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**SERVICES NEEDS AND USE AMONG A POPULATION OF SINGLE BLACK
MEN AND WOMEN**

City University of New York

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SERVICES NEEDS AND USE AMONG A
POPULATION OF SINGLE BLACK MEN AND WOMEN

By

Louise King Sindos

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Social Welfare in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Social Welfare, The City University of New York

1986

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1986

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Social Welfare in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Social Welfare.

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Abstract

SERVICES NEEDS AND USE AMONG A
POPULATION OF SINGLE BLACK MEN AND WOMEN

by

Louise King Sindos

Advisor: Dr. Michael Smith

Black persons in this society have felt alienated and antagonized by the delivery of social services by the formal system. This is reflected in the lack of use and the underutilization of those services.

This study sought to determine, in potential users' own words, their perceptions of problems and needs and their reasons for lack of use of the social service system.

The project was exploratory and descriptive study of a cohort of members of a mutual support group of Black persons. The research method used was participant observation and questionnaires.

Findings of the study indicated needs that were affective in nature - relationships, feelings and emotions.

Perceptions were of problematic male-female relationships among Blacks which were resulted in high divorce rate, broken homes and poorly supported families.

Housing, finances and health issues were less of a concern. Alienation was found to be a feeling of Blacks along ethnic rather than socio-economic lines.

The program had only a moderate influence on service use with outside resources. The majority of the members tended to wish to use the group for its autonomous purposes.

Recommendations were: further exploratory research on perceptions and needs of Black clients, recognition in literature and programs of Black middle class as potential needers and users of social services, more closed self help groups based on issues common only to Blacks and use of processes from the Black Church in designing programs to serve Black people.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my gratitude to the following:
The Hunter College School of Social Work for their help by providing me the opportunity to pursue doctoral study.

Dean Harold Lewis, my academic advisor who furnished intellectual stimulation as I started the research.

Dr. Michael Smith, my committee chair, for his patience, ideas and support throughout the development of the dissertation.

Dr. Irving Weisman and Dr. Charles V. Hamilton, committee members for the guidance, direction and encouragement without which I could not have made it.

My parents, Dr. Max and Addie W. King who inspired me.

Henry Sindos, whose belief and confidence in me was greater than I knew.

Anthony, Maria, Steven and Catherine, my children, who encouraged me.

Dr. Max King, Jr. and Dr. Catherine King Clarke, my brother and sister who were my constant motivation.

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Chapter I

SERVICES NEEDS AND USE AMONG A POPULATION OF SINGLE BLACK MEN AND WOMEN

There has been concern in our social services delivery system about the use, lack of use and underutilization of referral services and resources. This phenomenon has been particularly true among minorities and members of those groups that have been functioning in the societal system at an economic, cultural and educational disadvantage. Concerns for resource utilization have been motivated in part by heightened interest in accountability, focused on the pressure to achieve cost effective services use as well as care for client well being.

The importance of maximum utilization of services and resources as one means of reducing disadvantages was recognized by the O.E.O. program of 1965 - HeadStart. The social services emphasis in HeadStart is on families' and individuals' using their own strengths to resolve conflicts and problems of dissonance between their own lives and the environments in which they live.

The revised HeadStart Performance Standards of 1980 state that the "process of getting families to utilize their strengths to make maximum use of community resources is one of the primary aims of the Social Services component

in HeadStart." (Bruce, i) One of the implications is that statement is that families should find support in their efforts to increase their capacity to locate and utilize community supports and resources to the family. To achieve this objective, one of the stated measures of its achievement is the degree to which each family has confidence in dealing with a complex network of community agencies and services. (Bruce, viii)

Even with a program's carefully specifying referral and resource utilization as a philosophical and programmatic goal there is evidence that use tends to remain at a low level in the minority community. Except for safety and survival needs the writer has observed low income and minority families and clients who continue to reject follow through on using resources and services. The exceptions are also crisis situations, such as an extremely ill child who is in need of medical care and when there is severe interference with a person's day to day functioning. Even requirements mandated by law such as Child Protective Services leaves clients using quite a lot of discretion in making decisions not to use required services.

Even though many of the low income and minority clients are "lost in the system" at the points of referral or transfer from one point to another (System of Social Services, 1978, 90), the process of referral is generally

accepted by providers as a valid service and evaluated by effort and effectiveness measures.

Often the professional social worker has a resource file, service directories and informal connections with other agencies and services which are the basis for the referral. Coupled with an adequate needs assessment of the client, the worker attempts to develop a viable system of intervention in the resolution of presented problems.

Having services and resources available, however, is usually no guarantee that clients actually put them to use. Referrals and resources should be more than the listing of agencies and programs themselves and the linking of the client to that system (Green, 1982, 57). The contract between worker and client which usually initiates a service (Lewis, 1982, 35) is not always negotiated in the instance of a referral. Even though the worker may help the referred client follow through by placing a phone call in order to engage a new or "referred" worker or actually walk that client through to the service, there is not necessarily any evidence of resolution of the problem or need by having consumed the referral service. "For this reason one cannot inventory services in the traditional sense. The availability of a resource offers no assurance that it will be used in a transaction that produces a services" (Lewis, 1982, 35).

Therefore, documentation of service use for recording and statistical purposes can be misleading if, indeed the client has received only a referral or the name of a resource. It is only when the resources of the provider and the need of the recipient join in an actual transaction that a service, as a commodity exists (Lewis, 1982, 34).

It is important, then, to investigate factors which seem to inhibit the complete transaction between client and worker which produces a service. This might prove helpful in insuring that persons actually receive services which they need and to which they are entitled.

Wan and Suchman have identified two areas which seem to be important in influencing the degree to which services are utilized by consumers: (1) attitude and practices of the care providers, such as insensitivity, myths, racism, discrimination and prejudice, and communicative problems; and (2) structural and functional aspects of the care system itself, such as inconvenient hours, lack of poor transportation, lack of baby sitters, large and impersonal system, long waits for service (Wan, 1977, 47; Suchman, 1964, 319). Parents reported to Jenkins three areas where they felt there were deficits in service - (1) condescending and stereotypical behavior by workers, (2) discrimination by agencies and (3) community ignorance of cultural patterns (1982, 100).

In addition, there is a third area which involves directly the consumers of service themselves. The consumer variables in reduced service and use would be attitudes and perceptions of clients towards services and their method of delivery, opportunities for needs resolution outside the formal service system and conditioning by factors, such as class, lifestyle, socioeconomic status, and ethnic factors which influence how people approach receiving or asking for help.

This study will use the literature to look at some of the barriers and obstacles to service utilization by low income and minority persons, suggest social scientific explanations for the phenomena, develop a focus for discussing client generated non-utilization, present a description of a program which addresses some issues raised by the minority population's attitudes and perceptions, and, analyze ways that the program participants feel the program intervention has affected the service and resource use.

Obstacles in the Service Delivery System

Studies have been devoted to investigating the role of the delivery system itself (agencies, workers, programs, policies, legislation) in becoming more sensitive to the clientele who do not participate fully and pursue access to

their entitlement to resources.

Jenkins describes a service delivery system that is not attuned to the needs of minorities (1982, 4). At a time that many social welfare institutions came about, self help groups, immigrant associations and language and religious societies understood cultural and ethnic differences as basic to the provision of services. However, the more egalitarian approach of the public sector, which provides most services for low income and minority people has assumed the characteristics of the dominant culture (Jenkins, 1982, 8; Green, 1982, 41). This has created barriers to minorities in access to their appropriate entitlements.

Most studies seem to indicate delivery system attitudes to be more considerable than problems of mechanics, such as transportation, hours and child care needs in evaluating service use.

Potential obstacles inherent in the referral process were examined by Peterson, et al. They thought that the way the referral was carried out was crucial to the success of referral follow through (1981, 800). Their study revealed that the less confident, less motivated patients had greater difficulty in making first appointments. Nonetheless, preparing patients to make appointments

themselves by describing the potential process - preparing the patient for a possible wait, being transferred to another worker, anticipation of questions to be asked generated no significant difference in the rate of follow through. The preparation for the mechanics of the process seemed not to contribute much to successful completion (1981, 801).

Several studies were done to determine if availability of health care services made a difference in utilization by members of ethnic minorities of those services. Geographically accessible services were provided to the target group with no consequent appreciable difference in use rate (Bullough, 1974, 583). Pinderhughes reports a social worker at a Boston Child Guidance Clinic who felt mothers were not keeping appointments because they were too depressed or had no baby sitters. When the mothers indicated that they would welcome the child care assistance, the social worker organized local college students to provide the service. Even with the assistance of babysitters, only two out of twenty mothers kept the appointments at the Child Guidance Clinic (1982, 111).

Lindstrom studied Mexican families who had indicated that lack of transportation was a factor in their not keeping appointments. After providing transportation for a control group he found that lack of or availability of

transportation was not a factor in service use by the families but that use and non use seemed to be allocated along cultural and lifestyle lines (1975, 756).

Attitudes and feelings from the delivery system have been found implicated to a greater degree in alienating low income and minority people from participating in the referral services system.

Some providers of services have questioned the role of communication as an obstacle in the delivery of services to the minority and low income client. Language, specifically, has been observed as creating a difficulty in successful completion of the process (Maurogenes, 1977, 110). Maurogenes found that much of the literature that is prepared for distribution for recipients of public services such as official documents, instructions, pamphlets and forms is not readable. The language of the material rarely matches the language of the reader. The author studied publications and printed instructions used by the Illinois Department of Public Aid and noticed that the majority of it required a college reading level.

Even the public services upon which many recipients do rely as survival means cannot be fully utilized if the client cannot understand the meaning of information such as eligibility, nature and degree of benefits, all of which

can be dependent on communication, either printed or verbal with the service providers.

Communication by private agency auspices to poor recipients that they are not acceptable for services has been reported by Cloward and Epstein. Practices of earlier termination of the poor client, a tendency to pass low income clients quickly to other agencies, especially public agencies, a tendency for the private agency to define its role with respect to the economically more advantaged must be interpreted by the low income as meaning that they are unwelcome clients (1965, 626).

Even for those clients who attempt to follow through on a desired service, many find that the service is so designated as to be incongruous with the need as they perceive it. For all purposes, the help that they need is unavailable as helped and helper begin the relationship with different goals. The American Group Psychotherapy Association published in 1970 a study which showed that the major emphasis in community mental health to be on intensive psychotherapy rather than on the restoration of social functioning (Normand, et al., 1974, 37). It has been documented that persons preoccupied with survival and safety considerations such as low income and many minorities are, would welcome to a greater extent assistance to obtain and maintain social and economic

security rather than psychotherapy (Glyls' and Glyls; DeVore and Schlesinger, 1981, 68).

This discrepancy between provider and recipient perception of treatment can result in a client's being labeled as "unmotivated," (Jacobs, 1972, 667) The suggestions for this are two fold - first, the "unmotivated" client in our culture results in being denied access to services. Secondly, on another level, the client who has perceived the service offered to him as being inappropriate will not continue to reach out for that service. There is the additional possibility of the client's projecting that perception onto related services and thereby shutting himself off from accessibility to those related services.

Rosenfeld describes this alienation in another way by saying that non users of help, whether in a relationship of psychotherapy, social work or any other helping process, are existing in a different system of social relationships from the helper which makes it less possible for them to use help (1960, 18).

In addition to disparity of goals between provider and consumer, there may also be a disagreement on the process of providing help. Some studies show that low income services users have revealed that they are not accustomed

to talking about self and tend to seek relief on a practical present oriented basis (Jacobs, 1976, 667). These difficulties can prove very effective in discouraging continuation of the helping relationship.

Obstacles in the Consumer System

In stating that modification of the provider and the consumer system of services needs to be effected in order to complete the condition-resource cycle of the worker-client relationship, we have to look at the role of client attitudes, perceptions and personal conditions in the delivery of services. "The recipient will sustain the relationship only if the service exchange is beneficial to him" (Lewis, 1982, 33).

Recognition and acceptance of the problem or need are a prerequisite for seeking resolution of the discomfort. The perspective of many authors is that the consumer of services or the client has an important role to play in the referral/resource process. Many of the obstacles to service come in the form of emotions and entrenched behavior patterns. These obstacles derive from deeply ingrained attitudes on the part of the client system itself (DeVore and Schlesinger, 1981, 197).

A study by Gylys and Gylys of low income Black people

supported the suggestion that priority ranking for health (mental and physical) tended to rank low compared to investment to acquire or upgrade job opportunities (1969, 310). In addition to the reality of survival considerations in how people determine priorities, there are studies that project a relationship between socio-economic status, cultural and lifestyle factors and how persons use resources and referrals for services.

Bullough's study in 1972 found a relation between socio-economic and ethnic factors and utilization of preventive services (1972, 350). She investigated alienation as an explanation for the low level of use of preventive health services by families below the poverty line. Although she found situational factors such as, broken down car, need to miss work, no money for baby sitter, no bus fare, fewer doctors available in the area that they reside in, to indirectly figure in not using services, her study hypothesized that the more direct causes are the consequences of poverty which are augmented by some psychological barriers related to low income and minority status (1972, 351). Her findings supported the hypothesis.

