to learn and practice each core value. Counselors pace the group through the core values, stepping through the activities outlined in the curriculum. Some counselors reported that they bring in different activities based on their own expertise and professional background or introduce a core value out of order based on the

group's circumstances such as trying to understand or cope with the loss of a schoolmate to violence.[14] The order in which the values are taught are thought by the program's founder to be the most effective after over a decade of refining and adjusting the processes of BAM through trial and error. The BAM founder noted that each value builds upon and requires the foundation of all of the prior values. While counselors were aware that the core values needed to be introduced and explored in this order, none could explain the reason for the order (other than visionary goal setting is an "abstract concept that is difficult to teach and difficult for youth to grasp" so it should be taught last) or how each value relates to the others (other than integrity is the "foundation" for all the other values). Each value is explored in more depth below, including discussion of the rationale behind their order and their meanings to both counselors and youth.

During the interviews, youth were asked to name BAM's core values. Table 3 (below) illustrates the proportion of the analytic sample that was able to recall each value without prompting and the proportion of the analytic sample that was able to recognize each of the core values after some prompting by the interviewer. "Recalled with prompt or recognized value" includes instances where youth hesitated or stated that they could not remember any more values, but then named the value after the interviewer provided the first letter or the first word. This category also includes instances where the youth could not recall the name of a value, but when the interviewer asked if they learned about the value the respondent indicated that they had and in most instances provided a definition. We include in the "Recalled without prompting" category youth who used the term for a value at an earlier point in the interview regardless of whether or not they were able to name it when asked by the interviewer to list the values. We also include in this category the few cases where youth misnamed a value but the misnomer included a word in the core value name. These cases included "determination," "anger management," "respect," "respecting women," and "goal setting."

Table 3. Proportions of Youth who Recalled Core Values (*n* = 29)

Value	Recalled without prompting	Recalled with prompt or recognized value
Integrity	52%	90%
Self-Determination	21%	69%
Positive Anger Expression	17%	66%
Accountability	31%	69%
Respect for Womanhood	69%	97%
Visionary Goal Setting	10%	66%

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[14] In general, first year groups get through the first three to four core values although this varies depending on the counselor and the group.

The table above demonstrates that, as one might expect, with the exception of "respect for womanhood," the ability of youth to recall a value without prompting decreases in the order that the values were taught. So, the first value taught, "integrity," was recalled by the most youth, while the last value taught, "visionary goal setting," was recalled by the least. All the values were recalled with prompting or recognized by at least two-thirds of the interviewed youth, although just less than half (13) of the interviewees recognized all six values. Interestingly, "respect for womanhood" stands out as the exception, being by far the most recalled and most recognized value, even though it is the fifth value taught in the curriculum. Explanations for this exception are explored in the "Respect for Womanhood" section below.

All but one of the counselors we interviewed for this study correctly named all six values when we asked them to. The one counselor who did not name all six correctly named five of them and it is possible that he neglected to name the sixth because the interview discussion went in depth into each value. While the interviewer did not ask counselors to name the core values in order, there was strong consistency in the order in which counselors named the values, with the exception of "accountability" which was named second by four counselors.

Integrity

The official definition of integrity on the BAM website is "My values equal my actions. I am a man of my word." [15] This is the first core value in the BAM curriculum as it serves as a basis for the rest of the values—to live with integrity is to live according to your values. BAM's founder explains it this way:

> The order is that integrity is the foundation for all the other values. If I don't fully understand integrity, then I can no longer probe and challenge and explore the other values. They're based upon that. We use the value of integrity constantly. Let's say, I do a real nice job with integrity in getting these boys to understand character presence in depth. Integrity is two things; it's concrete, and it's am I a man of my word. Sometimes we learn to challenge ourselves to saying am I a person of my word, we may have a biological female who identifies as a male. Am I a person of my word? Good as concrete. As integrity starts to move through the other values, it becomes, what is my character presence. What I value, does it equal how I act? . . . I'm looking at how I see myself, how others see me and that affects me either positively or in a way to change. Of course, concretely, did I do what I say I'm going to do, which as we know, can be negative; take that gun, throw that rock through that window.

In the paragraph above, the founder lays out two questions that counselors and youth can use as anchor points to check themselves and others on integrity: "Am I a man of my word?" and "Do my values equal

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[15] From Youth Guidance website, https://www.youth-guidance.org/BAM/, accessed on June 16, 2016.

my actions?" This use of questioning is central to BAM and many of the interviewed youth used questions like these to define the values.

Counselors' definitions of integrity matched closely with the definition and description above from the website and founder, although they tended to use slightly more active wording—"be*ing* a man of your word," versus "I am a man of my word"—distinguishing the active behavior from the character trait. This difference may be due to the fact that the counselors are used to teaching these values by analyzing specific decisions and behaviors as opposed to analyzing or judging the youth themselves.

The vast majority (90%) of youth interviewed were able to recognize the value of integrity and talk about its meaning. Just over half (52%) of the youth interviewed named integrity as one of the core values without being prompted. For the most part, youth seemed comfortable using the word "integrity," with many youth relaying instances when they or others were "in" or "out of" integrity. Youth tended to use more behavioral definitions to get to the meaning of the values in general, and integrity is no exception. They used expressions such as: "Keep your word," "be honest," "don't blame other people," "have good morals," "do your work," "be a leader," "don't fight," "stick with your goals," and "think about what you're going to say before you say it." However, their definitions do suggest confusion with some of the other values, most notably accountability. Although, perhaps what appears to be confusion could also be a recognition of how integrity is related to the other values that they have learned, as it is understood to be the process of following through and acting on them. Additional analyses is needed to explore these relationships.

Self-Determination

Self-determination is defined on the BAM website[16] as "I pursue my goals in the face of adversity. I learn to conquer self-defeating thoughts and overcome obstacles." The program founder elaborated by saying:

> In self-determination, we explore positive thought replacement and the relaxation response. These are concrete social skills that we need in order to go into positive anger expression. I need to know how to biologically regulate and also challenge my negative thoughts into realist positive thoughts.

There was more variation in counselor definitions of self-determination than in the previously discussed values. When explaining this value, counselors used the following terms and phrases: "you're the one in charge of your life," "not giving up," "resilience," "self-reliance," "keep working hard," "push through difficult times," "inner me," "desire to motivate," and "make things happen."

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[16] From Youth Guidance website, https://www.youth-guidance.org/BAM/, accessed on June 16, 2016.

Over two-thirds (69%) of the interviewed youth recalled learning about self-determination with prompting from the interviewer and about one-fifth (21%) recalled the value without prompting. Just over half of the sample were able to go beyond naming the value and talk about its meaning. Some of the terms and phrases youth used to explain this value included: "determined to stay who I am," "don't let anyone stop you," "not giving up on what you're trying to accomplish," "stay focused," "I'm the only one standing in my way," "always have confidence in yourself," "don't go and get it for others, go and get it for yourself," "have confidence in yourself and always be on top of it," "you did it and nobody else helped you out," "control yourself," "you can't just want [things] and you got to actually work for them and be determined to do something," and "push yourself." Some youth identified self-determination as the most meaningful value to them, and many used these same sets of words and phrases, especially "staying focused," to talk about the ways that BAM has impacted them overall. In general, the program, counselor, and youth definitions of self-determination are closely aligned and seem to closely align with the orientation and related behaviors of persistence.

Self-confidence plays a prominent role in the way youth and counselors talk about this value. In explaining self-determination, one youth shared, "When no one else has faith in you, you have to have that faith and confidence in yourself." A counselor also elaborated on the role of confidence and the challenges inherent to self-determination for youth with low self-esteem:

> Based on what they've been through, it must be hard for them to. . . some of them it's really hard for them to take in. If you have a young man that's not that confident and always felt defeated, it's going to be hard for him to really internalize that determination. . . . If he's always been told he's worthless, you're just like your daddy, you ain't nothing, you're not this, look at your grade, at some point, people start to believe those things.

While the youth quote above conflates self-determination and confidence, this quote from a counselor highlights confidence as a prerequisite to self-determination. This suggests that B.A.M needs to help youth build confidence in order to improve their internalization of the value of self-determination.

Positive Anger Expression

Positive anger expression is defined on the BAM website as, "I learn that anger is a normal emotion that needs to be expressed. How I express my anger is a choice, whether as a savage or as a warrior." A counselor quoted the program founder's explanation of this value:

> I think Tony [program founder] said it great. He said, "If you're telling me not to be angry, you might as well tell me not to be happy, because every emotion has a reason why and what our job is as counselors and as individuals when we're not counselors is to identify why we're angry and then start dealing with the problem."

This counselor's reflection on positive anger expression also highlights how important it is for counselors to also reflect on and deal with their own feelings of anger.

Phrases that counselors used when talking about this value were: "anger is energy that can be expressed destructively or constructively," "normalize the emotion," and "controlling emotion." Counselors also talked about anger as a secondary emotion or expression of pain, often from parental relationships, that can be addressed through talking about these relationships during check-ins.[17] Counselors talked about teaching young men this value and the concept of secondary emotions (anger covering up sadness or fear) through personal stories and a clip from the television show *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air* that really seemed to resonate with youth. Counselors also distinguished this value from anger management programs of the past that shamed the emotion of anger.

Two-thirds (66%) of the youth recalled learning about positive anger expression in BAM (only 17% named the value without prompting), although they seemed to prefer to use the language of the "savage" versus "warrior" dichotomy, rather than the official name of the value. Other terms and phrases they used to explain this value included: "lead by example," "control your anger," "keep your composure," "work things out," "calm down with deep breathing," "talk it out," "when you're about to fight, stop and take that moment to come back to normal," "know yourself and how to deal with problems," "don't show anger," "express anger through music, freestyle, writing, wrestling," and "be angry in a positive way." There does seem to be some misunderstanding of the value among a few youth we interviewed, who defined it as controlling or not showing their anger, even though the program and counselor definitions emphasize normalizing and accepting the emotion in order to express it more constructively.

Accountability

The definition for accountability on the BAM website[18] reads: "I am responsible for the consequences of my actions whether intended or unintended. I take ownership for what I do and avoid projecting blame." BAM's founder distinguishes integrity from accountability, not as "two sides of a coin" as the interviewer questioned, but as integrity being the "parent of accountability: without integrity, you can't really address the accountability." He further elaborated on accountability:

> Accountability. . . is how I'm going to take ownership for how I feel about that, I'm going to take ownership for how I act, I'm going to take ownership for my thoughts, I'm going to take ownership for my attitude. It is mine. I am empowered. I own those things.

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[17] The process of check-ins is explored in the next section of this report.

[18] From Youth Guidance website, https://www.youth-guidance.org/BAM/, accessed on June 16, 2016.

We start with semantics. We start with, "Man, she's making me mad," as opposed to, "I'm pissed off," to cliché the affirmation. We talk about projection. . . . There you go, now we're going clinical. . . . Now we get into defense mechanisms and why do we project. Why do we blame out? It gets me off the hook and then I don't have to take on that responsibility. I don't have to look at my integrity now.

Now, in a circle we're doing constant accountability things. Someone's checking in and he goes, "You know how sometimes you feel like you're really upset." We go, "Who? Me?" "Oh. Sometimes I. . ." We do that kind of stuff. Then we do it in deeper counseling with these. "She did this and he did that." "You know what? You're telling me a lot about [teacher] right now. I'm not in that classroom. I don't know what it's like. I want to talk about you and what can you own. What can you own in this? You said you did nothing, but what did you do?" Little tricks. "I came late to class." "What's that about? You see how you're putting this on [teacher]? Can you own that?" "Yeah."

Counselors echoed the founder's language on accountability, with the addition of anticipating and accepting consequences for your actions. Some of the counselors identified accountability as one of the hardest values for youth to translate into practice because they are habituated to blaming others. Other counselors expressed that accountability was one of the easiest core values for youth to grasp because they recognize their own habit of placing blame on others. The fact that the majority of counselors recognized the salience of accountability in youths' lives (despite their interpretation about whether this fact makes it easier or more difficult to engage youth in the practice of this value) suggests that the value of accountability has the potential to powerfully impact both the behaviors and self-concepts of youth. One counselor offered this tip for helping youth start to understand the core value of accountability:

I think what helps is when they start thinking about other people in their life who have been unaccountable, whether that's a parent, another adult, someone who's made commitments and then not followed through. We talk a lot about how integrity and accountability, these types of things are what build your reputation. When we start saying, "Do you know anyone who doesn't keep their word or always blames everyone else and then never is willing to own their own piece?" Then they can think of a lot of people in their life like that, and they don't think too favorably of those people.

Counselors also highlighted the importance of consistency and persistence over time in helping youth internalize the value of accountability. "They understand what it means to be accountable, but then they'll keep blaming, projecting blame on other people. Then you go, 'Hey, what's accountability about?' They're not always connecting the dots. Just over and over again, you've got to remind them," said one counselor. Another counselor said, "It's a very simple lesson, but to get them to internalize it, it's rough. It just takes time."

Consistency also takes this value a step further, in that accountability is not only about taking ownership for your decisions, but also influencing future decisions. A counselor shared, "There's a difference between you doing some sort of repetitive behavior and saying it's okay because I said my bad, so I guess

I'm accountable now. . . . It's you being able to say you know that this is something I'm definitely struggling with. It's on me to change it. It's being accountable, but staying accountable." A BAM youth echoed this definition of accountability explaining, "Any decision you make, you should stand behind it. You always want to make sure you make a good decision. That way you're not scared to stand behind it because it was the best decision." This illustrates how taking ownership for your actions can lead to different strategies and considerations for decision making. It also highlights how a sense of empowerment and agency is embedded in this value. More explicitly linking the sense of ownership that comes with accountability to the sense of empowerment that youth can experience in the practice of this value may help engage those youth who counselors experience as struggling to embody accountability.

Just over two-thirds (69%) of the youth interviewed remembered learning about accountability when prompted (about one-third remembered without prompting), although there was some confusion around its meaning. A few youth simply could not remember what it meant even though they remembered learning about it and others could not distinguish it from integrity. Three youth took the definition of "accepting blame" so far as to include accepting blame for actions that one did not do, as in the case of a youth who reported accepting blame for something his younger brother did as an example of accountability or the case of a youth who suggested that his counselor was modeling the value of accountability when he accepted blame for something a group of students was doing in order to protect the youth in his BAM group. This interpretation that could be potentially dangerous for youth who are at high risk of involvement with the juvenile justice system.

Those who grasped the concept of accountability either (1) reflected on the work they still needed to do in this area; (2) talked about their success in applying the value; or (3) spoke about teaching the value to family members or challenging their BAM peers on the value. Some provided examples of more than one of these things to show they understood the concept.

Respect for Womanhood

Respect for womanhood is the core value that was most recently added to the BAM curriculum. It is defined on the BAM website as "I learn how my words and actions devalue women, including those I love. I am more mindful and respectful in how I interact with women. I strive to be a self-liberator and not an oppressor." The founder explains its order in the curriculum, "Respect for womanhood is a very, very deep value. Where it's the fifth value on purpose. . . . We have to have a lot of trust and cohesion [among the BAM group]. There's a lot of group building that happens. It's very experiential. If those boys don't have that. . . it's going to be very superficial."

The program definition for this value is longer than the definitions for the previous values, and the ways that counselors described *respect for womanhood* primarily fell into two camps. A few counselors talked

about oppression and liberation and the way that sexism is tied to other forms of oppression. In this way, respect for womanhood provides an opportunity to explore macro social issues. Most counselors talked about having youth visualize a positive woman in their life, usually a mother, grandmother, or sister, and then thinking about the girls they interact with daily as someone's sister or future mother. In this way, respect for womanhood opens space for explorations of personal relationships. One counselor also said, "I tend to generalize it and spread it out into just respect overall." Some counselors identified this value as the hardest for youth to internalize due to conflicting messages from the media and the world they live in. The "liberator" and "oppressor" language that was used by some of the counselors did not make it to the tongues of the youth that we spoke to. The concept of treating girls and women the way that they would want their mother to be treated seemed to transfer much more effectively to the youth.

Youth most often described this value as "don't call girls out their name," meaning that it is not right to refer to girls using words like "bitch" or "ho." Some youth referred to an activity they did as a group where they brainstormed all the words they used for women and then discussed why so many of the words were negative. Other phrases and terms that made it into youth definitions of respect for womanhood included: "help them out," "treat them like a queen," "talk to them nicely," "don't scream at or fight with women," "don't do domestic violence," "respect your mother/your sister/your grandma," "everyone is someone's sister or mother," and "treat them like they're your mother." Several youth also expressed experiencing changes in their relationship with their mothers or girlfriends since they started BAM

Youth varied quite a bit in their familiarity with this value prior to coming to BAM Many students explained that their family raised them to respect women from an early age and expressed concern for the ways they saw their peers treating girls. Some of these youth talked about how BAM helped deepen the value for them. Others were less familiar with the concept prior to BAM, such as this youth:

> I didn't know that that was something to teach. . . I never knew that there was a flip side to whatever I was saying. I didn't know that just like people are calling girls B's, there's also people calling girls princesses. I didn't know that there was a whole other meaning to women. So when he had taught me that I was like, "I don't know if I'm going to like it, I don't know if I'm going to catch on to it. I don't, you know, it sounds corny." But I use it every day now.

Interestingly, in the interviews with youth, respect for womanhood was by far the most recalled and most recognized value, even though it is the second-to-last value in the curriculum. This may be due to the fact that, at first glance, respect for womanhood seems less abstract than the others, even though the program's founder and the counselors view it as one of the deeper and more complex values. The youth reaction to this value suggests that, in practice, counselors may be introducing it earlier than planned in

the curriculum—even if in a more "superficial" form—in order to address issues that youth bring up during the check-ins. When asked about respect for womanhood, one second-year youth stated:

> We talk about that every week. Every day. . . . Because a lot of boys at our school just go from girl to girl at our school. Some guys just don't have the respect for girls. So he'll tell us like, "Don't call them out their names, don't hit on them, don't try to put them down for anything, just have respect for them, speak to them in a positive manner."

Since relationships with mothers and girls seem to come up during check-ins, it may be beneficial for the formal introduction of this value to occur earlier on in the curriculum and then be deepened over time. It seems like BAM could benefit from tightening up the meaning of this *respect for womanhood* and perhaps reconsidering its role in the curriculum.

Visionary Goal Setting

Visionary goal setting is the final core value in the BAM curriculum. The definition on the website is, "I create a vision for myself, for who I am, and how I want to be seen in the world. I create a vision that is focused on making my community and the world a better place. I set goals based on my vision and make responsible choices that help me achieve those goals."

The program founder further explained, in an interview, "It's purpose. It's mission. It's vision. The five stages of rites of passage, one is the descent into the slaying of the dragon or the ordeal of fighting the way that I am with the way that I want to be and here's the battle. I either run from the battle and go to my old ways or I make a decision that I want to ascend into this new type of self-validation."

The counselor definitions of visionary goal setting varied in their specificity. They included: "Having a vision for yourself and where you want to go and then creating goals or setting goals, long-term and short-term, to accomplish the vision you see for yourself," "SMART goals," "think of yourself as a winner," and "visualize what's in your future." One counselor explained why he felt it was the hardest value to get youth to internalize:

> A lot of our youth that's from the inner city or low socioeconomic statuses live from day to day. They just try to understand how to get, they wake up on November 6, they try to make sure they can make it to November 7. . .versus November 17 or December 17 or 2017. They just look into the next day. . . . [The] visionary goal is the hardest one because you're fighting through so much life experiences, trauma and issues and depending on their grades and academics, they may not be the best so they may not be the most confident. They're fighting through a lot of different things and understand that, regardless of what you are on paper, regardless if you have a record, regardless if you don't have your parents in your life, regardless if you have been abused, you still have potential to be great. How do you take these life experiences and these life issues and set a goal for both, short term and long term, that you can achieve that's tangible for you? . . . That's probably the hardest one to get them to really

understand because it really takes some work. Anything that comes easy doesn't last and that's what they always try to tell us. If you want something that's going to last, let's put in some serious work.

The quote above echoes the challenges discussed in the self-determination core value section, further suggesting youths' need for additional supports with issues such as confidence and dealing with the effects of trauma and poverty.

The visionary goal setting core value was by far the least recalled value by youth without prompting (10%), although two-thirds of the youth did recognize it when prompted. The youth definitions varied even more than the counselor definitions, and also overlapped significantly with the definitions provided for self-determination: "write down short-term, mid-year, and long-term goals and keep that paper"; "how I see myself in the future: degrees, a nice house, giving back"; "not just talking, not just wanting something to happen to you, working toward it"; "once its been said, you must accomplish it"; "going to college or the navy or being a basketball player"; "getting good grades so you can get into a good college"; "focus;" "get my work done"; "we talk about setting goals outside the school, after we graduate. That's like having a job, think about a basketball career or a football career outside of either high school or college level"; and "they want us to be determined to get good grades and do what we're going to say that's positive."