The alienation of low income and minority clients as suggested by feelings of powerlessness, hopelessness and social isolation could act as an obstacle to goal directed

behavior which gets people involved in steps to enhance their lives and those of their children. Mexican mothers were found to feel less powerless, less hopeless and alienated than Black mothers inspite of their immigrant status, language problems and much lower level of education. They were also found to be more available for help that would advance their condition (Bullough, 1972, 357). This could suggest cultural factors which transcend language and socio-economic condition. Another study found feelings of powerlessness and anomie acted as barriers to Black people's moving out of a segregated residential area in spite of expressed values for integration (Bullough, 1969, 969) Other research has also linked alienation to a low level of service utilization (Morris, Hatch and Chipman, 1966; Nakagawa, 1971; Watkins, 1968).

If hopelessness can be defined as expectancy that desired goals or outcome will not be achieved and powerlessness as the feeling of lack of ability to control one's own life, then poor and minority peoples, especially Blacks will have been conditioned to the fact that it is useless to invest in behavior that will have little or no effect on the future for them. Bullough concluded that both poverty and minority ethnic identity relate to these feelings of alienation and these attitudes are in turn related to a low level of resource utilization (1969, 358).

The conclusion of social isolation being correlated with low level use of resources was supported by Suchman. He felt that the underutilization of medical facilities and lack of cooperation in community health programs was an expression of a feeling of estrangement from middle class American society (1964, 331).

Suchman's conclusions would indicate the preeminence of cultural factors with ethnic inferences in evaluating service use. Other research has identified social class membership as being significant (Rosenfeld, 1960, 19). Social class; influencing the quality of communication between clients and providers was found by Hatch. He saw ideas and information as being more easily exchanged when clients and providers are from the same social class background (1979, 98).

Problem Definition

Closer examination of the effect of worker-client relationships and communication on client needs resolution through service use must begin with an understanding of needs and problem definition by the potential service user. Green describes the experience of a problem as a feeling of discomfort or sensing a lack of want which seeks resolution (1982, 32). Implicit in that definition are cultural and lifestyle interpretations of any person's

perception of a problem, a lack or a want.

A problem, lack or want may be measured according to a norm of survival or safety. In our current society, a problem, lack or want may also be measured by norms deriving from the higher levels of Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1954). The norm and standard would vary according to a person's experiences and life styles - his socio-economic status, education level and ethnic nationality group. For example, a member of one group may measure as adequate transportation an old beat up car that runs whereas a member of another group would measure adequate transportation by the possession of a very comfortable, attractive car. Still others would consider as adequate possession of carfare for public transportation. Falling below those levels of adequacy would be the point of discomfort for each person. There can be a wide variation in that point from person to person but particularly from group member to other group member. The Black housewife who finds herself divorced and in need of financial support will manage to become somewhat autonomous with less discomfort than the divorced wife from an ethnic group in which the wife is socialized to complete financial and emotional dependence. "Any culture provides a repertoire of explanations for problems related to etiology, symptom recognition, course of an illness, assumption of role for

the sufferer, expectations concerning treatment procedures and definition of desirable outcomes" (Green, 1982).

An occurrence in the sequence of life events by a client might be considered normal by the client but to a professional worker could be deemed pathological and in need of correction or intervention. For example, a Child Protective Services social worker who had known a family for many years was conducting an initial interview in a recently reported case of child abuse. When she asked the mother what her name was, as she filled out the form, the mother responded with her first name coupled with the last name of her common law husband. The worker asked the mother if she had been married in a legal ceremony since she had last seen her. The mother replied that she had not but that she and her "husband" had lived together for ten years, had three children and they felt they were married. The social worker diverted the interview to "preach" to the mother about lying and using a man's surname illegally. The worker also said to the writer later that the mother had compounded her infractions by refusing to cooperate with her after that interview.

In not understanding the client's definition of her own life situation according to her cultural interpretation, the worker had sacrificed an opportunity to provide the necessary service to the client around the

issue of abusing her child.

The social service institution has traditionally not been available to serve the needs of the Black community whose needs and problem definitions may be at variance with those of the dominant culture. Professionals representing the needs of the dominant culture "are recruited, trained in specialized techniques, indoctrinated in the ideology and folklore of the profession, certified and licensed, causing the social distance between them and clients and between them and community based sources to be enormous (Green, 1982, 41). The "social distance" and few number of services used by minorities may be interpreted as differences in needs definition, in explanations of genesis of discomfort as well as in definition of methods to help relieve the problem.

DeVore and Schlesinger suggest that people are capable of defining their own needs if there is a competent worker to help and support the client's honest exploration (1982, 123). Reid and Epstein have also discussed the issue of distinction between "attributed and acknowledged" problem and the need for the worker to work with people on issues that they define as important (1972, 49). Theoreticians themselves are strongly influenced by culture as they use their own reference group as a basis for conceptualization on issues of assessment and intervention (Trader, 10).

Understanding the emotional, social and cultural context of low income and minority client and striving towards the reduction of the "distance" between client and worker requires the recognition and application of theories found to be significant in working with that population. These are theories of hierarchy of power, equity or reciprocity, sense of competence and mastery and andragogy.

Power

Worker expertise and client need place them both in hierarchical relationships of powerful and powerless (Kadushin, 1980, 228; Siporin, 1972, 205). At times, cross ethnic and cross racial relationships may compound the sense of powerlessness of the client if he perceives the worker as member of the oppressor group (Pinderhughes, 1979, 315).

Feelings of powerlessness cause people to be unable to manage emotions, skills, knowledge, and/or material resources so that they can perform their required social roles that are necessary for personal gratification. In not being able to manage their own lives and relationships, people begin to question the efficacy of making any attempt to do so.

With minority group members being of a lesser power

they will tend to be more compliant and less competent in carrying out social roles (Solomon, 1976, 16). Having been socialized by and to a system that affords them few options and solutions to their needs, minority group members are not likely to be very persistent in efforts to enter into and engage a system that might be of some service to them. Most of the complaints against the social services system reported to Jenkins have been families' sense of powerlessness in trying to deal with it (1982, 107).

Lewis describes the important ingredient in the worker-client relationships as provision of opportunities by the social worker for maximizing the client's opportunity to act in his own behalf (1982, 199). The effort of social work should be to increase the recipient's choices. Opening up and promoting a person's options has been referred to by Solomon as empowerment (1976, 122). She further defines empowerment as a process whereby there is developed an effective support system for those who have been blocked from achieving personal and societal goals (1976, 22).

A sense of powerlessness can also be reduced by validating people's experiences and sense of self as positive. Self positive feelings promote autonomy as they develop a perception of self as responsible for identifying and carrying out the solution to existing problems.

Equity

Equity theories help to explain why feelings of powerlessness may also encourage clients to reject services and offers of help as they predominantly exist in our service delivery system.

The client who perceives himself as having very little power feels unable to reciprocate in a relationship in which he expects an exchange. Theories of reciprocity and indebtedness assume that people wish to maintain equity in interpersonal relationships and that inequitable relationships tend to produce distress and feelings of indebtedness (Fisher, et al., 1983, 52). In an attempt to correct the inequities of the exchange between worker and client, the client will discontinue asking for help or will seek to distort the image and messages of the service provider or himself (Fisher, et al., 1983, 52).

In spite of maldistribution of power and resources in the society, the members are all socialized to a normative condition of equity in interrelationship exchanges. For example, a minority client feeling a lack of control or lack of capacity for equitable exchange in a worker-client relationship may participate but become resistant to involvement or serious intention of carrying out the stated or agreed upon client responsibilities. The client may

unconsciously sabotage the helping process by providing inaccurate information or withholding information. He/she might also passively abandon her/himself to the direction of the worker without bringing any sense of contribution to progress towards the goal. Pinderhughes' suggestion that powerless people feel superstitious of free services (1979, 111) is a reflection of the concept of equity maintenance.

To play a meaningful role in making decisions about what happens to them and to be allowed to express adeptness are useful components in creating an equitable relationship.

Cognition

Ability to process and use knowledge and information encourages competence, increases self esteem and helps to develop a sense of control over lives and environments. The client's cognitive resources can be used to help him make critical decisions in their lives based on adequate information and knowledge. The client needs information about the environment as well as social skills development in order to deal effectively with bureaucratic organizations, negotiate social systems and to identify natural helping networks and to make more effective use of resources (Maluccio, 1979, 18). Cognitive development becomes one way of counteracting the adaptation strategies

which were protective in childhood but no longer useful. Old patterns and ways of doing things need new knowledge and opportunities for different application (White, 1974, 64). The ability to possess and to use information is not just a vehicle through which tasks are accomplished but it also becomes a pathway to increase the feeling of achievement and accomplishment.

Acknowledgement of the client's ability to effectively use cognitive strengths and to contribute to the helping process reinforces his feeling of competence, promotes an equitable worker-client relationship and increases the client's sense of power and control over his life.

Andragogy

Theories of andragogy or adult education are helpful here in suggesting approaches to relating to clients and promoting their strengths in cognitive application.

E.C. Lindeman suggests that the resource of most useful value in adult education is the learner's own experience. In the social work relationship this experience can be a resource that the client calls on to work out his adjustment to and use of his environment in enhancing his life (1956, 160), Lindeman's prescription for helping the learner utilize his experiences is one that the

social worker may apply to encourage the client to confront pertinent situations in his life as a beginning to growth (1956, 171). This system of education which also eliminates the authoritative hierarchical teacher-learner relationship can be used by the worker as one of peer exploration into discovery of ways to remove obstacles to self-fulfillment (1956, 171).

Knowles refers to self direction as a concept in andragogy, with structuring provided by self paced learning and contracts (1980, 19). In this approach also the teacher/worker assumes the role of facilitator and resource to the learner/client (1980, 19).

The use of roles and relationships of the andragogical learning model is effective as the client is respected as an adult, a peer with his own strengths, resources and experiences that are useful in goal setting, assessment and in intervention planning.

Trader describes a transactional teaching-learning process in which the practitioner and client share responsibility for teaching and learning. She rejects the notion that knowledge and skills must be transmitted in a vertical way, implying a relationship of expert worker and inexpert client (1979, 11).

The andragogy concept synthesizes theories of

cognition, equity and competence as a viable means of appropriating the worker-client relationship for strengthening the client's independence and autonomy as he seeks to make resources available for his own use.

Program Design

These concepts of powerlessness, reciprocity, cognition and competence were helpful in explaining the inadequacy of services and resources used by low income and minority people in our society. This information can also be used in program planning to meet the needs of this population.

The programmatic intervention to be described takes the concepts of self help and uses them in an integrative manner to apply the above theories to a system of service.

One of the rationales for self help groups is that they do address the awareness on the part of people that barriers do exist in society to the achievement of control and participation in solutions regarding their future (Vattano, 1972, 14; Encyclopedia of Social Work, 1984, 1254) For minority and low income people who especially feel frustrated and alienated this form of intervention could be useful.

An additional dimension of the self help group is that

the role of the professional is downplayed in order to minimize the distance between leader and group, to communicate a sense of parity and sharing and to place the member at the center of the helping effort. Smalley also indicated the client's place at the center of the social work relationship (Smalley, 1967, 27). Such a relationship allows the professional and the group to be able to help "remove barriers to constructive human interaction that exists between helper and helped."

Other attributes of self help groups as outlined by Alfred Katz are:

(1) Self help groups arise spontaneously from active interest of members; organization is not imposed from without.

(2) Self help groups typically continue over time, even though they may evolve or change focus.

(3) Personal participation is a key defining characteristic.

(4) The group supplies a "reference group," a point of connection and identification with others, a source of ego-reinforcement and a value system. Merged or common values in the group help the previously isolated individual cope with his personal situation.

(5) The members engage in some specific action, such as personal change or learning something - a body of knowledge or a skill. There is an acknowledged purpose for coming together - more than mere social interaction.

(6) Typically self help groups start from a condition of powerlessness and initial resources are always limited. A group of this sort allows "an emphasis on the creative potential of man and on the place of social and cultural factors in development" (Katz, 1965, 69; Encyclopedia of Social Work, 1984, 1259).

The concept of self help should accommodate the use of social support networks as a primary resource. A support network, afforded in the self help process generates a range of interpersonal exchanges that provide an individual with information, emotional reassurance, physical or material assistance, and a sense of self as an object of concern.

The usual form that the self help intervention assumes, the group, has been found to be effective in providing support, encouragement and sense of identification for members. Another advantage is that the process generated among group stimulates members to agree, disagree, hear diverse viewpoints, help recall and recognize (Jenkins, 1982, 106) and thereby expand the

experiences of any one individual. The same incident can be interpreted differently by different people. For example, "what may be labeled a racist remark by one person may be labeled ignorance, stupidity, or bureaucracy by another" (Jenkins, 1982, 106).

The warm culturally familiar atmosphere of group can help people feel accepted, less strange and more available to the benefits of influence and change.

Middleman finds the group as being a viable mechanism for meeting the needs of large numbers of people who can come together in a more natural less stigmatizing environment with greater socialization possibilities (1981, 184).

The "structured group" is a means of utilizing the learning experience (where participant is learner and practitioner is facilitator or resource provider) to help the participant deal with shared problems and common needs. "The emphasis is on the experimental...learning via doing and talking with other participants and the worker, with the aim of affecting some or all of the range of learning domains - thoughts, wishes, values, feelings or behavior" (Middleman, 1981, 186). At the heart of learning is the group's providing an opportunity and help in retrieving informal knowledge from the unconscious to conscious

awareness by labeling, talking about, processing them cognitively and bringing them under conscious control (Middleman, 1981, 193).

This application of White's ideas on adaptation allows the group member to reprogram his behavior after input from a more favored accepting source and by the use of more constructed experiences.

Theories of competence and equity are also employed as the reciprocal relationships become one of the additional methods of promoting self esteem and mastery in group functions. This structure and process would automatically obviate the group as a therapeutic one.

In keeping with the requirements of the self help group, Middleman has described the theme group whose purpose is to meet articulated needs of the members and deal with developmental concerns through discussions, problem solving, and task centered focus on key topics (Middleman, 1981, 189). The skills group utilizes direct practice in skills and activities to link, intensify or generalize the group's themes to other situations (Middleman, 1981, 202). It is also the setting where persons can practice and rehearse behaviors without having to deal with real, possible consequences of rejection or punishment incurred by the behavior. Role play, role

reversals and simulations can be effective in identifying difficulties and hang ups and opportunities to explore solutions (Schopler and Galinsky, 1979, 32). Group members are allowed a safe place to expose themselves and to take risks without taking a chance on being destroyed.

The design, format and program of the self help experience can be structured combining ideas from the theme and skills groups described by Middleman. In keeping with the emphasis on individual self assessment, awareness of one's own needs and conscious focus on development of one's own potential in utilizing self and external resources, potentiating relationships with others and functioning more constructively in society, self growth seems a more descriptive appellation for the group. With an emphasis on the goal (self growth) rather than on the process (self help), people can be encouraged more to the ultimate possibilities that the group process may achieve.

Goals and Objectives of the Program

The major goal of the self growth group is to promote and enhance the ability of minority persons to use their own strengths and abilities to facilitate an effective use of resources of the society and the environment. Resource refers to any thing of value that a person may call up for use for his benefit. Webster's Dictionary states the Old

French derivation of resource to be re and source which means to spring up anew as water. The definition is "something that lies ready for use or can be drawn upon for aid: a supply of something to take care of a need."

Pierce defines resources as "anything of value such as material or tangible goods, an opportunity or service or relationship needed by people to meet needs or resolve concerns their environment" (1984, 18).

Green describes resources of society as those institutions, individuals and customs for resolving problems indigenous to the client's own community (Green, 1982, 57).

In considering the ability and tendency for low income and minority persons to use resources of the environment, it is well to keep in mind that resources can be personal as well as social. Garbarino describes personal resources as the individual's own characteristics that make for competence, combining intelligence, which is the ability to respond effectively to the changing environment, and ego, which allows the individual to deal with arranging the most effective fit between his needs and environmental demands (1979, 20). Resources also include the individual's own talents, abilities and strengths that can be called up for use in the interest of the person.

These persons who have not been able to make full use of the benefits and resources available in society have been traditionally excluded by virtue of personal and cultural obstacles as well as structural and functional ones in the system itself. In the program intervention to be described the goal of effective use of society's resources by minority non users will be encouraged, not through an attempt at engaging the delivery system, but through addressing problems in the approach of the consumer system itself.

Feelings of low self esteem and powerlessness and perceptions of unfair and inequitable treatment by clients need to be recognized and understood in order to provide viable social work intervention.

Objectives of the program have emerged from attempts to reduce those feelings through activities and experiences that promote competence, mastery and control.

Programmatic objectives are:

1. To provide a network of information and relationships for Black single persons. The meetings of BSR allow the sharing of information, ideas and resources among members that will expand each person's knowledge, ways of problem solving and methods of goal achievement. Dormant interests and talents are stimulated towards

expression and connections as members are charged by interaction and involvement with others who are participating.

2. To provide an arena for exploration of needs, feelings and interpersonal relationships; a place where people can work on hang ups, inhibitions and obstacles responsible for constraining relationships and negotiations in the larger society.

Sub groups of 8 to 10 members randomly selected meet once a month for the purpose of exploring certain pre-specified feelings or emotions within the context of their own experiences. For example, the emotion anger may be the designated one for discussion. In the group session members investigate situations of their own in relation to anger and through group member comment, question, role play, support, recommendation each member is able to look more inwardly at productive and counterproductive ways that he uses or might use that emotion. A discussion of anger would naturally not focus solely on internal mechanism but would also help to identify external targets as well for the appropriate expression of aggression (Pinderhughes, 1979, 117).

3. To provide encouragement for members in areas where there is inadequate support in the usual environment.

Members are socialized to the group to have high regard and respect for one another. Educational and career status are downplayed in order to eliminate hierarchical differences between members. Emphasis is placed on intrinsic and productive value of people. Small gains and successes are validated in the group meetings and in interrelationships. The specialty groups encourage interests and talents as a means of support for each other's accomplishments.

4. To help people identify strengths and assets; to work on constraints from self development because of low self esteem and inadequate courage for risk taking; to increase the sense of security and competence in task performance. Programmed discussion among members acknowledges their coping capacities and helps them to share successful strategies with others.
5. To provide a comfortable and safe atmosphere where people are able to rehearse new social skills in a non threatening setting. Informal role play situations are structured in the small groups to allow the opportunity for persons to practice behaviors that they have arrived at intellectually but have not the courage yet to operationalize.

Scope

The population group involved in the current study is those members of an organization of single - never married, separated, divorced, widow(er)ed - Black persons of any age, sex, religion or nationality who feel that they have needs that are not or cannot be met by currently existing services provisions. The organization is not a singles or dating arrangement and very strongly discourages affiliation for that purpose or for the development of relationships of commitment within the organization.

The large group meets once a month for four hours. Ad hoc or needs meetings occur frequently in between. These meetings may be interest or talent groups - drama, literature, travel, poetry, etc., all at members' initiation.

There are currently 300 enrolled members with an average attendance at the monthly meetings of 70 to 80 members. The interest groups have an average participation of 10 to 20. The sub groups into which the large group is divided average 8 to 10 participants.

The membership is of wide socio-economic - from unemployed to professional - and educated range. Group membership is open to all persons of the described characteristics with no limit on enrollment numbers.

Management of size and program are accommodated by structure and organization of the group itself.

There are no outreach or recruitment plans but the group is made accessible by word of mouth and a newspaper feature stories.

Feasibility

The organization was started by one individual, a psychologist, who currently provides leadership. A committee of three volunteers will begin overseeing program planning, refreshments and newsletter printing. The group is loosely structured with members volunteering to contribute where indicated. The volunteer leadership committees positive contribution possible in this proposed study and has offered help and support in any way possible.

The presentation of the proposed study to the general membership was done during the period of time set aside for service and information exchange. The informal feedback was that it is a good idea to do an analysis in order to understand what is working well and what can be improved.

Practice Principles To Be Tested

Theories from ego psychology indicate the importance

of mastery and competence in attempting to build the self esteem of persons who have had many failures and few successes in their lives. As a group, minority and low income people have led tenuous lives, vulnerable to the threats and pressures of lack of acceptance in the dominant society and oppression by a social and economic system that perpetuates marginal economic and psychological successes.

1. The role of a professional helper should be that of helping persons to explore options which reduce feelings of powerlessness and encourage success. Pursuit of those options and exploring them in a problem solving process encourages the development of skills that are necessary for more independent autonomous functioning.

Persons whose lives and experiences have not been adequately acknowledged or validated will find great difficulty in being able to accept help from the formal resources and referral system. The hierarchical nature of the system's structure which is reminiscent of their group's position in relation to other groups in society does not accommodate the recipient's sense of low self worth and need for mutual exchange and contribution with the helping person. Clients need to have some feelings of parity with a service provider or some sense that there is a reciprocity in the relationship. Continual one way

service provision places the client in a position of discomfort with a conscious or unconscious desire to interrupt the unilateral direction of help. It is the responsibility of social work to reinforce the client's sense of power and competence (Pinderhughes, 1979, 121).

2. A service should be provided in a way that would set up a cyclical flow of input and output between worker and client so as to confirm the client as a competent, resourceful person, capable of making a contribution to self and to society.

Helping people to explore perceived obstacles and barriers to needs meeting mechanisms in self and society in the context of an accepting enabling group atmosphere can be helpful to that person's evaluation and application abilities. People can be helped to either utilize an existing service, make decisions as to whether he wants to participate in generating the service through the formal service structure or seek resolution in an informal peer group.

3. Clients should be encouraged to identify and utilize resources of their own, other individuals, the community and society in order to enhance their ability to manage situations that affect their lives.
4. The consumer, not the professional, should be at the

central focus of attempts at intervention.

Research Methodology

This project proposes to study a cohort of members of a mutual support group of Black single men and women. The focus of the study is on their experience in seeking and using help and their perception of the role of the group in influencing their ways of seeking and using help.

The study will seek information on needs and problems the members have experienced, how and when they have sought help in dealing with these needs and problems; barriers and other obstacles they have encountered in utilizing such help; what affect, if any, their experience in the mutual support group has had on their other help-seeking efforts; and any possible association between the members' pattern of use in the group and the way that they go about using outside help.

The study will be an exploratory and descriptive one. In social work the descriptive use of research is important in developing knowledge about client needs, problems and attitudes towards service (Reid and Smith, 1981, 71, Tripodi, Fellin and Epstein, 1978, 79). The information collected may be used for the purpose of developing ideas and concepts and if there is any evidence that the findings

are useful, they could be the basis for recommending a more formal study.

The sample to be selected will consist of all persons holding membership in the mutual support group from October, 1981 to April, 1984. The anticipated sample size will be 400.

The identified population is one which has the need for services and resources but which has not had successful experiences in using them. The members of the mutual support group has encountered usual problems of many members of society, such as family management, relationships, income, housing and health but have encountered obstacles and barriers in attempting to deal with them. For minorities the barriers have been greater.

The data to be sought will be self-reports, utilizing questionnaires and collateral information provided by the cohort to be studied; observation of group meetings; and interviews of 25 of the cohorts.

The Survey Questionnaire will ask:

- 1). Kinds of needs and problems that members perceive that they have.
- 2). What they have done to resolve problems and satisfy needs.

- 3). What barriers were encountered in attempting to meet the needs.
- 4). Members' perception of how the group has helped them to seek resources outside the group.
- 5). Demographic information.

The survey will also collect information from which can be derived members' views of areas of difference between their status in an early stage of group membership and at a two (2) year or more time of group membership.

In evaluating the data that has been collected, the total group of respondents will be separated into two groups according to the length of membership in the group. The division will be those members of three (3) months or less, and those who have been members for more than 24 months. Since all members came into the group in the same way, the membership can be viewed as random with new members coming in not being dissimilar from those who have been members for some time. If there is found to be some difference between the two groups, then, because of similarities of persons on entering the group, any differences in those having been present over 2 years can be assumed to have occurred as a result of the group's intervention. The methods of intervention which have been derived from the group's objectives are reflective of the

literature's indication of alienation and powerlessness as being related to a low level of resource use. Solomon has defined powerlessness as the inability to obtain and use resources to achieve personal goals. Whether or not the feeling of powerlessness derives from membership in a stigmatized negatively valued racial group is important. Empowerment activities in these groups should aim at countering negative valuations to perceive themselves as casual forces capable of exerting influence in a world of other people and capable of bringing about some desired effect" (Solomon, 1976, 26).

To make some determination of members' status and/or change in the way they use resources the following concerns will be reflected in the questionnaire:

1. Network uses of group.
2. Ability to explore feelings.
3. Identification of unknown strengths and assets.
4. Areas of increased sense of proficiency and productivity.
5. Comfort in taking risk to expose self in group.
6. Feelings about self awareness.
7. Perceived degree of acceptance and support from group.

It is in those uses of the group that members can be enabled to develop the sense of causality with self, others and the environment.

Participant Observation

Researcher will attend the group meetings, small groups and community meetings. Discussion will reveal agenda items of group that relate to users' sense of equity and power, relationships between leader and group members (authoritarian, democratic, reciprocal, facilitative), interactions among members (democratic, collaborative, supportive), information and exchanges that may promote cognitive ability to use resources.

Interviews will seek detailed information on:

1. Group members methods of seeking help for particular problems.
2. Their views of barriers and obstacles to service use.
3. Their views on how the group has helped their ability to use resources.
4. Anecdotal material that relates to experiences in the group generating change in how they use resources.

The findings will seek to answer the following

questions:

1. The nature of problems encountered and their frequency and scope.
2. Patterns of help seeking for particular problems.
3. Barriers to utilization and how they are dealt with, facilitating factors and how they are utilized.
4. How mutual support group experiences were perceived as helpful to utilization of self resources.
5. How mutual support group experiences were perceived as helpful to utilization of outside resources.