Only one youth described a visionary goal setting activity that involved the group closing their eyes and visualizing themselves in the future. He explained, "When I seen myself, I felt like I seen myself going to college, being in big business. Then [counselor] asked us 'Why do you see yourself like that?' I was like 'Because I changed. I've started to do better. I've started to have more respect. I've started to talk more properly. . . more proper.' I was like 'I feel like I can get up there.'"

Activities

Counselors lead youth through activities in order to teach and instill the core values, challenge youth, and build a sense of teamwork and belonging. These activities took many forms, such as group "missions," video clips, discussions, physical activities, and writing activities. For example, one youth explained:

One time he made us all get in a bunch, and put our hands together, and try to unknot ourselves into a perfect circle. Basically like group work and communicating with each other. . . it's fun, but also entertaining, and we felt like we were responsible to communicate with each other more. . . . One time for positive anger management, he brought some boxing gloves and he brought the mitts, so you could hit them, express your anger on the mitts.

Youth described a wide range of activities, and few mentioned the same ones, suggesting that different activities resonated the most with different youth, including the video clip from *The Fresh Prince of Bel Air*. Youth also seemed to appreciate the physicality of missions and the sense of accomplishment they

felt when they successfully completed missions as a group. A counselor also spoke about the importance of the variety and range of activities. When asked which activities he though resonated with the youth the most, he responded:

> It really depends. . . but it's a variety of all. . . . I could sit here and write words on a board. A kid will look at me like, "Whatever." I put a video on, "Yeah, I get it." If we do an activity together, put action to it, "Okay, that makes more sense." In the course of doing the different BAM values, we do a little bit of everything because they're able to retain the information a lot better.

In most cases, youth did not talk about activities and missions as related to core values, although one youth described a group activity that tied the core values to their relationships with their parents. This activity involved talking to an empty chair as though it was one of their parents. One youth explained that the group initially did not want to do this activity

> because we kind of felt it was going to be real emotional. . . for some kids and we didn't want to see the kids get emotional. So we didn't want to do it, but then [the counselor] was like, "Come on, we should do it, so we can try it at least. Let's just try it at least once." We're like, "All right." We tried it and we ended up liking it a lot. We ended up doing our fathers and then we did our mothers, the next day after we did our fathers. So it was actually really cool.

This quote shows how BAM activities challenge youth to venture outside of their comfort zone. This requires youth to trust and feel safe enough with their counselor and peers to make themselves vulnerable. It also highlights the need to have counselors who are well trained and prepared to work with vulnerable youth who put their trust in them.

Check-Ins (PIES)

Check-ins, also referred to as PIES, serve as a starting point for BAM sessions where youth come together with their counselor and reflect on how they are doing that day. PIES is an acronym intended to support reflection by guiding participants to check in with themselves on four levels: physically, intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually. During this process, youth both reflect internally and then share externally with their peers and counselor. Sometimes they also rate how they're feeling on a scale from one to ten. On some occasions, check-ins deviate from this format. In cases where there has been a violent incident in the school or neighborhood, the group focuses the check-in on how each member feels about the incident. The role of the counselor during check-ins is to encourage authentic participation among youth and to participate authentically himself.

All of the youth and counselors talked at length about the check-in process. During the interviews, most of the youth (20) used the PIES acronym to break down each of the topics they talked about during check-ins. While the letters (PIES) and numbers (1–10) provide training wheels to support youth who may not

be accustomed to exploring their feelings, they are by no means rigid. Many youth reported space for flexibility in being able to control how and what they share with the group. Two examples of this are:

> You didn't have to go in that order or whatever. Just answer it however you felt like you wanted to answer it I guess and that was all right.

> Sometimes you get to choose which ones you want to do. Like three of them or all of them. Sometimes it takes a little bit longer, so we've got to cut it short.

This flexibility is crucial to a youth-centered approach that allows young people to control what they share. An effective counselor must possess the experience and skills to understand when to accept and affirm in order to build trust and when to challenge in order to push for deeper reflection (Rhodes & DuBois, 2006). Youth and counselors both spoke about how check-ins would get increasingly detailed and personal over time as the group began to trust each other and grew accustomed to the process. As one counselor put it, "In the beginning, it's one word. Are you mad, glad, sad, and happy, to 'Man, what you saying, let me tell you about the day I had yesterday.' Before you know it, this kid's talking for five minutes about check-in." A number of youth also talked about the evolution of the check-in process over time. One youth explained it this way, "As far as I know, in my group, everybody did open up over time. At first, there would be some kids who would be like, in the check-ins and stuff, would be like 'I'm just all right,' and stuff like that. . . . [Our counselor], he wouldn't ask them to explain more or something, he'd be like. . . 'That's cool. I understand.'"

While no youth identified a desire to talk about their feelings as part of the initial appeal of BAM, about two-thirds (20) talked about why they liked checking in or talking with the group, and almost half (13) identified check-ins or talking with the group as the component of BAM that they liked the most.[19] Counselors seemed well-aware of the importance of check-ins to fostering engagement in BAM One said, "I would be surprised if another counselor says anything differently, but I think it's the circle, it's the check-in, check-out process that's the most essential piece of BAM It's what keeps them coming back."

One youth explained how the check-in process helped create a sense of calm, "I like how we can just sit down and just talk to each other, and it's calming. . . you're in there, everybody's relaxed. Sometimes, we're running around or something, but then, he makes us calm down and then we do relax, and it's just nice to just be sitting there talking about whatever." This sense of calm may be valuable because it is something that they are not experiencing in other aspects of their lives. For youth, the check-in process

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[19] Five of the youth who identified check-ins or talking with the group as their favorite component of BAM said that it was a tie between the check-ins/group and the field trips.

evolves over time as they become more trusting of the counselor and of each other's adherence to the group norms of supporting each other and maintaining confidentiality in the group.

A number of youth noted that what other youth shared during check-ins helped them realize that they were not the only one with certain feelings or who had gone through a certain experience. One counselor highlighted this aspect by saying,

> What we really want to know is that we're all not going through this on our own. . . . To hear when a student of mine says, "I relate to Will. My dad walked out. He promised that he was going to come back and he didn't," and I see a kid right across the circle say, "That's exactly my life. Holy shit, I'm not on this island anymore, I don't have to deal with this on my own," when this kid's going through something, I got him. The check-ins, sometimes it's one of those days where they just [say], "I'm good," but most of the time those check-ins are where we get a lot of that depth.

This normalizing of traumatizing events and related feelings also seemed to influence the likelihood of youth opening up during check-ins.

There were some exceptions to the opening up at check-ins. One counselor recognized this phenomenon, saying, "They might not feel comfortable. There's reasons why they won't tell you but that doesn't mean it's their fault." Only three youth remarked that they didn't generally share much during check-ins. These fell into two categories. In two instances, the youth noted that he didn't relate to what was said during check-ins because he didn't share the family challenges that others in their group experienced. They both reported having close and positive relationships with their fathers. On the other hand, one youth emphasized that the type of sharing that happened among the group and with the counselor contradicted the rules he was taught at home. "I don't know, like my mama says some stuff in the house should stay in the house."

A goal of BAM is that youth will be able to transfer the self-reflection, acknowledgement of feelings, and communication skills they learn during check-ins to other realms external to BAM This is an area that should be further explored. In the interviews youth and counselors reported perceiving that the skills would likely be transferrable, although they also acknowledge that generalizing these processes to more abstract or distal situations is challenging.

Int: Do you think you'll carry PIES beyond BAM, and beyond high school?

Youth: Probably, yeah, probably.

Int: What about checking in?

Youth: On myself? . . . Probably.

BAM's founder also reported that youth struggle to internalize, in a more general way, the core values. "The kid is talking about ways that they can address how they're out of integrity in this particular instance and then the counselors talk about [it] but it's harder to get them to generalize it more," the founder said. Nevertheless, youth and counselors reported many instances of youth holding the counselor or each other accountable for a core value in specific situations. Counselors may consider building upon youths' recognition of the core values in action (externally) in order to foster internalization of the values during check-ins, activities, and one-on-one interactions.

Some youth also report checking out at the end of the BAM sessions, although they spoke about this much less frequently and in less detail than checking in. Checking in and checking out also give the youth an opportunity to apply the program's core values to their decisions and behaviors.

All counselors also report practicing check-ins amongst themselves to support their own development and as part of the ongoing training they received throughout the academic year.

> We have our multiteam meetings. . . BAM team where we come together and we have our own check-ins as a team. . . where we check in on an individual level, how are you feeling physically, intellectually, emotionally, spiritually, where you get to check-in and say, "Let me do a self-check. . . ." Your other counselor in the support [group] can say, "Maybe you need to take some time for yourself" or "Maybe you need to do this" and we always receive. . . make sure you're doing self-care. . . are you making sure you're doing what you need to do for you.

This is a form of clinical supervision that can ameliorate the effects of secondary trauma for counselors, enable counselors to deal with issues of transference, and become better facilitators of this process for youth.

Relationships

Relationships are the cornerstone of effective BAM programming. The development of deep relationships with and among BAM youth depend upon the counselor's skill at appropriately reading and adapting to group and individual youth strengths and needs. Counselors need to know when a youth needs more encouragement and when a youth is ready to be challenged. There are no hard and fast rules about when to encourage and when to challenge a youth. However, counselors report they make these decisions based upon their knowledge of the individual youth's situation and maturity level. Youth and counselors report relationship building occurring in three main contexts: individual interactions (both planned and spontaneous), passing interactions, and group interactions.

Relationship Building in Individual Interactions

Seventy-nine percent of the youth we interviewed talked about meeting with their counselor one-on-one. These individual sessions were sometimes initiated by youth reaching out to the counselor for help and

other times were counselor-initiated. Youth report also having meaningful interactions with counselors in passing interactions during or after school. BAM refers to these as "brief encounters." Many youth talked about the importance of seeing their BAM counselor in the lunchroom and hallways, even if they did not speak with him. Some youth also reported that seeing their BAM counselor in the school hallway or at a lunch period made them feel closer to their BAM counselor, like their BAM counselor was part of the school. Both youth and BAM counselors noted that brief, passing interactions in the school or at after-school activities provided an opportunity for short, more informal, conversations and check-ins.