The data collected will be analyzed to compare responses according to the length of membership in the group. The data will be analyzed to determine if there is a relationship between the length of time a member has belonged to the group and his patterns of help seeking for particular problems and his perception of how the group has helped him find ways of resolving them.

If there is found to be any difference in perceptions of services and help seeking behavior then the information may be used as a basis for identifying variables for a more controlled study.

The questions in the survey have been derived from

those items in the literature review which indicate attitudes, perceptions and personal condition as being implicated in underutilization of resources and services. The questions also reflect concerns expressed by group members about what they considered to be needs and problems. The concerns were identified during meetings attended by the researcher.

Chapter II

DESCRIPTION OF THE GROUP

The failure of the formal service system to adequately address the needs of Blacks has been demonstrated in the literature review. The obstacles and difficulties in service provision have been generated by antagonism in the worker-client relationship, perceived lack of understanding of the Black client by workers and a sense of alienation and powerlessness on the part of Black clients who are seeking to improve their life's circumstance.

In looking for a program that would reduce some of the disadvantages and barriers to gaining help with problems, it seemed important to consider the qualities of self help and peer help through a group intervention. Such a method would encourage the ability of people in helping themselves and supply a reference group for value system and ego reinforcement.

The structure and organization of BSR were such that many emotional and social benefits accrued to individuals who had joined. The major goal of the organization was to promote and enhance the ability of Black persons to use their own strengths and abilities to facilitate the effective use of resources of self, society and the environment.

In assessing the reasons that Black persons do not make full use of the social services delivered system, two areas were identified - 1) obstacles in the delivery system such as structural characteristics - schedules, transportation, services definition and delivery, and 2) attitudes and practices of service providers such as insensitivity, myths, racism, discrimination and prejudice.

The writer had decided to focus on yet another area which involves the consumers of services themselves. The consumer variables in reduced service use would be attitudes and perceptions of clients towards services and their method of delivery and opportunities for handling problems and needs outside the formal service system.

The purpose of this study was to look at some of the barriers to service use by Black persons, suggest social scientific explanations for the phenomena and to present a program which would address some of the issues raised by Black people. In addition, attitudes and perceptions would be examined and analyzed to discover ways that the program participants feel the program intervention has affected their own service and resource use.

BSR was a relatively recently organized program which sought to provide a forum for Black people to deal with problems that they had not successfully coped with

previously. The group method was used in order to allow sharing of information, ideas, resources and values that would expand each person's ways of problem solving and methods of goal achievement. The ethnic homogeneity served to reinforce and support members, most of whom were dealing with problems that were consequences of being Black.

BSR was a program intervention whose structure, organization and goals seemed to be set up to serve the population described in the literature review of this study. The program also seemed to carry out the type of suggestions projected by the practice principles in this study.

The purpose in studying this particular organization was, in looking at what seemed to be a typical group, to gain a better understanding of why Black persons tend to shun the formal social services system. The population in the group represented Black people in that they were a group of varied age, socio-economic and education level people. Their responses would probably provide a broad based expression relative to the issues under investigation. It could not be said that the group was representative of all Black people since it was an organization of volunteer participants.

The writer also had an interest in an intervention

that would help Black people to be able to use those services and resources in the larger society which they had historically avoided. One of the purposes of the organization was to help people develop their own resources and to more effectively use outside resources. Responses from the group then became a viable measure of the effectiveness of this program in encouraging Black people to make themselves more available for social services.

Studying the group, which had a program consciously designed to help people to grow and develop would also provide answers to the different ways the members used the group itself to accomplish some of the purposes often achieved in the social services institution.

An organization like BSR seemed to be an important concept in American society where Blacks continue to be alienated, oppressed and powerless. The alienation of Black clients as suggested by these feelings of social isolation needed some resolution that would encourage persons to enhance their lives and those of their children. The literature review revealed that Black mothers felt more powerless, more hopeless and more alienated than mothers who were recent immigrants, had language problems and had a lower level of education. Any information that would contribute to an explanation of this extreme alienation of Blacks in America, to a degree greater than other minority

groups, would be helpful in policy and program planning.

Given possible positive results from the BSR intervention, many Black people may be helped to address problems generated by structural prejudice and discrimination. The program might be expanded or duplicated in order to reach more people. A program successful in helping people to maximize their own and society's resources could become an important model for programs elsewhere in seeking to resolve the problems and issues that confront Black people today.

The importance of the Black church is acknowledged as an arena for needs gratification. However, there exist many concerns and problems that escape resolution in that institution, however important its role and contribution might have been throughout the years.

Change In Methodology

The researcher discovered in the preliminary participation in the BSR group that there was a lot of rich anecdotal information available in talking with members. The more interaction and association with the participants the greater their comfort seemed to be to share information. Kidder has observed that the more the participant observer is immersed in the research setting

the less likely the research subjects are to distort the research (1981, 110). It seemed that the valuable real information could be derived best from interviewing respondents and observation as opposed to a highly structured mail questionnaire.

Instead of collecting information through the 400 mailed questionnaires, it seemed more feasible to collect indepth data as would be provided through interviewing a sample of the members and gathering information through informal contacts.

The participation observation method of research will be used. As an exploratory study, this approach will provide some familiarity with Black methods of using resources in the social services system and will help achieve new insights regarding their perception of how and why they use the system and lead to more precise research problem or hypothesis development. As a descriptive study there will be a benefit from a varied format in order to maximize the chance of capturing fully the social process involved in the study (Settig, Wrightsman and Cook, 1976, 104).

The writer participated directly and shared the experiences of those observed. It was relatively easy to get involved in the group because of the writer's

possessing eligibility characteristics and profile of the group membership. Plans were to participate as a member of the group for six months before starting the formal research. Because of the similarity with the group members it was important to avoid getting emotionally involved in the group and losing objectivity.

One way of accomplishing this was to discuss with the group the research being undertaken, its purpose, who the researcher was, what was being done, the expectation (need) from group members and individual members' and writer's roles. Another means of avoiding involvement in the group was to carry out the process of recording as the activities and dynamics occurred by making written and mental notes to be recorded later.

The writer was aware of the possibility of the influence of her presence on the group because her presence was familiar to the group and consciously attempted to keep the influence minimal. Adhering to standardized instructions and developing and maintaining rapport with the respondents helped control interview effects. (Participant observation preceded by a few sessions the beginning of the formal data collection in order to enhance the comfort of the group with the researcher's presence.) Advance participation also helped to generate questions that were specific and relevant to the agenda of the group.

The main and mini groups through which the members participated were ones in which there was not usually 100% verbal participation. Researcher was physically included as part of the group and participated at some points in order to maintain credibility as a participant member. This level of participation was completely consistent with the functioning norm in the group.

Anecdotal material from informal contacts were used. The majority of notes and data from participant observation came in the mini group discussions. It was in these mini groups that the major group influence took place. The group explored specific topics of concern at each meeting.

Additional information on the organization was gained from attendance at some of the interest groups that spun off from the main one such as the drama, poetry, Black literature groups. Process notes were recorded at these contacts.

Description of the intervention efforts included a list and description of the topic areas explored and the process that took place. The group curriculum was set forth as approximately four different topics for discussion.

Purposeful Selection

The respondent sample was 25 members of the organization who were selected from a group of 75 volunteers based on a balance of sex, length of time in the organization and number of sessions attended. The amount of advanced information from volunteers was limited so as not to request extensive information from people in advance of actual participation.

The 25 respondents selected were not necessarily representative of the group of BSR or of the Black population in general. This method of identifying the 25 respondents was a probability sample, the sample elements having been done on the basis of self selection (Walizer and Wiener, 1978, 437). Availability of members to researcher through volunteering provided a pool of respondents willing to allocate time and involvement in being interviewed. This advantage had its limitations, however, because the resulting sample could have been members with a bias regarding the organization with a purpose to speak favorably or unfavorably in their responses.

Even though only 25 were selected for the sample from 75, it was not possible to generalize the results to the BSR members or to the Black population in general. This

method of sampling, however, is consistent with an exploratory study which relies more on the power of the in-depth information obtained than on the method of sampling used (Walizer and Wiener, 1978, 438).

The initial explanation to the group in the request for volunteers was that researcher is a member of the organization doing a study of Black persons' use of social services and referrals, their perception of those services and if they felt they had been influenced by BSR to alter their level of formal service use. It was explained that the study would be anonymous and that information would only be used in a statistical way. Anyone interested in the result would be welcome to see them.

The volunteer paper asked the members' length of time in the organization and approximate number of sessions attended. Only 25 persons were selected based on those characteristics in seeking a balanced sample in those categories and a sex balance representative of the sex ration in the overall organization.

Interview Questionnaire

An open ended schedule was the basis of interviews with 25 members of the organization. There were some closed ended questions. All interviews were conducted by

the researcher. This allowed for more detailed information and interaction than would have been available through a mail questionnaire and would also allow a greater degree of standardization of responses. Interviews also allowed descriptive probes to many of the responses.

The interview schedule was divided into three sections to explore members' needs and problem solving efforts in the areas of personal adjustment, living or life conditions and their perception of how the group process had affected their seeking resources inside and outside the group. A section on demographic information was used in assessing differential experience responses.

Overview of Group

Black Single Resources - BSR - is a group of Black people who have come together for the purpose of promoting their own self growth and that of others. The hope is that the members will develop to the point of being better able to manage relationships and to make better use of their own personal resources and those of others, whether they be formal or informal. The discussion groups necessarily maintain a focus on the Black experiences in a racist and oppressive society that generate many of the problems with which the members are dealing. The designation of Single only serves the purpose of limiting

the group and specializing many of the issues that would come under discussion.

Context and Setting of Group

The BSR group meets in a community center located on the periphery of the low income section of the Black community. The Center is contiguous with a low income housing project, other housing subsidized for low income families by the federal government and surrounded on two sides by private working class owner occupied dwellings.

In the same block and surrounding ones are agencies designed to serve low income and minorities - the Community Action Program, an alcohol and substance abuse program and the Human Relations Council.

The street bordering the block is the city's main street of Black businesses - a few owned and operated by Blacks, the others specifically catering to Blacks. There are a large number of store front churches, liquor stores, eating establishments, numbers holes, real estate offices and a steady procession of people and drugs. There is deterioration and decay, over priced stores, inferior goods, double and triple parked cars on the streets. This is a transient community - busy, with lots of traffic from the outside.

The police are on constant patrol in the area because of the high incidence of drugs, alcohol, robberies and personal assault. Many children under ten years of age may be seen roaming the streets after 10 p.m., usually without an adult. There is a sense of gaiety which camouflages feelings of hopelessness and despair.

The community center is buffered from the corner street by a large new fire station. The building housing the community center is a 15 year old brick structure of contemporary architecture. It has been very effective as a central service organization and also as a point of identification for people who have few resources and little control in the city.

The location and sense of connectedness to the Black community has become a source of identification and acceptance for Black persons who may reside in other communities. Many of the Black people that I spoke with indicated that the Black composition and location of the group was a factor for them to attend the group.

The group uses the large recreation room for meetings and many of the smaller rooms for the sub group meetings. As the group has grown from the small original nucleus the facilities have been able to accommodate a growing group.

Early Beginnings of Group

The group was initiated by a psychologist who had recently moved into the community. With a sense of isolation from people, contacts, support and services she conceived of the idea of the group. An immediate concern was the feeling that there probably were a community of people who shared the same feelings and sustained the same needs. In response to an initial contact with a few persons on an informal level in the workplace, church and community a small core group of persons met for the purpose of exploring needs, resolving problems, networking and providing mutual support. An expert in group dynamics was engaged as a consultant/facilitator to guide and direct the group as well as to be involved in goal setting and evaluation.

Description of Group

1. Purpose

The purpose of the group was to bring people together to explore relationships, to improve communication among people, and to promote self growth. These processes were described as crucial to helping people use their own personal resources, those of other people as well as the resources of existing institutions in society to become

more effectively functioning with caring relationships among those persons in their lives.

Structure

The group was a mixture of people who came together for the monthly meeting. It was relatively loosely structured and was coordinated and planned for by a three person council. The large group met the second Saturday of each month for four hours - from 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. The four hour session was followed by a social hour during which a food and drink buffet was offered.

The interest groups have spun off from the main group as members developed interest in participating in a specific or specialized activity. These groups were formally organized with regular periodic meetings or they were convened on an an hoc basis. The regular groups were the drama groups - The BSR Players, Black literature, poetry reading, appreciation and writing. The concept behind each of these groups was not only interest in an activity, but a means of dealing with a member's need or problem as reflected by discussion and exchange in the monthly sessions or thorough member choice.