There was some variation in the ways that counselors talked about meeting with youth one-on-one. Four of the nine counselors used language such as "counseling" or "clinical counseling," while others referred to "brief encounters" or pulling students to the side. A couple of counselors explained that the expectation was for them to do "brief encounters" of roughly 10 minutes with all the youth and then one-on-one "counseling" with about 15 percent of their caseload who were in the most need. Despite the clear differentiation in the definitions of "counseling" and "brief encounters," when counselors and youth talked about their interactions in our interviews, this distinction was rarely made explicitly.

One counselor explained in more detail his strategies for individual sessions in a way that highlights the flexibility and different forms in which individual interactions take place:

> Early on, my first semester I was working this job, I would see a few or four or five F's and I would go straight to that. It felt like you've got to get this going now, otherwise you're going to fail your first semester, and that's a bad track to go down, and it felt very immediate. I've evolved to the point where I still pay attention to grades and I still talk about it, but I try not to put all my focus on that because it's more a symptom of the problem than it is the root of it. And if I could focus more on the root of the problem, then maybe the grades will take care of themselves. Sometimes I do goal setting with guys. It's something we talk about and follow up on, and so it makes it more concrete. With most guys it ends up being kind of scattered and hit or miss, because things just come up. Then it's almost like, I don't want to call it crisis management, but it is. . . . I check in with guys when they need to be checked in with. When they check in in BAM group and they say that something's going on at home, and their father's been drinking for two weeks, then that's when I'm definitely going to check in with that kid more in depth that week, and maybe for a week or two.

Youth who spoke about seeking out their counselor when stressed or having a challenging experience talked about asking him to meet after group, stopping by the BAM room during the school day, or contacting their counselor via text or phone outside of school hours or in the summer. One youth said, "I'd call him or text him, tell him what's going on and all that stuff if I can't talk to him in person. He'd always find a way for us to communicate." A counselor noted the importance of this accessibility to helping youth reflect on the values and skills in situ, "When a kid sits there and sends me a text message,

'Man. . . I'm freaking out. I'm ready to take the ACT. I know it's going to impact my life.' I refer back to them, 'Hey man. Remember when we talked about dealing with your emotions and talking about those deep breaths?' 'Yeah, yeah, yeah,' 'Now's the time to be doing it.'" In essence, counselors are scaffolding the skills being built during group in individual, as-needed, in-the-moment cases. Many youth also emphasized the importance to them of the counselor's accessibility. One youth put it this way: "People don't like when they're [the counselors] not in there [the BAM office], because you always want to be able to walk in there."

Other reasons for seeking out their counselor included having problems with a teacher or a class, family issues, and wanting help with college or career planning. Youth talked about seeking their counselor's help for problems with a teacher or class in a couple of different ways. Some went to the BAM room to cool off and get advice after a teacher upset them. For example, one young man told a story about something a teacher did that made him so upset he asked to go to the BAM room to talk to his counselor, "[My BAM Counselor] was like that it shouldn't bother me. Change my class next semester or try to talk to my counselor to get a different teacher. That's what I'm a do." In other cases, youth requested the counselor's help negotiating a situation with a teacher, usually regarding how to improve his grade in the class. A couple of youth described how the counselor advocates for the youth in his BAM group without involving the youth in the negotiation. We discuss in the mechanisms section how these different approaches to advocating on behalf of the youth may affect the individual youth's development as well as the counselor's reputation with the group.

In some situations, counselors also helped youth with family issues by talking with the parent and youth having a problem. For example, one young man told a story about his mother kicking him out of the house and explained, "[The counselor] will talk with your mom, and then we can have a family conversation, see what's going, what the problem is." The interview continued:

Int: Do you think [counselor] is supportive for you?

Youth: Uh-huh.

Int: Has he ever had to provide emotional support, or help with a specific situation or something?

Youth: One time I had got into a big argument with my mama.

Int: How did he help you out?

Youth: He talked to me. . . . He talked to me. . . . He talked to me about how I should respect her, and whatever. Even though sometimes she might be wrong. I still got to deal with it, respect her.

Another youth, who was about to become a father at the time of the interview, talked about inviting his counselor to the baby shower because he was "like family."

Youth also talked about reaching out to their counselor for help getting jobs and for advice on college and career planning. One youth explained, "I told [counselor] that I was interested in engineering, and he told me that he had a friend who was a civil engineer, so he talked to me about him, and he said that he would try to get him to come in or something to talk to us. He helped me in that ways, because it gave me more, like I said, background on the whole engineering thing." In this example, the counselor took the youth's request and tried to address that youth's individual need while also creating a meaningful and relevant experience for the whole BAM group. Providing all youth in the group with knowledge about particular career pathways and the types of education needed to pursue career goals is an important practical component of visionary goal setting.

One youth provided an example of reaching out to his counselor during the summer with an immediate employment concern. In this case, the youth talked of his strong desire to remain in Chicago, most importantly because of the bond he felt through BAM While the counselor provided specific supports to try to help the youth, he was unsuccessful. Nevertheless, the youth still had strong positive feelings towards his counselor. This case highlights how strong relationships with the counselor are based on process and not results.

> My mother, her paychecks would come in late and still are today and she's struggling with money. I was like really desperate because my mom, she wanted to move. . . to Florida. I really didn't want to go. . . I love everyone who's here. Also, the biggest thing was being in this program, because it does help me. It helps me here and it helps me in the outside world. So the first person I called was my counselor. . . I told him, "Hey, can you help me out? I'm kind of struggling right now. I'm trying to get a job." It was in the summer and he did. Right away the next day he answered my call and I came here [to school] and we signed up for One Summer in Chicago and he was hoping I got in and I never got in. I'm still trying to find a job, because I'm just trying to help my family.

One youth also reported that his counselor had an individual meeting with him for another purpose: "He was telling me if I don't get my act together and stop being in the hallways, he goes, I'm going to get dropped from BAM" This quote raises questions about the conditions under which youth can be removed from BAM and the process by which this happens. In describing the process by which a youth was removed from BAM after being confronted with theft, one counselor described it as challenging and one that he did not take lightly. The process involved the BAM founder and the youth, along with the counselor, coming up with actions that the youth could take to earn his way back into BAM The youth never did take those actions and was dropped from BAM The counselor did not describe how the group was informed of this process or decision.

The youth who said that they did not meet individually with their counselor explained that they "didn't need to" or that those types of meetings were only for youth who "needed it" or were "having problems"—such as problems in school, personal problems, or problems with their family. One youth said, "He only did one-on-ones with kids that were more like, who were really going through stuff. He did a lot of one-on-ones with kids like that." All of the youth who noted that they didn't try to connect with their counselor outside of BAM groups also reported having close and positive relationships with family members whose values aligned with those taught in BAM It is important to note that some youth who did talk about seeking out individual meetings with their counselor also spoke of having supportive relationships with family members. What seems to be unique to the youth who do not seek out individual time with their counselor is that they perceive reaching out to counselor as an indication of someone who needs additional help and this perception does not align with their own self-image. It seems that, even if it is not made clear to youth why counselors seek out individual students for one-on-one support, youth in the group sort themselves by those who do not need additional assistance and those who do and have a mental map of which side of that line they stand on.

Relationship Building in Groups

There was also variation in how much information youth reported they were comfortable sharing with the whole group versus with just their counselor. Most youth reported feeling a closeness with all the young men in their BAM group. One youth described it this way: "We really got everything out in the group, because we was just that open with each other." A couple of youth shared stories about one member of the group becoming emotional during check-in and described how others in the group showed support to him.

Youth also talked about how they appreciated the opportunity to share their own stories and get feedback and advice from their peers and counselor. One BAM member explained:

> Everyone shares out and they all give feedback on how you should resolve a problem, things like that, and everyone shares even personal stories. . . like what happened to them in the past that's affected their life, and we've all just reflected on that. . . . Usually [the counselor] starts it off, and says what he learned from that.

The quote above shows that the speaker appreciates hearing about the experiences of his peers and receiving feedback on his own stories. The fact that he uses the word "everyone" shows that the expectation is that no one is excluded from sharing. While he does explain that the story-sharing conversations are typically initiated and modeled by the counselor, his emphasis is on the sharing of situated stories about the self and the feedback of his peers that occurs after the counselor catalyzes the conversation. Another participant also described the way his counselor modeled personal storytelling

while teaching life lessons from his personal experience. "There's no limit to what you can say. He tells us. . . he'll give examples, like experiences he's had with friends who've done drugs, like it's ended up bad for them, and he tells us why are you doing it, when this could happen to you, and he's experienced it."

This youth emphasizes the openness of these "limitless" conversations, an openness that is unusual within the school setting. This aspect of the storytelling refers back to the safe nonjudgmental space in which these conversations occur. Such safety could not occur if youth believed that there would be social consequences among their peers or spreading of rumors about them beyond the confines of the group.

One youth interviewed for this study made a distinction between those in his BAM group who were his "friends" and those who were "associates." He reported that all youth supported each other but that he only felt close to his friends. When the interviewer asked whether these were friends that he made through participation in BAM or whether they were friends before BAM, the youth replied that he was already friends with these young men before starting BAM On the other hand, some youth talked about developing new friendships with other youth in their BAM group. One youth remarked that he wouldn't have been friends with these people if he didn't come to know them through BAM

It is likely that friendship dyads and subgroups form within BAM groups. It is also likely that some BAM groups are comprised of youth who have a history of either friendship or rivalry. Counselors are likely aware of friendship groups and rivalries within the BAM groups, although none mentioned it during the interviews. Nevertheless, counselors should remain vigilant about ensuring that no youth feel excluded or isolated from their peers within the group.

Successful Relationship-Building Strategies

In all of these contexts, counselors and youth reported the types of strategies and ways of interacting that foster trust, the key element for relationship building. For youth, it is incredibly important that the counselor feels authentic to them. Counselors also talked about the significance of being relatable to the youth, while also emphasizing the importance of authenticity in relationship building. One counselor said:

> I think it's very important to just be you and to be real, because they can sense if you're being fake or not. . . . In that case, they won't open up. They're not going to be comfortable enough. I think the main thing in relationship building is to be genuine with them and authentic, also, be relatable. Because we were all teenagers once. Students sometimes feel like they're the only ones going through what they're going through.

This authenticity makes the counselor a caring adult who is different than other caring adults in these young men's lives. Counselors are more multidimensional to youth than teachers (who focus on academic skills), school disciplinary personnel (who focus on in-school behaviors), and parental figures (who focus

on family values and responsibilities). When relationships with counselors are strong, youth feel that counselors see them as they are, in a complete and nonjudgmental way, and see them as becoming the men they want to be. Figure 3 illustrates the multiple strategies counselors use to express themselves authentically with youth and foster the trust required for youth to be authentic and vulnerable with the counselor and the BAM group.