For example, the drama group which sponsors the BSR Players encouraged members of the large group who feel

insecure about appearing in front of a group, who don't have the courage to pursue something they need or want to come to one of their sessions. The recruitment announcement describes the group as a place for those who would like to gain confidence in some areas and endeavors of their lives. The poetry writing was promoted to help members free themselves to creative expression, allow self disclosure and to gain confidence in themselves. The chess group was organized by a woman who was looking to help establish a structure in the void created by her retirement. The spin off or interest groups then have a basic purpose that was consistent with the goals of the main group itself.

The regular annual events are the Fellowship Farm Weekend Retreat, the Christmas dance and an annual play produced by the BSR players. Ad hoc groups have been a group producing a Black film festival and the facilitators group. Those who were interested in learning skills in group leadership or who simply would like to learn more in the area of group dynamics in order to be a more effective participant could attend the facilitator training sessions. These meetings were not regularly schedules.

Organization

For the first two years after organization, the

founder served as the leader, the director, the person responsible for sending out notices monthly, convening the members, taking leadership for the group and making policy decisions. This leader, who has a doctorate in educational psychology, consulted with a specialist in group dynamics, a writer and a small nucleus of participants who provided feedback, ideas and recommendations for the developing organization.

As the group grew and the duties and responsibilities became too demanding for one person, a decision was made to restructure the group to allow more democratic processes, to broaden the perspective of the leadership and to relieve the existing leader. A council of three members was formed from volunteers with the job and authority of leadership. The newly formed council had the task of making plans for the upcoming meeting, serving as a clearinghouse and coordinator for implementing recommendations and suggestions submitted by the membership and of deciding on the topic of focus and exploration at each monthly meeting. Members of the council took turns in leading the group meeting itself.

There were about 450 enrolled members. Membership in the group only required initial attendance and that the member attend periodically. There was no formal policy on the number of meetings that a person must miss before being

dropped from the mailing list. The person sending out the notices did indicate that after a person's being absent about 10-12 times he tended not to continue sending notices until that person reappears. However, the meetings continued to be open at all times.

The average monthly meeting attendance was between 70 and 80 members. The founding anniversary month of March which was called Homecoming usually drew over 150 members. The vacation month of August dropped the attendance to about 50. The highest attendance was during the winter months.

Membership

The membership of the organization was composed of single Black males and females (separated, never married, divorced, widow(er)ed) from the tri state area - New York, New Jersey and Connecticut.

Outside of ethnic group and marital status the only requirement for admission and membership in the group is the admission price of \$7.00 to each monthly group session. (There was no admission charge for any of the special and interest groups.)

The policy allowed and encouraged a broad and diverse group of people along socio-economic, age and career lines.

There were no questions asked relative to a person's status so there was no sense of stigma attached, for instance, to income or job that an individual performed. Reducing these usual status factors has encouraged a diversity of participation.

There was a sex ratio of 60-40 with women being the majority. Most members were in the middle in age distribution with the second largest group being over 45 and the next in size being under 30.

Since there were few official records, it was impossible to know the socio-economic and job categories of the members, but from the information available through informal conversation and reference there were teachers, nurses, paraprofessional workers in various fields, private business people, retired persons, unemployed, skilled and unskilled workers.

There was a portion of the membership that had been with the group since the inception and many had assumed tasks of evaluation, recommendations, welcoming new members, reintroducing intermittent members, seeking information that would be necessary to acknowledge life events, such as sickness, family deaths, special occasion such as graduations and beginning a new venture. These members took the unassigned responsibility to informally

welcome new members and just to try to help persons to feel comfortable and at home. Somehow, they seemed to serve the role of binders for the large group of people. There were also those who had joined along the way and became regular attenders, some moving into the leadership group and others connecting only on a member participant level. There was a large group that attended intermittently with expressed attendance being subject to factors such as work schedules, interest and any other countervailing factors.

In addition, there were those who had attended once or twice and not returned. There had been no real follow up on those participants.

Recruitment

There was no planning for recruitment or outreach for the group. It was felt that the informal communications about the group were adequate to serve the purpose of continuance. There had been feature stories in the local newspaper and also a listing in a county social services directory.

The attitude of the organization leadership, however, was one of frowning upon any kind of advertisement and publicity in a feature context.

Description of the Facilitator

The facilitator in BSR was an individual member of the group, usually of adequate tenure to be familiar with the group, its organization and process. The purpose of the facilitator was to enable the group process and not to lead. The individual must have gone through the facilitator training provided by the organization.

The training was provided by a person who was an expert in group dynamics, who met the Black single characteristics and who was instrumental in organizing the group. The facilitator training meetings were held on an ad hoc basis and there were no strict requirements for the number of times in attendance, but those who facilitate do tend to participate in as many of the training meetings as they are able to. Earlier in the life of the group, sessions were held quite frequently - every other month. For the last year, however, there were only two meetings held. The majority of those who facilitate have been those of one or more years standing in membership and attended the earlier training sessions.

Content of Facilitator's Meetings

The content and process of the facilitator's meeting is one of providing information for those attending that

would help them to become better facilitators and/or better participants in the group meeting. There is instruction in group dynamics, understanding the purpose of the sessions, role of the facilitator in the group meetings and the goals and purposes of the group meetings. In addition to the didactic instruction provided there is modeling, simulation and role playing which puts the participants into the process that would be desirable in the actual session that is to be led.

Role of the Facilitator

The facilitator was responsible for introducing the day topic, raising provocative questions regarding the topic that would generate discussions, helping ease anxiety, especially of new members and attempting to integrate the group. He/she also ought to develop productive process in the group by encouraging a balance between those who would overpower and those who would tend to be more restrained.

It was incumbent on the facilitator to maintain focus on the current topic, to discourage generalizing and to insure that the speaker contributes from his/her own experience and uses only first person singular statements. Participating as a group member, the facilitator was expected to share experiences and feelings in the group as

any other member. There had been instances of members who had requested that the facilitator become more involved as a member and also where members had tended to withdraw until the facilitator became involved as a member contributor.

Part of the process that was formally defined for the group was the necessity for some summary, confirmation of process and interaction with the group members and a closure. The facilitator encouraged all members to wrap up and summarize and looked for specific areas of agreement. Closure was sought by affirming that everyone had had opportunity for expression, restating areas of agreement, acknowledging of areas of difference and summarizing the record in draft form. One member usually volunteered or was requested to record information that was later shared with the larger group.

Issues Considered by the Group

BSR grew out of a need of a few individuals who felt that their needs could be generalized to a large part of the population. With some reflection on what exactly they were lacking or were looking for, it was revealed that many ideas were expressed seemed to be directly related to the reality of being Black, of belonging to a group that was not adequately recognized or supported by the majority of

society. They discussed the fact that Blacks have historically been excluded from welfare services and socialized to rely not only on society, but on its own people. The historical spirit of concern, charity and benevolence has manifested itself through kinship, lineage and community bonds. In Africa the socio-economic context under which people lived was "tribal socialism," - patterns of mutual concern and sharing. Dubois observed that "of charity, as such, there was no need among Africans, since all shared the common fund of land and food" (1969, 10).

Most members had indicated that it was taken for granted that services available in the larger society were not specified or geared to their needs. Culturally there was the sense that the system does not even have as one of its purposes the recognition and understanding that problems and needs of Blacks may be somewhat at variance with the majority society. What existed according to members' perceptions had very little relevance and purpose in the lives of Blacks.

A thought that the original members entertained was of feeling excluded from access to opportunities for gratifying needs and problems. They shared an awareness that Black people need to learn to function in both societies - their own and that of mainstream culture. Social work, at one time, had as one of its goals

reorganizing the individual to "become" like members of the majority culture. The assumption was that immigrants, poor people, lower class and Blacks were deficient and deprived and needed socializing before being ready to be integrated with others. This notion of cultural deficiency had its heyday in compensatory education programs that flowed from the War on Poverty in the mid sixties. This conceptualization posited that norms and cultural patterns of minority groups that varied from those of the majority culture were for the most part deviant and destructive" (Moynihan, 1965, 30).

The protest and advocacy movements by and for Blacks in the United States stimulated a move towards closing ranks and looking inward as a group to interpret their own culture as respectable. In addition, social science research began to generate information that influenced society's historical interpretation of "different as deviant." These data have discredited assumptions that the majority group norms should be the standard.

Feeling that there must be some way of structuring the nurturing, companionship, relationship and networking for persons who had been involved in these experiences and were attempting to deal with feelings surrounding them, a nucleus group met for the first time in May, 1981.

Some of the first members were familiar with or had been members of a life issues group at Riverside Church. They felt rewarding experiences in that group but sensed a compromise and diluting of issues and values important to them as the tone of the group took on the perspectives of the majority group's concerns.

The question that arose in making decisions about the composition of the group being formed was stated well by Green, "Should an assumption of a melting pot uniformity, a belief in the essential similarity of people's needs and desires, underlie the worker's suggestions for problem resolution among ethnically distinctive clients? Or should the worker attempt to encourage problem resolution in terms of ethnically distinctive values and community practices...?" (Green, 1982, 3).

Green argues that social services should be provided to people in a way that accommodates the client's cultural and community background and in a way to enhance their ethnic group participation and power (Green, 1982, 4).

It was with this orientation that the originators made the decision that BSR should be a group that dealt with the needs and concerns specifically of Black people. Programmatically, this meant that the composition of the group would be limited to Black persons. It also indicated

an influence on the issue focus of the meetings that were to be held. While it may be true that we all have common human needs for safety, security, self esteem and self fulfillment as outlined by Maslow, the degree of the needs and how people go about realizing them may vary according to cultural and ethnic differences.

As an example, if there were a concern for male/female relationships, there had to be recognition of the fact that Black women have always been in the labor force, Black men were the least recognized group in our society, social problems of Black young men remain highest of any group, Blacks, as opposed to the majority norm tend to have women more highly educated and job secure than the men and the ethnic group has the highest divorce rate. This has been societally reflected in aggressive behavior in crime, the passivity of low education, poor skills, high dropout from school and in the withdrawal through suicide, drugs and alcohol on the part of Black males (Staples, 1984, 13). A very large proportion of Black men have never been successful in meeting the most basic prerequisites of manhood - life sustaining employment and the ability to support a family (Staples, 1984, 13).

Black women likewise suffer indirectly the consequences of male alienation as they become victims of the male attempts to cope and adjust in a hostile society.

These problems of Black people were the results of the economic, educational and career opportunity, societal attitude differential between the Black male and those of the groups with greater access. It is racial and ethnic differences and the implications of their expression that states different experiences, perceptions and behavior for Black people. The original members of the group felt that these serious considerations of special concerns indicated a closed Black group so that there could be a restrictions in discussion which would allow a sharper focus to particular issues.

Historically, one of the few places open to Blacks where they can predominate has been the Black Church. The Church has traditionally provided an arena to give expression to deepest feelings and also at the same time to achieve status and find a meaningful existence. The Black Church also "provided a refuge in a hostile white world" (Frazier, 1963, 45). Mays & Nicholson and Hamilton discuss the Church as a meeting not only social needs, but also meeting needs for political life, opportunities for leadership, for private business concerns and as social agencies. (Mays & Nicholson, 1969, 9; Hamilton, 1972 ,13) Hamilton suggested that in a rigidly segregated society, with no opportunity for participation in unions, social or economic agencies, the Church was the one institution that

belonged exclusively to Blacks (Hamilton, 1972, 21). The Church's popularity has been an indication of the need for prominence in an institution and for opportunities to make decisions about how they will be served. In this arena people can be open and free, relaxed, themselves and work out their own brand of deception and compensation in dealing with the outside world (DuBois, 1969).

It is true that there was still no one single organization that meets as many needs for as many Black people as the Black Church. In spite of greater economic, educational and political advances through integrated activities, the basic social, business and leadership needs remained ungratified in the larger society and without the opportunities for pursuing the satisfaction in that society.

Federico and Berger have indicated that social structural resources for adults are found in major institutions of society through which people organize their behavior (Federico and Berger, 1982, 147). It is true that the family and close friends are able to handle the most intimate interpersonal relationships, but the economic, political and social welfare resources are necessary in order to round out survival and life satisfaction needs. Needs for help and support, as people deal with tasks of adulthood, such as earning a living, providing emotional

support for mates, children and parents and seeking to achieve their own aspirations warrant affirmation in the larger society. The adult's sense of accomplishment and well being are, for most people, heavily dependent on the formation of relationships and structures that provide the necessary social, biological, socio-structural and psychological supports. These socio-structural resources do not always exist for Black people.

Knowledge of the lack of adequate formal mechanism outside of the institutions of the family and the church would be important information to govern intervention efforts and techniques with a Black organization. In a highly technical complex society, consideration needs to be given to the kinds of compensatory systems that are needed in order to sustain the person's well being.

An appreciation of the emotional, social and cultural context of the Black client are supportable by basic concepts that can be helpful in working with that population. These concepts can further define needs of the population served in the group under study and can also be used to help plan for curriculum topics, focus, structure and process of the group. Concepts of power, equity, cognition and andragogy were those drawn upon to provide structure process and content in the group intervention applied to address the problem.