Figure 3. Counselor Relationship-Building Strategies

Briefly, each of the following aspects of counselor interactions were noted as important to youth feeling that they know, care about, and respect their counselor:

- **Sense of humor.** As we noted in the section on safe space, fun is an essential element for youth engagement. But it also serves to make the youth feel connected to their counselor. The ability of the counselor to show his silly side makes him relatable to adolescents who are still in touch with and practicing their youthful joy. As one youth said, "He respects us, and we respect him. He's always had our back, and he keeps things interesting and fun." Another youth put it this way, "Not only does he joke around with us, but he also gets serious with us too." The ability and willingness of the counselor to express some goofiness with the young men in BAM seems to foster their ability to engage youth on more serious topics and challenging BAM activities.

- **Relatability.** Counselors and youth both talked about the ways in which the counselor builds relationships with youth based on commonalities. In some cases, the counselor relates to youth in the group around shared interests such as sports or hobbies. In other cases, the counselor can relate to youth culture through expressions of ethnicity or race in music and fashion. In still other cases, the

counselor shares the personal struggles that he encountered in high school or because he grew up in a similar community where poverty and violence were prevalent. Youth often referred to instances where their counselor shared something personal about themselves and how this made them feel closer to the counselor. One youth related, "I was like, 'Damn. Even counselors mess up their lives sometimes.' So I felt connected with that. I felt like I had someone to talk to who could understand where I was coming from." It also makes youth feel more comfortable with the counselor, as it did for this youth: "I say that we're comfortable with [our counselor], since he's told us about his personal life, about his mother, his wife, his son, and all about him."

- **Modeling core values.** All youth responded positively to the question about whether or not they thought their counselor lived up to the core values he was teaching them. Many youth were able to give examples of the different core values that they witnessed in their counselor. The most commonly cited core values that youth saw in their counselors were integrity and accountability, although youth also gave examples of their counselor exhibiting positive anger expression and respect for womanhood. Both counselors and youth gave examples of youth challenging counselors to live up to the core values of integrity and accountability in cases where the counselor promised something to the youth and didn't come through. One counselor said that youth "love to call me out on being a man of my word" if he doesn't immediately follow through on something he said he would do.

- **Opening up and being vulnerable.** Counselors challenge youth to open up and be vulnerable as a means of development. In order to illustrate how important it is that youth overcome their fear of being vulnerable, counselors often share personal experiences that highlight ways in which the counselor messed up or felt uncertain about how to handle a situation. One youth explained how the counselor's personal storytelling inspired members of the BAM group: "I realized that everybody in the group had more respect for him now [that he shared a personal struggle]. . . they show more respect for him, because they realize what he had gone through, and he's an inspiration to them." This respect fosters inspiration and trust, likely making the counselor's efforts to get the young men to engage in BAM programming more effective.

- **Consistency over time.** As noted earlier, many youth highlighted the importance of knowing their counselor was available for them during school, after school, on weekends, and over the summer. Counselors provided youth with their phone numbers and made themselves available to talk and text as youth needed. In addition to the consistency of the counselor's presence in youths' lives, consistency in interaction style were also noted by youth and counselors as important to building and maintaining relationships with youth. While there was less consistency in BAM meeting times, this was not something that youth or counselors raised during interviews and it is not likely that it

impacted the quality of relationships with youth (although it likely impacted progression through the BAM curriculum).

- **Encouragement of youth.** Most youth spoke often during their interviews of the ways in which counselors encouraged them to try new things, help other BAM peers, improve their grades, or work on their relationships with family members. Some youth reported that their counselor offered praise when they reached a goal. In all of those instances, youth noted that this made them feel like the counselor cared about them. This sense of being cared for is an important ingredient in developing a strong relationship with youth.

- **Challenging youth.** Youth talked about the ways that counselors challenged them in similar language that they used when speaking about the counselor encouraging them. They expressed a sense of being challenged as an indication of a counselor's belief in them. Based upon the interviews with youth and counselors, the difference between "encouragement" and "challenging" is that instances of challenging generally related more directly to the core values. When challenging youth, counselors illustrated for youth where their actions did not align with one or more of the core values and provided insight into how a youth could bring them into alignment.

The Challenge of Managing the Demands of Relationships

Counselors also talked about the demands of building deep relationships with youth, specifically around time pressure and setting boundaries around these one-on-one sessions with their large caseloads of students. One counselor said:

> Boundaries pose big challenges. I have a revolving door, because I would love to see my students for eight hours a day and be able to support them, but unfortunately I can't. Sometimes students don't understand or just don't care that I have to see other students. It's establishing these boundaries, saying, "Okay, I can see you one hour a week, but unfortunately I don't have the time, it's going to have to be in a group setting," or "Hey, can I check in while we're walking down the halls?" . . . It has to be in passing because I have like a hundred students.

This quote is representative of the burden that all counselors feel to provide youth with what the youth need and want. It demonstrates that the demand for counselor attention and counseling is still greater than what counselors are able to provide. One counselor spoke about how he has to "hide out" in order to do required program paperwork since he always has youth that want to meet with him. This suggests that the program could benefit from setting clearer expectations and boundaries around counselor accessibility or provide further supports to help counselors meet the expectation of constant availability to youth.

Counselor Transitions

More than half ($n = 15$) of the youth in our sample talked about the experience of transitioning from one counselor to another, with most doing so between academic years. There seems to be quite a bit of

variation in how much notice youth have about the upcoming change and whether they were able to say good-bye to their counselor or not. Some youth also talk about maintaining their relationship with their first counselors in instances where the counselors were promoted to supervisors.

Youth primarily talked about how they did not like that their counselor switched and indicated that it took time to build relationships with a new counselor. For example, one youth said, "I think it affect the group because everybody don't have respect for all of the counselors. I think they feel like they haven't been knowing him as long." Another youth said that he and others wanted to quit BAM when they heard at the end of the year they would be getting a new counselor the next year, but he decided to give the new counselor a shot and was able to feel comfortable around him after "three weeks." Another interviewee said it took a "couple months" to feel comfortable with the new counselor.

Some youth explained that they did not like the idea of a counselor transition at first, but were eventually able to build a strong relationship with their new counselor as well. One interviewee even indicated that although he was initially disappointed about the change, he felt like it was a positive experience overall because it provided more perspectives on the values they had learned. The interviewee said, "I think it was good for us to change because it helps us learn from one perspective [for the first counselor] and another perspective [for the second counselor]. So it's good to know like there are two perspectives on how to be accountable for all of the stuff that we learned."

Youth who talked about losing their counselor to a supervisory role discussed their appreciation for the fact that their previous counselor still made himself available to them. One youth reported that his former counselor still does group with his old group even though he had been promoted, saying, "I don't think that it's something that he has to do, but he does it anyway, just to check in with us to make sure that everybody is on task." One youth noted that the fact that his original counselor told his group in advance of the transition, vouched for the new counselor, and introduced the group to the new counselor at the start of the new year helped the group feel comfortable with the new counselor fairly easily.

In some instances youth expressed confusion about whether or not their counselors would be returning. One youth said, "I thought they [the counselor] were going to return for a second year, but they didn't because I think their contract expired." Another youth expressed uncertainty about his counselor coming back the following year, "He [the counselor was] pretty good. I want him back next year, but I don't think he's going to come back next year."

This could be particularly challenging for youth that have already lost others in their lives that they were close to or had come to depend upon. When at all possible, it is important for youth to have clear expectations about how and when the relationship with their counselor will end. One youth did talk about

his counselor taking the group on a field trip as a last good-bye since he knew he would not be returning the next year. However, this did not seem to be the norm.

BAM and the School Context

The BAM program model is embedded in schools but it is implemented by nonschool staff. It follows that the leadership buy-in, relationships between BAM staff and school personnel, and school policies and practices can foster or inhibit effective implementation of BAM Only one youth mentioned a school policy that negatively influenced the implementation of BAM He complained about the school's policy that prohibits BAM participants from wearing their BAM t-shirts to school. He pointed out that other school-sanctioned clubs and sports teams could wear their shirts. He seemed torn between following the request of his counselor to not wear the BAM t-shirts and his and his BAM peers' desire to make a statement by wearing the BAM t-shirts to school. The school's policy set up an "us versus them" dynamic between the school and BAM, despite the counselors' attempts to guide youth toward following school policy. Aspects of the school context that positively influence BAM implementation involve school personnel's active and widespread support of BAM When school personnel know which youth are involved in BAM and know the BAM counselors in the school building, they are able to proactively involve the counselor in supporting youth academically or provide information about the youth's family circumstances that can help the counselor support the youth. In addition, support of BAM by school personnel increases the likelihood that the BAM counselor will be included in meetings about the youth and be involved if disciplinary issues arise.
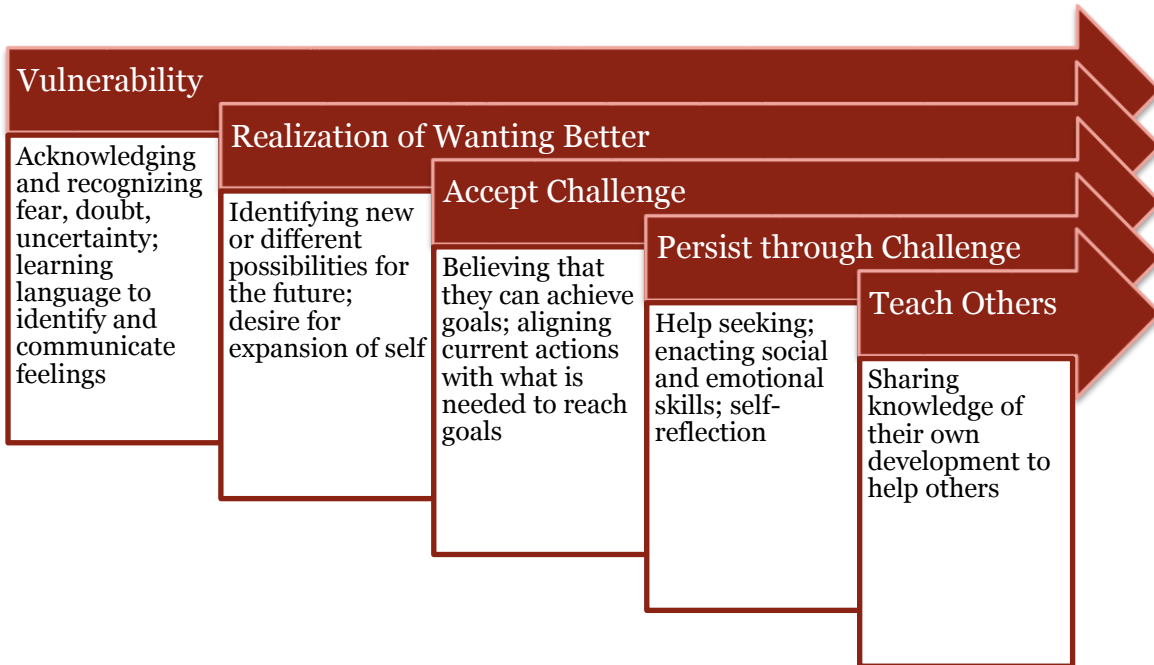
Perceived Impact of BAM and How Youth Know that BAM is Working

The series of studies conducted by Urban Labs provide evidence of the impact of BAM on academic outcomes, arrests, involvement in the juvenile justice system, and reduced time to decision making in an experimental context (Heller et al., 2016). While our study was not designed to provide evidence of BAM's impact on youth outcomes, our analyses provide some insights into the ways in which BAM youth feel BAM has impacted them and how they know that BAM has impacted them. These aspects are related.

How youth talked about the ways their participation in BAM impacted them fell into the following categories: vulnerability, realization of wanting better for themselves, accepting challenges, persisting through challenges, teaching others, core values, relationship with counselor, and staying true to who they are. The first five of these impacts are experiential processes outlined in Figure 4. Youth explanations of these processes did not always follow this linear progression and sometimes just touched on one of these aspects. Many youth emphasized that they felt like the program did not change who they were as a

person, but allowed them to feel supported and reassured in the person they were. We discuss each of these perceived impacts below.

Figure 4. Youth Experiential Process in BAM

Vulnerability	Realization of Wanting Better	Accept Challenge	Persist through Challenge	Teach Others
Acknowledging and recognizing fear, doubt, uncertainty; learning language to identify and communicate feelings	Identifying new or different possibilities for the future; desire for expansion of self	Believing that they can achieve goals; aligning current actions with what is needed to reach goals	Help seeking; enacting social and emotional skills; self-reflection	Sharing knowledge of their own development to help others

The fact that many youth emphasized the emotional aspect of their experience in BAM and highlighted it as an impact of BAM, coupled with our review of the literature on youth development, suggests that BAM is most effective when youth are able to recognize, share, and face the vulnerability they naturally feel as adolescents.

Vulnerability

Feeling vulnerable is challenging for anyone and it is no different for BAM youth. The "vulnerability" category captures all discussion of uncertainty, fear, and doubt. For example, youth reflected about how they did not want to do certain things that would have been aligned with their goals, because they did not want to be rejected, fail, or mess up. Coming to realize these true reasons behind not wanting to do something helped youth move beyond their fears of failure to the next step of wanting to do what they may have been resisting. One youth described how fearful he was when first engaging in BAM and in his description, he highlights one of the BAM-taught ways of mitigating this fear:

> If I'm being negative with myself, think about it again and do better. If, for example, if I'm trying to do something positive, but then I don't want to do it 'cause I'm low self-esteemed about it, I think about it again, because it might be a good thing. . . . For example the BAM thing, I didn't want to do

it, like maybe I'm gonna mess up, you know, I probably won't even make it. But I mean, I got into it, I want to go for it, try it out. I tried it out and so far I'm liking it.

One counselor articulated the importance of getting youth to allow themselves to feel vulnerable and express their emotions, saying:

> The students have a history of—they're boys. They're not supposed to say what they feel. They're not supposed to say how they're feeling. This is a shock to them, but once they're comfortable, which is usually pretty quickly. . . . At the beginning sessions I'll flat out off the bat say listen this is how we're going to check in. One word answers, I'm not going to lie to you guys. I'm a going to let them fly for a little bit, a real little bit. After that I'm going to take you guys through what I hope to hear. Once you guys are comfortable with me I hope you guys will say more. Within two weeks maybe up to a month. . . you'll have some kids who are saying a little bit more and some kids that are just like I'm fine. I'm good, whatever. After a good month I like to joke around. I'll be all right man, now remember what I told you the first day right? You remember I said it's cool for you to say you're fine back then, but we're going out four weeks so let we ask you how do you feel about this group. Do you trust us? If you don't that's okay. I just want to know.

One youth highlighted the uniqueness of the emotional aspect of BAM in youth's lives and the importance of sharing feelings and accepting support from others:

> Well, first of all, in BAM . . . we do check-ins. Physically, how you feeling, intellectually, what's on your mind, emotionally, how are you feeling, and then spiritually, what's your motivation? They don't do that in every other classroom. We get to talk about what we really feel. We get to talk about what's bothering us. In school, we don't get the chance to do that. We either bottle it up like I've always done, or we lash it out on other people and get in trouble for it. In BAM, you get to talk about it and not get in trouble. You get to talk about it and actually get help, you know?

Realization of Wanting Better for Themselves

Iterations of the word "want" appeared over and over again in youth's explanations about the ways that BAM impacted them. Youth talked about what they wanted changed or how they realized they wanted something they had not thought about before. For example, one youth talked about how he knew his father always wanted him to go to college, but he didn't realize that he himself wanted to go to college until after he joined BAM This realization is often phrased in terms that indicate that they want to *be* better versions of themselves and become better men, but not that they want to become somebody different than who they are. Often times, this realization is related to youth's desires for future career goals (such as when a youth says he is spending all his free time at school in the library looking at colleges and working towards college entry requirements). Other times, it is related to fostering better relationships with those they love (most often their mother).

This experiential aspect of BAM seems to be fostered mainly through encouragement by the counselor or others in the BAM group and sometimes came up in the interviews in discussions of the visionary goal setting core value. Although not explicitly described this way by youth, our analysis suggests a relationship between youth's increasing belief that they deserve better and their self-confidence that they can achieve better that goes along with the recognition of wanting something better. One youth described the importance of the check-in process to building self-esteem this way:

> The reason why I like checking in is because certain students don't be feeling the same way another student feels, so you have to help them and all that. Some students will be feeling down because something happened before school or during school. Some students will be feeling good. Students that be feeling good will help the students that be feeling down when we checking in, so they won't feel so down as we feel good. We'll bring they self-esteem up to our level.

The key to the experience of realization of wanting more begins with self-acceptance, then building self-confidence and self-knowledge, and then identifying the skills the youth needs to expand their sense of self.

Accepting Challenges

Youth talked about accepting challenges to try new activities, ways of behaving, or ways of thinking about a situation as an impact of BAM They talked about using the support from BAM counselors and others in the BAM in deciding to go after things that they may not have pursued on their own. Most youth identified at least one challenge they faced rather than avoided as a result of their involvement in BAM Often youth used the core value terms of "integrity," "self-determination," and "visionary goal setting" to describe the process of accepting challenges and highlighted the role of their BAM group during check-ins and their relationship with their counselor as fostering this process.

On a few occasions, youth noted that accepting a challenge meant following through on "homework" or something that their counselor recommended. On a few other occasions, youth talked about this process in the context of them trying to rectify a wrong that they committed, either with a family member or teacher, and seeking the advice and assistance of the counselor in figuring out how to move forward in a productive way. One youth highlighted that the counselor challenged the youth to "be the leader that I know you are" when encouraging the youth to apologize to another youth who he had wronged.

Persisting Through Challenge

Another word that came up repeatedly throughout the descriptions of BAM's impact was the word "keep." Over and over, youth talked about how BAM helped them keep on persisting through challenges that they might otherwise have given up on. Youth talked about the importance of the support of their counselor in helping them persist through challenges as well as enacting social and emotional and self-

reflection practices. It is worth noting that for a number of youth who expressed having self-doubt, this was related to both self-doubt in their own abilities as well as self-doubt about acceptance by others. The BAM group was especially important to those youth.

One youth who said he did not meet with his counselor for any one-on-one sessions described how the counselor reflected back a longer-term vision that shaped his desire and ability to remain in ROTC despite wanting to drop out because he had been overlooked for a leadership position. Helping youth keep an eye on *why* they are not giving up, despite challenges, is a role of the counselor. Fulfilling this important role requires that the counselor have ongoing knowledge of the youth in his BAM groups. In a few instances, youth talked about telling the counselor about another youth who was struggling with challenges so that the counselor could intervene. A couple of counselors talked about the importance of their relationships with other staff in the school because they were able to provide information to the counselor that a youth did not share. However, in most cases in our data, youth self-disclose challenges directly to their counselor or during group check-ins, enabling the counselor and others in the group to challenge the youth to persist despite obstacles.

A couple of youth talked about performing self-check-ins to refocus on their goals despite a setback or emotional interruption. One youth talked about how important it was for him to "do deep breathing and count to ten" when he felt himself responding emotionally to a situation. He knew that if he responded in anger, he would disrupt his progress toward achieving his goals. These help-seeking, social and emotional, and self-reflection behaviors are important habits that will serve youth well as they face challenges to their determination to reach their goals in school, career, and life.

Teaching Others

A few youth talked about teaching their family members or friends about values and other lessons from BAM While discussion of teaching others was not as pervasive as the other impacts and experiential processes discussed above, it was mentioned with pride by a few youth and is included here as a next step and sign of mastery of the BAM concepts and skills. This seems to be an indicator that a BAM youth feel comfortable enough with their own development to impart to others knowledge learned through BAM (although there was one second-year youth interviewed for this study who talked at length about teaching others but could not name any of the core values without prompting).

A few youth noted that they had the opportunity to share knowledge with others in the context of school or with peers outside of school when a BAM youth noticed that a friend was behaving in a way that didn't reflect one of the core values taught in BAM For example, one youth said, "Every day, days out of school, days in school, I see women get treated the wrong way. I don't like when women get treated the wrong way. . . they'll tell me what's wrong. I tell her. . . . They be doing stuff that's wrong. I'm like,

'Nah, don't do that.' I tell them the right thing to do." Sometimes, youth described teaching a younger sibling how to behave in a way consistent with BAM core values. In these cases, the core value was generally that of "accountability," with the BAM youth explaining the importance of taking accountability for their actions at home. Although not many youth described this process or impact in the interview, because we did not specifically ask about it, it is impossible to know how prevalent this actually is for BAM youth.