Feelings of powerlessness can produce the inability to manage emotions, skills, knowledge and/or material resources so that one cannot perform his/her required social roles that are necessary for gratification. With repeated experiences in managing situations in life very poorly, or not at all, people tend to withdraw or to make only half hearted attempts. Blacks in the American society even today have aspirations and goals that are limited simply by virtue of being Black in a white society. The race continues to be second class citizens having lost many gains that had been made during the last 25 years before they could be consolidated and integrated.

Although there has been a steady move for Blacks toward becoming more prominent in the political arena, establishing eligibility in the business and economic world and making educational strides, Black parents continue to socialize their children to a world of oppression and lack of equitable opportunity. This process of socialization includes teaching the developing of tools for survival such as the repression of aggressiveness, muting expression of feelings and the folly of aspiring to power. The gains in the right and ability to vote has given a kind of power to Blacks to elect mayors of 300 major U.S. and towns, 3655 other elected positions, but the checks and balances that accompany those gate keeping positions have prevented the

real exercise of power and control on the level of the average person. The real sense of power and control continues to escape the Black person as unemployment rises and numbers of Blacks in undergraduate, graduate and professional education decline. As Black men and women struggle to survive and maintain a few gains in many instances, it is at the expense of relationships and marriages. Blacks have the highest divorce rate of any ethnic group in America.

The Black man who is the least able to look forward to continuing care and responsibility for his family, Black youth who are still restricted from entry in many employment areas and from advancement in others, all Black people who live in a society that compels them to expend a great deal of energy observing attempting to avoid and dealing with institutionalized racism are all psychologically reduced to fractions of people as they seek a place for themselves in society.

Power

Power - an integral element of American society - is rooted in the ability to influence and control. The sex and role appropriate functions that lead to that power are denied to Black men (Chestang, 1976, 83). Even though statistically many of the majority ethnic members will not

make it either, the possibility is not denied them from birth because of an inherent characteristic over which he/she has no control. For him/her, the possibility does exist.

The powerlessness and impotence generate a lot of rage and anger in Black people. The attitude of many Black people is that the society that casts them in their various roles of inadequacy does not really have the solution or capability to understand how to help them cope with the consequences.

A growth group or the theme group as described by Ruth Middleman is an idea that can help open up options and choices to the participants as an empowering solution. Support and encouragement from those who share similar experiences, feelings and lives can go far in mitigating these feelings of impotence.

A sense of powerlessness can also be reduced by peer confirmation of one's being as positive. Self positive feelings promote autonomy as people are enabled to feel self as being capable of developing and carrying out solutions to existing problems as well as being able to extend self to seek solutions from others, formal or informal. This sense of accomplishment is greatly maximized in a group which, out of a common background, is

able to validate each other from a non-threatening position.

In recognition of the above stated needs on the part of Black people or any oppressed people, the leader of BSR considered very carefully the topics chosen for discussion and what focus would be used in approaching a topic. For instance, one monthly topic was positive thinking. Group facilitators were instructed not to allow statement of any negative feelings, perceptions or behaviors. Participants were also required to speak in first person singular pronouns. It was very difficult for members to combine an "I" statement with something positive. There was the tendency to precede it with a negative comment or to want to reflect the "positive" aspects of their lives against the backboard of the negative situation.

At the end of the sub groups session, the general membership talked about how difficult it was not to stray, to maintain a positive focus and not to lapse into negative statements. Some expressed it as actually having been an enervating experience. Another feeling shared at the end was a sense of feeling better with a sense of relief or relaxation as though there were some cathartic process present.

Equity

Theories of equity help explain why feelings of powerlessness may cause people to reject traditional services and offers of help. Equity here is used to mean obligation of mutual conduct (Webster's Dictionary).

The client with very little sense of power and low self esteem will harbor the pervasive feeling of not being able to offer anything up in exchange studies have been performed that indicate that most people feel quite uncomfortable if they are not able to reciprocate after having been offered something (Fisher, et al., 1983, 52). People will attempt, if at all possible, to offer something in exchange. Peter Blau has used the theory of exchange to describe "voluntary actions of individuals that are motivated by the returns they are expecting to bring and typically do, in fact, bring from others." However, feeling that he/she has nothing of value to offer can produce feelings of frustration, alienation and perhaps outright anger (Blau, 1964, p. 121).

The client with nothing to offer will soon cease asking for help. Or another way of dealing with the inequity would be to accept whatever was given regardless of usefulness or appropriateness since one is not involved in an equal exchange. Historically, Blacks have accepted

left over, second class services and resources since they did not have the right to demand anything better. Accepting in a one way direction had caused them to resent the donor and the service or to look for ways to minimize or downplay the value of the service or simply to accept it and not put it to use, or a combination of all of these. The one way relationship can also confirm a sense of unworthiness since the individual is not able to live up to one of the basic norms in our society and that is the one of interrelationship and exchange. The Black cultural heritage of communal ownership, sharing and reciprocity is overlaid with the capitalist dictum of individualism along with the concept of earning or deserving. The struggle to combine the two can be quite stressful to the person at once needs and psychologically indebted.

This lack of ability to participate in an equitable exchange has caused some clients in the traditional social work relationship to resist services, to reject offers of help, and to accept a service while looking for ways to undermine its effectiveness or success. Some clients accept the service and proceed to discredit or disqualify the donor in whatever way possible - withholding information, giving false information or by deriding the worker among friends and others later.

Some clients rationalize this inequity by making

statements such as, "she knows she wouldn't have a job without me," or "if she didn't have me to feel better than, she'd be in trouble." These statements acknowledge a contribution by the client to the exchange which does not seem to be gratifying enough to be credibly accepted.

On the other extreme is the client who completely abandons self to the direction of the worker, bringing nothing to the cooperative problem of solving effort except the body which participates in a completely passive way.

The issue to be dealt with here in its implications of use in a group setting is, how can people be helped to recognize that they are indeed making a contribution to the client/worker service relationship and to identify what that contribution is and just what feelings and behavior are appropriate after the recognition.

The group with its process was a likely setting for changing the relationship between the person and an environment which has been in many ways counterproductive. With the benefits and services the BSR member received, he/she does not have to be concerned about a unilateral flow of "gifts." A member profited from a statement, action or behavior of another member and had the sense that he/she may expect to provide something in return. The peer exchange put no one in the position to feel beholden. With

little reason to feel suspicious of the service being rendered, a group member was freer to concentrate on the advantages and benefits of the experience.

The atmosphere encouraged members to make their own decisions and to act on them. No one, whatever his/her place in the hierarchy, solved problems for anyone else. For those who felt that they were still not able to be autonomous around an issue, there was help in identifying external sources of support and amelioration. Additional validity in the peer provision of service lay in the fact that those who were offering the help had shared the experiences and pain and can therefore identify with the feelings that the other member had and can appreciate that person's goals and aspirations.

Many of the members in BSR related how difficult it was for them to accept help from anyone or even to acknowledge that they needed help. What surprised them about themselves was the fact that they could, after a while, confide to fellow members that there was a problem or need and to be able to outreach to others for response.

One member discussed her experience after an automobile accident. She had made all of her plans about how she would recuperate at home using some support from an adult grandson who could help out periodically. She

perceived need of or depending on others, as a sign of weakness and she did not see herself being in that position.

She described a period of about six months during which many of the BSR members visited her, brought food, sent cards, ran errands, performed housework. She did not expect any of this and actually felt very uncomfortable as the recipient of the care. She even stated quite clearly that if the situation were reversed with someone else, that she knew being the patient, she would not have time to offer the kind of care and attention that they did.

The aspect of the situation that surprised her was the fact that after her recuperation she found herself extending herself to others in a way that she had never done before and would not have thought possible. She articulated the experience as - she did not want to be put in the position of receiving, but when she could see herself as part of a cycle of giving and receiving, she could begin to be much more comfortable in the situation.

Cognitive Learning

Persons who have the opportunity to have repeated experiences in which they are able to make a contribution and to gain respect for having performed well enough to

feel generative and productive may reach a point where a feeling of mastery occurs. Ability to gain knowledge and information and to be able to use it and to be allowed to use it increases a person's self esteem and strengthens the feelings of self control over his/her own life and over the environment.

Cognition is the process by which individual comes to know and interpret the environment. It plays a very important role in shaping behavior. To use a cognitive approach to behavioral and environmental change or modification is necessary in adapting to life's situations in a more profitable and constructive way. Much of the Black person's behavior has been adaptive for survival in a racist society. Because of societal and technological changes, much of this behavior is no longer the best form of adaptation. To be able to use knowledge and information as a way of changing no longer adaptive behavior is a skill that can be fostered in a group setting. Anyone attempting to cope in a changing or misperceived social world could benefit by the use of an intervention toward this end. The members of BSR needed more objective information about themselves and about their environment in order to be able to deal in a more objective way and to be able to identify additional sources of problem resolution.

Part of the knowledge necessary is the skill to carry

out a task required for improving one's condition and the way that one goes about improving his/her fit with the environment. Maluccio has written extensively about the necessity of person's understanding of bureaucratic organizations, social systems and natural helping networks (1979, 18). Removing fear about the environment and becoming more willing to confront it, as one seeks to reduce his own discomfort, which usually is a result of individual and environmental forces, promotes one's sense of security and self esteem.

Cognitive ability is not just a vehicle through which tasks are accomplished, but becomes a way that people can derive a sense of achievement and accomplishment. In addition, a client must be acknowledged for his/her cognitive contribution to the helping process which encourages his sense of power and control over his own life. But she must also learn to recognize how cognitive contributions of others can be useful and helpful to him.

The group discussion on depression was a good example of how members were able to gain knowledge and information that otherwise might have remained obscure or at least unclear them. One member of the group who described a clear case of clinical endogenous depression shared with the group that she had gone for psychiatric help and had tried different disciplines - psychiatrist, social worker

and psychologist. She received practically no help. Her depression continued throughout and survived each treatment. She did not even get a clear understanding of what she was dealing with. It was a force that struck unanticipated, incapacitated her, rendered her "totally useless" while causing a lot of pain, then just as mysteriously, disappeared. Those episodes of incapacity did not threaten her economically only because her employment could absorb her intermittent attendance.

Her willingness to describe her experiences in such detail became informative for those who had not articulated the feelings and behavior except to themselves. Two members had discovered depression in common since joining BSR before the current session and one had provided information from her experience for the other.

In the group session two members said that they had not thought of depression as being an illness and would later look for ways to alter their responses to their experiences in order to recover from them more quickly and to assume less of a helpless attitude toward the resulting situation.

The larger meeting where all sub groups reconvened reflected that all sub groups had entertained similar discussions. Consideration was given to the potential

neurological and pharmacological aspects of depression towards the purpose of encouraging members who felt it necessary to seek professional help from appropriate personnel. The group was urged not to consider sessions such as the one attended at BSR therapeutic for an illness such as depression. The purpose of the discussion was to help persons become aware of the possible existence, nature and manifestation of the disease itself and to consider the use of self and others and the treatment profession for remediation.

Andragogy

The concepts of power, equity, cognition can be subsumed under andragogy as an organizing principle in its application to a method necessary in the group process. The term andragogy refers to the method of teaching adult learners, with its style and approach especially constructed based on needs and learning styles of adults as different from those of children.

Knowles defines andragogy as the process of teaching/learning that presumes that learning is an internal process so that experience is very important as people seek to assess and change themselves (56, 1972).

E.C. Lindeman, a pioneer in the field of adult

learning, saw as utmost importance the encouragement of learners (clients) through utilization of his/her own experiences to confront pertinent situations in his life as a beginning of growth (Lindeman, 1956).

The respect for an individual learner or client as afforded by the andragogical approach is one that encourages persons to identify and feel comfortable as he/she calls on his/her own resources and experiences as well as those of peers and the larger society. As with the concern in the reduction of hierarchical relationship as people are helped to mobilize services and resources in their environment, the andragogy approach rejects the concept of expert worker and inexperienced client. The client must be free to set and work out his/her own goals, to develop self motivation in pursuing services that would help him in maximizing societal benefits.

Some members in the BSR group had recognized the appreciation and respect for them as adults as provided in the structure of the group. The governance of the organization recognized the members as capable of making decisions, setting goals for the group and taking responsibility for what they get out of the group. As an example, new members frequently ask why the facilitator did not take a more active role in getting people who tend to withdraw in encouraging verbal participation in the group.

The leader's policy was that people should be adult enough to decide if they were going to use the opportunity presented through participation. The role of the facilitator did continue to be discussed as others asserted that the role should be one with more active participation in involving each individual member.

Group members were encouraged to develop additional skills by following their interests and needs to create additional groups. This structure encouraged a sense of self worth in members through making contributions and taking responsibilities. Holding a position of responsibility was what some people felt gave them the support to extend themselves in the group. Continued successful experiences in the group seemed to also provide the sense of achievement and accomplishment needed by some members to feel good about their involvement in the organization.

How Structure Addresses Needs and Purposes of the Group

Many of the benefits and advantages of the group inhere in the structure which has been very carefully designed in order to carry out purposes of the group. The leader and council with member input plan program, activities, and the organizational structure of BSR.