Core Values

Youth provided examples of how they have internalized specific core values. Most notable were the stories about applying the "savage versus warrior" concept from the core value of positive anger expression. For example, in the story below a young man applies this concept to explain two similar incidents that happened to him and how he reacted differently the second time:

> An example of a savage one that I had was there was a kid in the hallway. He walked past me and he bumped into my girlfriend. He said "Move, bitch." I was like, "Whoa, chill." He said "Man, fuck off." My girlfriend knew him, but they were messing around and I didn't know that. . . I didn't understand the relationship he had. So me, personally, I got aggressive, because, one, that's my girlfriend and I'm not going to let that happen, and pushed him and I said, "Hey man, don't be saying that to my girl." He was like, "Hey, chill, chill." Security came and pushed me. I was like, "Man, I don't care." I was pushing security, punching lockers. The reason that was a savage moment was because one, I wasn't there. I wasn't me. That's not who I am. Two, I did regret that because I messed up my relationship with that person, who was also in BAM It was a kid in BAM I messed up the relationship between my girlfriend and him. So that moment was a savage. . . . Later on, I learned how to become a warrior. Almost the same situation. A guy, I didn't know him, was joking around with my girlfriend. I sat quiet. He called her a bitch. I said, "You know him?" She said, "Yeah." In that situation, I was in control. I knew they were playing. I didn't lose control. I was smart at that time. So BAM teaches us things we can do in BAM and things we can use on the outside world. I like it.

Relationship with Counselor

The way that youth talk about the impact of the relationship with their counselor on the way they feel about themselves is essential to counselors being able to effectively use the strategies described in the section on relationship building. Many youth attributed the impact of BAM on their life trajectories to their relationship with their counselor and the way he would communicate with them. One youth shared:

> I love BAM It's really helped me out, because ever since, well before I even got to high school, I was always a troublemaker in school. . . . I wouldn't even listen to the teachers, I would just like blow them off. I wouldn't care. And ever since I met [my BAM counselor], something about him, he's been motivating us to do better in school, making right decisions.
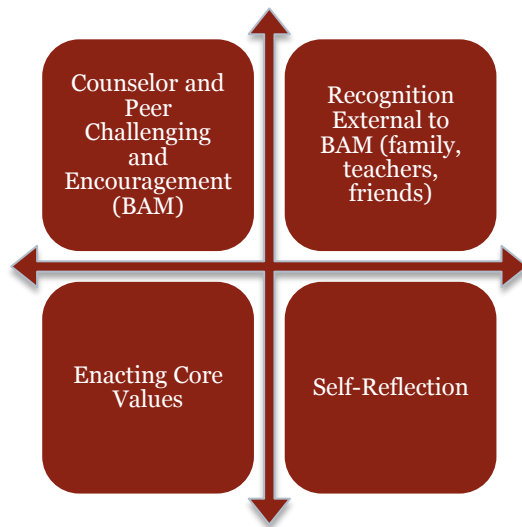
Staying Who I Am

While many youth talked about changes they saw in themselves as a result of BAM, many also articulated that the program did not change *who* they were. They talked about BAM giving them more confidence in and reassurance of themselves and helping them mature and make decisions, but this all fit into their narrative of who they were as individuals.

How Youth Know BAM is Working

Youth report four main ways in which they know BAM is working for them. Figure 5 organizes these into four quadrants along two axes. The two quadrants above the horizontal axis relate to experiences with others and the two quadrants below the horizontal axis relate to processes internal to the youth. The two quadrants to the left of the vertical axis relate to BAM-specific processes and the two quadrants to the right of the vertical axis relate to processes external to BAM Because we did not systemically ask youth about this process, we are not including counts for each quadrant. In addition, our analyses show that many youth provided examples of more than one of these "ways of knowing."

Youth tended to bring up these processes in the context of discussions about core values and our question about whether or not the youth felt that their experience in BAM had impacted them in any way. Because many of the examples related to these processes are provided in other sections of this report, we provide only a brief explanation of the processes related to each quadrant.

Figure 5. Ways in Which Youth Know BAM is Working

BAM Counselor and BAM Peer Challenging and Encouragement

This type of knowing involves a level of trust between a youth and their counselor and/or a level of cohesion among the BAM group. Both encouraging and challenging interactions with counselors and

other BAM youth indicate a belief by someone else within the BAM "family" that the youth is changing and ready to change even more.

Recognition External to BAM

This type of knowing involves active reflection about specific behavioral or attitudinal changes in the youth from someone outside of BAM Most often this was a family member (particularly the mother), although a couple of youth mentioned that a teacher or a friend said something to them that let them know that they were changing in a positive way. One student provided an example of the reflection of his mother letting him know that he changed since being in BAM:

Youth: I feel like I have [been impacted by BAM], because my mom said that I have become a better person.

Int: Really?

Youth: Yeah, and I've started to take more of the fault *[sic]* for things I've done.

Enacting Core Values

This type of knowing involves the youth explicitly basing a specific decision or action on one of the core values. Youth recognized their own growth when they were able to link their action to the core value and remark that they would not have made that decision or taken that action prior to BAM Although this youth does not explicitly name any BAM core values, he describes an action he took that was guided by his knowledge of the core values:

I only used it in school about maybe twice, which was during the final semester. One of my teachers did not want to accept one of my projects, because it was late by maybe one or two days, but instead of freaking out and maybe just calling attention at his desk, I accepted it. Maybe by the end of day, he said he would accept it, but I wouldn't have a perfect score, because it was late. . . I reacted by saying, "It's okay." I said that if it's my fault that I didn't turn it in at the right time and that if I got any work that could push my grade up and he said that I could turn it in, but I won't get as much points as usual. . . . If I would have [gotten upset], I would have probably, maybe gotten expelled or my grade would have dropped even more.

The quote above shows how a student combined accountability (taking ownership of not turning in his assignment on time), self-determination (asking if there was another way to "push his grade up"), and positive anger expression (not "freaking out") in order to achieve a better outcome for himself in the school environment.

Self-Reflection

This type of knowing involves the youth self-reflecting on an action or decision and relating that course of action to their participation in BAM Often this type of reflection included mentions of core values or

the nature of the relationship with the counselor or BAM group members. However, it also involved a deeper sense of feeling changed and changing through the BAM process. One youth highlighted the importance of the practice of PIES to developing the skill of self-reflection and as an example of how he knows BAM is working for him:

> [PIES] matter a lot to me because, I could just basically listen to myself, see how myself doing. Usually, I just go through the day without thinking about what really going on. When I think about PIES and stuff then I can redirect myself if I'm feeling bad or if I'm feeling good, to continue doing what I'm doing that making me feel good. It's hard. . . . Mostly, if I feel like I got an attitude or I'm down or something. . . to think about why, then I try to, you know. . . lift up my spirits.

Key BAM Mechanisms

Our analyses led us to build a model representing the key mechanisms by which BAM is working. Our findings, and this model, further the argument being made by some researchers and practitioners that adolescence is not "too late" for intervention. The model shows that adolescence is in fact the only effective time for intervention if the intervention works by influencing the developmental processes that are more salient during adolescence than at any other time in the lifespan.

Adolescents are especially attentive to belonging with social groups because these social groups provide a sense of security in the face of the vast changes associated with the transition to adulthood. BAM youth are no different. One youth said, "So I like the fact that if I say something, I know I have people who are listening to me and I feel like I have my counselor and my friends there for me, and they just give me advice. It's just good you can go somewhere once a week and just let everything out and appreciate everything, basically." Many youth refer to their BAM group as being "like family."

Youth recognize that being a part of BAM comes with benefits as well as responsibilities. Youth are aware of the status that being in BAM confers on them and of the opportunities that being a part of BAM provides them. They also report feeling a sense of responsibility to BAM Some youth talk about not wanting to let down their counselor, let down other youth in BAM, or give BAM a bad reputation among school staff by misbehaving or not achieving academically. A sense of belonging in BAM fosters a number of other prosocial orientations and skills.
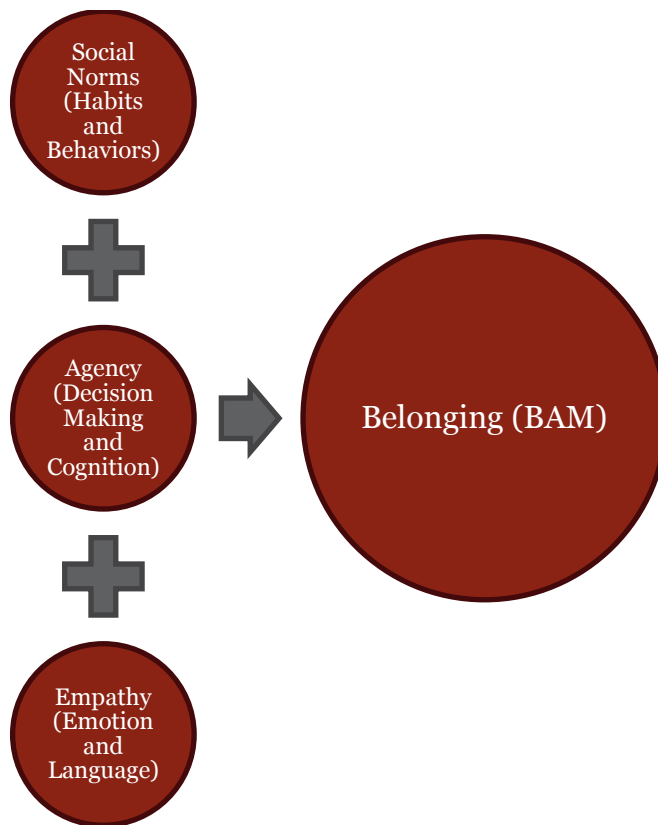
The fact that so many of the youths' discussions around core values and relationships related to them feeling sense of belonging within the BAM group highlight "belonging" as key mechanism for youth development in BAM Our analyses show that this sense of belonging with BAM emerges as the result of three key processes:

1. understanding, contributing to, and enacting the social norms of the BAM groups;

2. using BAM core values and supportive relationships in BAM to build a sense of control over one's future; and

3. developing a stronger understanding of their own and others' emotional states and using language to express who they are, how they feel, and what they want.

Figure 6 highlights the dimensions of the "Belonging" mechanism for BAM In youth who experienced all three of the dimensions, we also found that youth reported a stronger sense of belonging with mainstream social networks outside of BAM such as school and family.

Figure 6. Mechanisms of Youth Development in BAM

Social Norms. As highlighted in the core components section of this report, the social norms associated with BAM involve the types of behaviors and attitudes associated with safety, respect, and willingness to grow. They also include an element of fun that both taps into a normal way of dealing with all the awkwardness of adolescence and provides a counter to the deep emotional work that is done in the group. We heard of some cases where youth developed specific norms of behavior for their group like prohibiting the use of cell phones. By knowing (and, in some cases, setting) behavioral expectations, regularly enacting those in the context of BAM groups, and monitoring each other to ensure that each

member of the group is supported in following the norms and values of the group, youth develop a strong sense of cohesion and belonging with their BAM group.