An organization like BSR has been defined by Davis and Anderson as a commitment organization, one that is bound by bonds of values and ideology (1983, 243). It is an opportunity for people to collaborate on their background and to express similar views of the world. BSR constituents were attracted to the organization because of a sense of peoplehood outside the dominant order of society.

Davis and Anderson feel that commitment organizations have to deal with elements and undesirable subjects that bureaucracies seem to ignore. Professional organizations likewise have not felt obligated to deal with issues that are not generally popular (1983, 245).

Leadership

In BSR the nature of the commitment of members has allowed the leader to capitalize on a structure that encouraged loyalty and support of the members. The leader was sure to consider needs and problems of the constituent group - background factors, ways of thinking, habits, attitudes, goals and aspirations and to recognize how this could be used to build a large committed following.

The group members were very attuned to the leader, respected and followed her judgement and looked to her for

direction, consultation and as a resource. Members seemed to like the result of the leading, guidance and monitoring of the leader as reflected in the attendance, growth and perpetuation of the group as a continuing unit.

Individual members have shared with the writer during some of the informal sessions, such as the pre group coffee hour and after group social time, that they see the leader as a magnetic person who is warm, empathetic and genuinely dedicated to the individuals in the group and the group itself. Some have indicated that she is the group and the group is she. Her character personifies the group culture. She is an intelligent Black female with a strong sense and pride in being Black, a quiet effective leader who spends most of her time doing for other people. A professional woman with six adult children, she is very active in the community and in her professional career.

Even as the group grew to proportions too demanding for one person to lead the suggestion for increasing those on the leadership level came from the leader and not one of the group members. This division of leadership involved running the meetings, decisions on matters such as topics for discussion, structure or process changes, program concerns, the newsletter and leadership in the sub groups.

The leader has used scientific intelligence to inform

decisions about the group but has been careful not to rely entirely on outside professional input as a way of operating. She has brought in outside experts as consultants, but it was ultimately her education and intuitive decisions that have guided the group. Her decisions seemed to have been on target as the group members and level of participation have continued to grow and expand.

As an example, the leader has made suggestions for topics for discussions at the monthly meetings that a consultant thought would not hold the group or be viable to carry the group through the afternoon. With her decision prevailing, her choice usually resulted in a successful session - without any knowledge on the part of the general membership about how the topic was decided. One member said that there were some topics that the leader suggested that he thought would be a "bomber." Her sense invariably seemed to prove right.

The leadership had decentralized - decision making was done by the council. Individual members have the responsibility of leading the interest groups, program planning and leading the monthly meetings. The leader was much less visible, but was still highly involved and invested and still seemed to have ultimate responsibility and supervision.

Even though members liked the results of the group, there continued to be a strong need to follow. No one had proposed any substantive changes or alterations in the running of the group. No one had emerged who seemed to want to move in different directions.

The interest groups, such as drama and poetry allowed just enough independence and decision making so that members comfortably follow the overall leadership. Ultimately, the leaders of these groups relied on the leader for advice, consultation and support although she had no more expertise in the varying areas than they had. If the production of the newsletter got bogged down, the burden fell on the leader. When she produced it, it was predictable and timely. With member leadership, it was late and less comprehensive.

Size

BSR was a large collection of individuals who needed the leader and each other to work on common tasks. When people first came to BSR and initially participated in the large group, they had not usually articulated just what those goals and expectations were. They did seem to realize that they did need some vehicle to help in the management of some of life's tasks and to gain support by being able to use the system more efficiently as they

perceived it. There was a feeling among large numbers of people anticipating starting and unfolding the process in a setting that was amicable to their lifestyles. Schwartz notes the function of the setting (agency) to provide help with specific problems and as being hospitable to the common tasks of the group.

The structure of convening as a large group - from 50 to 150 people - set the stage, the culture of influence of shared values, standards of behavior and chances for identification unavailable in the larger society. Durkheim emphasized the need for support and attachment within the larger society as a result of his studies on suicide (1951).

To explore feelings in a more intimate way and to acquire the attachment and support desired, allowing for greater participation of each member required that the large group be broken down into sub or mini groups. With a smaller size, the monthly topics could be more specifically and intimately addressed. This allowed each member some participation, but since in depth exploration was not a goal of the group, the six to eight member optimum (Schwartz, Hartford, Northern, 1976) was not a desirable number of participants. Twelve to thirteen members were described as small enough to be intimate, but large enough not to encourage in depth focus on any one.

Care was taken from the outset that the group not become a therapeutic one. This prevention was built into the structure. One specifically assigned role of the facilitator was not to allow any one member to preempt general and total group participation by getting too involved or too heavily invested in his/her own needs. The individual needs of the members have prescribed a therapeutic process as members tend to protest behaviorally or attitudinally if there was too much or too long a focus on any one person.

The group was to be used, however to affect the membership through socialization and resocialization - influencing self concept and identity, attitude and behavior change and achieving a sense of belonging and support. It was these purposes that influenced the choice of topics, all of which could be related to areas as they affected and are affected by the Black experience. For instance, toward the aim of strengthening and coalescing the Black group psyche, recognition was given to the necessity for Black men and women to be able to communicate and work together productively. With the divorce rate among Blacks being the highest of any ethnic group in our society, it was not possible to build positive experiences for the group participants without looking for ways of bonding and understanding among those that comprised the

group.

The overall benefits that accrued to members could be reinforced by participation in other events, none of which allowed an in depth involvement. Members did expect and received from these other groups benefits that they perceived as helping them to manage their lives more effectively. One member who played a leading role in the drama production stated that being a member of BSR had much to do with her fulfilling her potential in playing the character in the play. She thanked BSR forum and members for the many things she had learned and come to understand -- some to change and some to accept.

She also indicated that she was extremely gratified for professional direction and for the sharing and support provided by fellow cast members as she played her first role.

Hierarchy

One of the barriers identified as keeping many Blacks out of the consumer system for some services has been the alienation generated by the vertical relationship between provider and client. This structure has symbolized the devaluation of the individual, culture and life style as expressed by the hierarchical relationships in the larger

society.

Gratification based on conventional status characteristics such as age, occupation, sex, wealth or education was strongly discouraged as an organizing principle in BSR. For an organization that was not highly formally organized, it was not easy to prevent the effects of status implications into hierarchical layers. A large formal organization organizes hierarchically in order to effect efficiency and order.

Alcoholics Anonymous achieved the absence of hierarchy through anonymity and through the exclusive focus. The exclusive focus made it inappropriate to discuss any matter other than the program of A.A. Other issues may be mentioned, but there is no dwelling on them (Davis and Anderson, 1983, 278). A.A. refused to take stands on various political and social issues and was single minded. The normative, stress focus on the problem under consideration mutes facts interpreted as extraneous to the purpose of the organization. The sense was that if persons perceive that they have shared status, there will emerge affective bonds which lead to solidarity and cohesiveness within the group.

BSR had a similar structure goal of elimination of as much status and hierarchy as possible. Structurally, this

was achieved by organizing with no layers between leader and members. Psychologically, the status reduction was achieved through minimizing differences in the characteristics of people. When new members were introduced, there was no mention made of occupation, income, education or the like. There was a tendency not to deviate from the prescribed operation routine. In focusing on commonalities, perceived differences among members tended to be rendered unimportant.

Flexibility

There was an attempt to build a certain amount of flexibility in the group by seeking input and suggestions from the group members. However, this flexibility was almost always tempered with a structure that marked the input, molded it and expressed it in a structured form. The final product might not be recognizable as the input, but it usually contained some of the original elements.

As an example, the leader made decisions from the beginning about the monthly discussion topics. After the council was formed, the topic discussions was one of the responsibilities that they took over. If a member suggested a topic for discussion, it would not be implemented uncritically. The council would evaluate the topic, examining its appropriateness and suitability.

After their decision, the leader refined the examination further, considering issues such as interest possibilities, usefulness of the idea of the majority of members, applicability to the Black experience (recognizing also that many experiences, needs and problems are generic to all social beings) and ability to be explored without excessive personal disclosure.

Participation in discussion groups was restricted when a member tended to stray from the acceptable mode or time frame for expression. Those who were somewhat reticent to speak were not required to share, but were encouraged to verbalize a feeling or reaction. The verbal message was that it was acceptable to respond or not respond as you chose, but there would be a gentle leading to become involved in the group process.

On the other hand, in the interest of having the group belong to everyone, any member who tended to go too deeply into his/her own feelings was curbed by having the facilitator or a member seek input from someone else.

There were strict rules for speaking in terms of making only "I" statements. A member could be requested in the middle of speaking to restructure what he/she was saying to first person. This request related to the way that a member presented material. There was some

functional variation in this application as some facilitators tended to be less formal and rigid in their approach. Others made a very strict interpretation of the requirements governing facilitating the group.

To see behavior and relationships from an "I" perspective helped focus on that member's responsibility and accountability for his/her behavior and also on the fact that people do have more control over their lives than they are aware of.

How Processes of the Group Serve the Members

Most adults are capable of dealing with the balancing of needs of the individual and social self. However, during crises, there may be the need for extra help due to increased pressures and resulting reduced ability to cope and adjust. Since the self is generated through social interaction, it is true that modification of self through increased social competence can best be developed by functioning in a group situation also (McBroom in Northern and Roberts, 1976, 297). The processes that occur in a group should be manipulable for the use of goal achievement of group members. The group processes are needed as a functional element between perceived needs of members and a resolution by a larger service system.

The group would be the means through which people were able to effect a relationship between need and service. People striving to gain some mediation between themselves and society or their environment see great viability in a secondary institution such as the group under investigation. A group such as this is close to the individual's primary ties and support system, but yet accessible to points in the institutional environment which can offer satisfaction on higher levels of need that cannot be accommodated by the individual or his/her primary network.

The group processes in a secondary group such as BSR enabled the individual to (1) experience and understand himself in order to be able to express self; (2) provide opportunities to try new behavior; (3) foster norms in the group that may be different from those in the larger society; and (4) provide structure to help reduce anxiety that normally accompanies free expression (Anderson, 1980, 277).

As one member articulated, "Its (BSR) philosophy strives to support, to seek alternatives, to understand, to be sensitive and most importantly, to bring Black people together under less conflicting circumstances that we usually encounter in other places."

Support Functions Served by the Group:

"Tentative results suggest that support provided through structured social relationships can have preventive and therapeutic functions." Some of those functions are buffering against various life crises and influencing patterns of health service utilization within the community (Caplan, 1976, 47).

Caplan defines support as "continuing social aggregates that provide individuals with opportunities for feedback about themselves and for validations of their expectations about others. People have a variety of specific needs that demand satisfaction through enduring interpersonal relationships (1976, 47).

BSR, with one of its primary means and goals being that of providing support networks, provided in its regular program exchange feedback for members on realistic and expectable services, their abilities and availabilities. In planning the development of BSR, consideration was given to structural aspects of support such as regular and periodic contact, frequent contacts, activities that encourage social relationships and opportunities for members to be able to express needs and expectations with opportunities for responses. This was provided not only in the group setting, but also by extra and informal contacts

outside the formal meetings.

The benefit to members was the properties of nurturance and sustenance afforded the individual in the support groups and not just the presence of the relationship itself. With this understanding, BSR had planned to formalize relationships to provide direct support and encouragement. The way that the members extended and reached out to new members has been mentioned as one of the factors that held attractiveness for those who started out tentative and anxious as they embarked on a new experience in their lives. The social support and interrelationships providing connections among members were not automatic to people coming together in a social relationship. The support and networking functions were programmed so that each member got a sense of connectedness to the group. Some members indicated that the support that they received outside the group potentiated the benefit that they received from the group situation itself.

Self Help

The issue of the group leader's having a common background and in many ways using the same coping mechanism as the membership was an important concept in the structuring of the group. It was recognized that the leader should not be one who related to the group as an

authority who has answers in helping them solve their problems, but that the role be more of a participant.

In self help the group members in their discussion, explorations, commonalities, and sharing actually had the powers of their own well being. It was through the self help process that they were able to realize the purposes for this they joined.

Katz and Bender have indicated that people join self-help groups because they feel rejected by the larger society and its institutions, have feelings of powerlessness over decisions that affect their lives, and experience a sense of helplessness to make any changes (1976, 105).

People who are attracted to self help groups are not tolerated or have been outrightly rejected by society. The roles that society has imposed on them were at variance with their perception of themselves and their potentials. People who can find no place for validation might seek it in a setting where they feel comfortable and acceptable. When existing groups and relationships fail to provide the sustenance, empowerment and support that people need, they tend to seek solutions in new groups.

The concept of self help is one of the integrating themes that provided the basis structural approach to

meeting the needs of the population involved - Black people in need of affirmation. One of the creating rationales behind the self help movement in our society has been the recognition of the lack of existing structures that can adequately and equitably deal with people's solutions of their own problems. The self help form of intervention assumes that people can take an active role in making plans and decisions regarding their lives. Allowing people to participate in solutions regarding their future is a powerful motivating tool as they attempt to manage their lives.