Threats to the development or enactment of social norms include inconsistent messages from the counselor about the norms, inconsistent application of sanctions for breaking social norms, or lack of knowledge or procedure for removing a youth from the group. If the social norms and their related rewards and sanctions are not clear, group cohesion is threatened and youth may not develop a sense of belonging with the BAM group.

Understanding of, adherence to, and deviance from social norms of any group to which an individual belongs are the aspects of identity related to self as social actor. Providing youth with the types of skills that align with the social norms of BAM, such as communication and self-presentation skills (expressing oneself with words, listening, indicating support of others), gives participating youth the opportunity to learn and practice new ways of being a social actor in a supportive social setting that may translate to interactions beyond BAM

Agency. Youth develop a growing sense of control over their own futures as they progress through the experiential processes outlined in Figure 4. Agency involves key executive function skills such as planning and decision making, and also involves the cognitive skills that allow youth to know when they need help or support and know where to seek that support. The practice of agency involves knowing who to ask for help, how to ask for help, and that agentic habits can be built over time. We found an abundance of evidence that many youth in our sample seek support from their BAM counselor. When the counselor involves the youth in thinking about how to approach challenges or issues, the counselor is scaffolding the development of agency for the youth. This increased agency fosters a sense of belonging with BAM because the enactment of agency resonates with BAM's core values.

Agency can be threatened if the counselor does not appropriately engage the youth in decision making and help seeking from others. One youth described a nonagentic inclusion of youth in a help-seeking process as, "[Counselor] reach out to [teachers] often and as long as we ask them to. They do it for us. Like everything I have a problem with I'll just go to [my counselor] and tell him. . . he's never turned me down. He always go and take care of it." A different youth mentioned a similar phenomenon in his group and said that he "felt sorry" for his counselor because youth were "always taking advantage of him." In cases like this, belonging is threatened because the counselor's legitimacy is diminished and he is not modeling or helping youth enact the core values and social norms of the BAM group.

A sense of control over one's own future includes the development of and commitment to long-term goals. These are aspects of identity that relate to self as motivated agent. Providing youth with the types

of skills that align with agency, such as decision-making and self-control skills—as well as knowledge of career and educational pathways and the ability to anticipate and find ways around obstacles—gives participating youth the opportunity to develop a sense of agency through BAM programming and counselor modeling. This sense of agency can sustain them through the next phase of enacting long-term planning beyond BAM

Empathy. Personal storytelling is not only essential to counselors building relationships with youth. Through this method of interaction, counselors model communication skills, emotion management skills, and the structure and content of personal narratives as a way of expressing the self. As highlighted in the prior section's discussion of check-ins, PIES, and relationship building, counselors and youth use storytelling to reflect on their experiences and share those experiences with each other. Stories, in general and within BAM, typically involve working to overcome an obstacle or challenge and learning from the experience. They not only highlight the facts of an event but also the tone and feelings of the participants. Language around feelings, highlighted especially through the core value of positive anger expression, helps youth develop richer stories about themselves and incorporate the supportive responses of their counselor and peers into future tellings of the story (both to themselves and to others). Sharing stories of self builds skills around identifying emotions, knowledge of language to express emotion, and empathy for self and others that fosters the ability to form strong relationships. These strong relationships help to build a sense of belonging for youth in the BAM group.

Threats to building empathy include bullying or making fun of youth within or outside of the BAM group for something they said (although we saw no instances of this in our data). Without the belief among all youth that they can be vulnerable by sharing stories with the group or the counselor (whether or not they actually do), a sense of belonging with the group can be destroyed.

Developing a personal narrative through the sharing of stories of the self is the key aspect of identity related to self as autobiographical author. It is in this realm of self that the individual develops purpose about who they are and why. The BAM check-ins, as part of the regular BAM programming, provide youth with the opportunity to reflect upon their experiences, structure and share stories about themselves, and integrate supportive and empathetic feedback to those stories which bolsters a youth's sense of their own lives and experiences as meaningful. This meaning-making process can lead youth to develop a sense of purpose for their lives. And this purpose provides a sense of authenticity and self-acceptance that allows for new expressions of self through actions and goals.
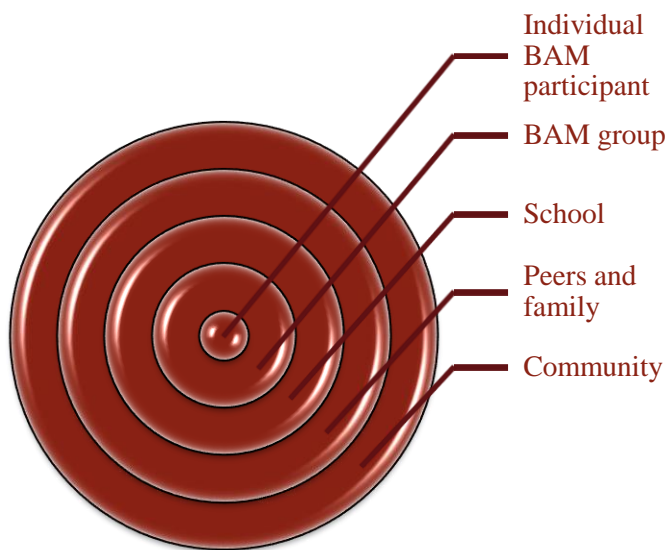
Implications

One major implication of this work warranting further study is the influence of groups on identity development. Our findings suggest that it is both the structure of BAM and the program's processes that influence identity development in the youth who participate. The sense of belonging and the related positive developmental behaviors that emerge for BAM participants is a function of the expectations, activities, and language used in BAM group meetings. The participants' adherence to expectations and maintenance of a safe physical, emotional, and psychological space highlights the sense of belonging they experience. Youth's use of language related to the core values and themselves, as well as their enactment of core value principles and communication skills through challenging group activities, illustrates the growth of trust among the members of the group and highlights how youth internalize components of the BAM curriculum. This structural context creates the foundation for the development of trusting relationships and identity exploration that, in turn, contributes to the processes of deep and authentic identity development through the sharing of self-stories and witnessing others' growth through successes and challenges. Understanding how youths' self-stories are shared and experienced by others within the context of BAM would further knowledge about how narrative identity development evolves and how social interventions can effectively influence the process.

Another implication of our findings is that the context in which BAM implementation occurs can foster or inhibit the effectiveness of BAM Further research on the relationships between BAM's implementation, the school context, and student outcomes for both BAM youth and non-BAM youth in the school should be explored. The fact that the BAM group meetings are held in the school building during school hours creates a pathway for the mechanisms of BAM to permeate other areas of school such as classrooms, lunchrooms, and during clubs, sports, and other school-sponsored after-school activities. This is not to suggest that BAM can serve as a panacea for all behavioral and academic challenges in any given school.

However, BAM can serve as a part of a network of supports in schools with strong leadership support for BAM and a functional network of faculty and staff working together to create a safe and supportive climate for all students. Moreover, integrating the BAM counselor with other supportive adults in the school building may intensify the impact of BAM on current participants and broaden BAM's impact beyond its own participants. Unlike after-school programs or one-on-one mentoring, BAM provides an opportunity for development alongside a group of peers within the natural context of the school. As such, it promotes social behaviors that can extend beyond the BAM group itself. B.A.M can be leveraged as a discrete ecological model (see Figure 7 below) with the individual BAM youth at the center, surrounded by the BAM group context, then the social networks of family and non-BAM peers, and finally the school context with multi-directional influences across all levels. All levels are also embedded in the community context which provides both a framing for the intervention as well as opportunities for extended influence of the intervention. Schools could benefit by strengthening connections between each of the layers of this model in intentional ways and in combination with other in-school and school-sponsored out-of-school activities.

Figure 7. BAM Ecological Context

In short, our study suggests that there are important social elements to identity development that influence individual behaviors. The ways that youth carry this into the future would be important to understand. In addition, exploring the ways in which the school context—disciplinary policies, leadership support for BAM, teacher buy-in for BAM, and BAM counselor integration into school-level practices and decision-making—and BAM implementation relate to each other and to student outcomes would help develop the ecological model so that BAM can be better leveraged in the broader social context.

Recommendations

Our analyses highlight many ways in which BAM seems to be working well. They also bring to the fore some important considerations related to program implementation. In this section, we provide some recommendations for Youth Guidance and BAM leadership to consider as part of their efforts to improve BAM implementation and effectiveness.

1. **Counselor roles and responsibilities.** Counselor responsibilities need to be better defined. Counselors are expected to run BAM groups regularly, provide youth with individual counseling, be a physical presence in the school, and be accessible to youth. They also need to build and maintain relationships with school staff and perform administrative and data duties. Clearer definitions of each of these responsibilities need to be developed and expectations about how counselors should prioritize them need to be made explicit. Counselors are working in dynamic contexts and setting these expectations will help guide them in managing their day-to-day demands.

2. **Counselor training.** Counselors report receiving much of their training throughout the course of academic year by going through the BAM curriculum with a cohort of other counselors at the same time as they are leading youth through the process. Many said that this training was helpful but not sufficient, especially at the start of their role as a BAM counselor. Training on the core values, their definitions, how they relate to each other, how they relate to activities, and how and when counselors can use them to engage and challenge youth during check-ins and individual meetings should take place prior to the start of the school year.

3. **Curriculum.** Greater emphasis should be placed on linking core values, not only to the activities and missions in the curriculum, but also to events and emotions raised during check-ins. Counselors should be encouraged to bring recommendations for adapting activities or

incorporating new activities to their supervisor so that they can be reviewed and approved by BAM leadership, piloted with supervision, and, if effective, incorporated into the curriculum.

4. **School selection.** Some schools, because of their policies and practices, are not good contexts in which to run BAM BAM staff need to get assurance from the school that they will be able to meet a minimum number of times each year and will have a room in the school that is dedicated to BAM BAM groups should not be meeting during lunch periods and they should not be meeting in semipublic spaces such as the lunchroom.

5. **Expectations around conditions for dismissal from BAM** There needs to be clarity and transparency for counselors and for youth regarding the conditions that warrant removal from BAM and the process by which that happens. There may be circumstances under which it is appropriate to remove a youth from BAM However, such an action is disruptive to the group and needs to be handled in a way that recognizes this disruption and facilitates meaning-making of the event by the group.

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