Black people have especially felt the pressure of having choices and decisions imposed on them by those who have very little concern and interest in the consequences. The literature review has documented the sense of alienation and oppression heaped on the population due to remotely controlled circumstances in their lives.

Self help processes allow people to benefit from feelings and experiences of others with similar points of reference. These shared experiences, values and feelings can be affirming and validating and of help in communicating that those with needs and problems are not alone. A member in a group like BSR, for instance, needs the reassurance that there are opportunities in the group

expanding their resources for creating better solutions. With the sense of limited resources that most of the members come to the group with, a peer sharing expands problems solving capacities of all members.

Knowing that a fellow member has similar experiences to yours and that others are in varying stages of solution achieved, the education purpose in the service process that came with more difficulty and time in the professional worker/client situation.

The fellow member has more of a sense of how the pain of an individual feels, he understands the context of how this pain came about and he has a sense of what works as an attempt is made to address the hurt. The session on depression was an example of how individuals were helped to better understand an illness, were able to put it into perspective and plan ways of alleviating the pain and look for more effective coping behavior. The dynamics of the group indicated that it was a beginning for members' reaching that level of understanding.

With the human services profession's commitment to self determination, the goal can be maximized in self help whether the service under consideration is a direct service for information and referral. Self help groups can use either of these foci as an interventive effort to

ameliorate conditions in people's lives.

Ritual

One theme that emerged as an important consideration in the monthly meetings, as well as other programs in the organization, has been that of the importance of ritual in the life of the organization and the individual. Although other disciplines have made intensive use of ritual, their meanings and uses in other cultures, social work has tended to underestimate the need for ritual systems in the lives of most people (Laird, 1984).

However, our lives in this society are replete with instances of ritual which are so commonplace that we take them for granted. It is well documented by professional writers that it is the ritual that accompanies life span development transitions that makes it possible for people to adjust as they move from one stage to another. It has been suggested that at least some forms of mental illness are the result of people's being forced to go through these transition stages without help (Kimball in vanGennys in Laird, 1960, 1984, 123.)

Some social scientists have written that rituals have become less meaningful and that rituals that were shared and formalized have been replaced by rituals that seem to reject active participation and communion among people

(Laird, 1984, 124). Behavior such as eating alone or on the run, television watching, crossword puzzles are rituals, but in ways that are counterproductive as people seek to satisfy their needs in socially isolated ways.

Ritual can be done collectively or individually. There are many components to it, but Moore and Myerhoff list certain features common in ritualistic procedures: (1) repetition, (2) acting (saying, thinking, doing), (3) special behavior or stylization (using action or symbols that are extraordinary ones in an unusual ways), (4) order (ritual may be ordered according to beginnings, ends and prescriptions for behavior and still be capable of containing elements of chaos and spontaneity that may be expressed at particular times and places), (5) evocative presentational style, and (6) a collective dimension (that is, a dimension charged with a social message, even if it is the self sending a message to the self)" (1977).

There is a supportive function served by ritual even in a person's day to day living. The ritual of the religious service has been an important feature in mobilizing and maintaining people who would otherwise feel so oppressed that it would be difficult to function. The ritual also becomes symbolic of the way that Black people have constructed a reality for themselves which is different from life in the larger society.

The uniformed matron who is a respectable member of the usher board on Sunday morning with all of its rituals and procedures and the recitation of announcements which are endlessly repeated in the church bulletin as well as being read by the church clerk - these and all the rituals of the church have a meaning and need that goes as deep as the need for a belief in a supreme being itself. Ritual creates a substitute world for people complete with its own reality and roles defined (Moore and Myerhoff, 1977).

The ritual also becomes a source of comfort, of security as the predictable, repetitive occurrences reassure people and reduce much possible anxiety. The security is also provided as the ritual clarifies members' roles, expectations, states their responsibilities and confirms the results of their behavior. They bring order, synchrony and continuity to people (Laird, 1984, 125).

Blacks as an ethnic group have been caused extreme conditions of disorganization by a society which oppresses, restricts opportunities, provides few rewards and is generally hostile to them as individuals and as a group. This pressure has served to counteract the stabilizing effects of rituals and norms as people struggle to adjust and adapt in a society that is ever demanding and never quite accepting of the performance and behavior of the group.

In efforts towards some stabilization, Blacks have embraced the protective rituals with such fervor that they have had a conserving effect on the lives and behavior of the members. As fierce supporters of the status quo, Black Americans are attempting to bring and maintain some order and some predictability to their lives.

But there are also the individuals as described by Minuchin who have succumbed to the ill effects of society by becoming disorganized, impermanent, unpredictable and lacking in orientation norms (1967, 194). Victimized by poverty, discrimination, social oppression and continued lack of opportunity (Minuchin, 1967, 194), many ritual responses or adaptations are lost as coping mechanisms for these people.

Individuals from both types of backgrounds cited seem to benefit from participation in an organization that offers the security and opportunity for ordering their lives in a ritual manner that provides support and reaffirmation. Most individuals under study have a history or participation in the Black Church with the benefits that its extensive ritual provides. Any organization that wishes to offer affiliation to them will have to make available to them some of the same sustaining benefits.

The ritual in BSR is expressed in the way members

introduce themselves, the way the meetings are introduced, the orientation and activities in preparation for the sub group meetings and carried out in the strict prescriptions for ways that members must participate in the meetings. The meetings are highly structured, stylized and stereotyped and are predictable from month to month.

It seems that the security provided by this ritual is one of the attracting points in the whole concept of the organization.

A Behavioral Approach

In insight psychotherapy the goal is to help clients better understand their feelings and underlying motives so that they can better cope with their problems. There is an emphasis on how past conflicts influence present behavior.

A more recent approach, the behavioral approach, is more concerned with the behavior itself, how can it be improved or changed so the client can function more effectively with him/herself and the environment. There is no concern with how the behavior came about but rather, how to go about making it more personally and socially acceptable.

It was seen in the BSR processes that there was

was it like. There was little tolerance for explaining or understanding what caused the behavior. The gospel singer Jennifer Holliday, in analyzing the importance of gospel music for Black people has explained the importance of the behavior directives historically used by Black people to help cope in the hostile world, e.g. Precious Lord, Take My Hand and Lord, Help My Feet To Run This Race.

In the group discussion about the difference between your stated values and your behavioral ones (difference between what you say your values are as opposed to the things to which you commit your time, energy and money; what you say as opposed to what you do), the leader encouraged participants to list obstacles to living stated values and work out ways to remove those obstacles. The members were to carry this out as an assignment - to confront each obstacle, put it aside and bring stated values closer to becoming a part of behavior.

There were rules built into the processes of the group which encouraged the behavioral approach. Members were not allowed to explore feelings deeply, to free associate or to probe for reasons or explanations for a behavior that had been described. An example of this was the discussion group on positive thinking. many members attempted to recall experiences from their past which were negative. Even though this seemed to be the point at which most

persons wanted to start, it was preemptorily rejected by the rules as enforced by the facilitator and some group members.

Some members mentioned definite ideas about their reasons for coming to the group and what they hoped to get out of it. This information was helpful for the group and leaders to establish the group experience as a learning one in overcoming adjustment strategies that were no longer productive to the person's adult performance. The responsibility that the group took was to help the member to use cognitive resources more effectively so as to be able to use information to make critical decisions in their lives.

In one instance in the large group it was reported that in the mini group, a female member had indicated that she liked people to send her birthday cards. A male member of the group felt offended by her comments and expressed that she sounded accusatory, "though sweet." He sensed a pleasant tone, but perceived her comments as controlling. At that point, with direction and coaching from the leader, she "practiced" how to say the same statement in a way that seemed less threatening but communicated her message.

In the mini group each member who had dealt or was dealing with depression was asked to recall behaviors that

they felt had helped them counteract, prevent or shorten a depression period. The group discussed many possible behaviors with individuals taking what they found more useful to them to work out their own plan to combat depression. They were asked to use the plan to order specific behaviors in their everyday relationships and interactions.

Use of Attachments

Another planned focus in the groups was the encouragement to use attachments and affiliations in the environment as a means of coping. Members did not seem to have an unhealthy attachment to BSR. Most of the respondents and members spoke of other meaningful outlets in their lives. In the mini groups there was repeated reference to other interests and involvements.

Orientation to Present

As indicated in the literature review, Black people tend to focus more on practical survival issues. Instances of rejection of services were cited because the Black client was more interested in dealing with day to day issues while a therapist was focusing on causes explanations and insights. Some respondents in the interview stated that they had problems reconciling with

therapists over these concerns.

Sense of Alienation

The feelings and attitudes of Blacks in the sample seemed to substantiate those of Blacks described in the literature review. In the literature, most of the studies tended to be about low income Blacks, their perception of condescending and stereotypical behavior by workers, discrimination, ignorance of cultural patterns (Jenkins, 1982, 9). The interpretation by low income clients of being unwelcome in private agencies (Cloward and Epstein, 1965, 626) or that an offered service is incongruous with their needs (Normand, et al., 1974, 37) has caused Black clients to reject many resources and services in advance.

The findings in this study suggest that the perceived alienation was a feeling of Blacks along ethnic rather than socio-economic lines. The respondents in this study represented a cross section socio-economically and educationally of Black men and women with about 40% being professional. The explanations for low service use by the Blacks in BSR generally was very similar to those provided in the literature review on service use behavior among low income Black persons. Support for this concept was further affirmed in findings that low income mothers of other ethnic groups do not have the same sense of alienation and

powerlessness as Black mothers even though they were recent immigrants, did not speak the language and were less well educated. The middle class professional respondents indicated that they had entertained conscious consideration of possible benefits of using services in the larger system in most cases rejected this idea. They stated feelings of racism that they had witnessed, personal experiences and those of relatives and friends had influenced their decision. In addition, they had purposely joined a Black self help group with the notion that the characteristic and experience of a Black organization may help them to resolve problems that they perceive as having racial/ethnic genesis.

There has been a history of Blacks having been excluded from the private provision of services which has generated provision of their own formal services as well as attempting to handle many needs on an informal basis. The communal origins of Black people have also contributed to feelings and attitudes of mutual aid. Respondents in the survey did tend to seek help for problems from friends, relatives or someone in the local community.

Chapter III

BSR AS AN INTERVENTION

Observation in BSR Program

One of the major points of focus in the BSR group was the convening of smaller mini groups into about 10-12 members for the purpose of exploring relevant topics in a more intimate supportive environment. Only one topic was addressed at each meeting. The rationale behind the use of the topics was to provide an opportunity for people to look at themselves as related to the topic at hand, to attempt to understand how they fit within the context of the issue, to explore what significance it has for them, in what ways they are affected and how they feel about the particular issue.

The monthly topic was usually introduced in the large group session as a question to which each member was asked to respond from his/her own perspective and feelings. The members' responses were written down so that he/she may carry the written response to the smaller mini group.

In the mini group, the topic was raised by the facilitator again and the members were encouraged to respond verbally. The discussion then developed into one of sharing thoughts, attitudes, concerns, then moving to a

session of revelation and exposure through exploration.

The topics were usually suggested by the organization leader. She developed them purely from her own thinking or through reflection of recommendations from the membership. The leader considered topics very carefully within the context of interest, appropriateness to the Black single experience and their explorability in a non-threatening way. With an education and career background in psychology along with her own instinct as a single Black woman, she usually made the final decision about the topic to be discussed at each meeting.

The topics have been quite varied and cover material such as, anger, the independent Black woman, sexuality, the endangered Black man and values.

Four of the topic meetings will be described below. The purpose is to give a process view of the kind of interaction that occurred in a meeting with some idea of how people responded and something of the effect of that process on the participants. The four meetings occurred during a calendar period of March through August of 1985. Topics for the entire six meetings will be listed along with a facilitator's meeting. The facilitator's meeting was a group interaction process also that promoted and developed the ability and skill of participants to provide

the leadership in the group meetings and to participate in the group dynamics in a more constructive way.

The topic meetings that will be described in the following section will be: Thinking Positively, Depression, Living with Your Children, and The Independent Black Woman and a Facilitator's Meeting.

Curriculum Topics in BSR

- I. Thinking positively.
- II. Depression.
- III. Living with your children.
- IV. Facilitator's meeting.

I. Thinking Positively.

About 40 members of the group were present before the meeting convened. The initial phase of the meeting was informal interaction around coffee, tea and pastry. Various members talked with each other as they moved around the room. No one seemed to be isolated. No one was seated. About ten members of long standing tenure approached various people. They smiled and welcomed different members. They were outgoing and friendly. The room was already set up with about 60 chairs in a circle.

The room was bright and sunny - a western exposure in a room that was mostly glass panes.

The leader of the group convened the members who had already come. She stood in the middle of the circle and welcomed those who had gathered. She made comments to the new members regarding the purpose of the group - "to form a community of supportive people, to be able to talk with each other about common concerns, common problems and common goals; it is a process of helping each other to grow, to help ourselves to change for the better; we can help ourselves change toward the direction that we want to go; it is a group that offers friendship to people; to help those who seek resources."

After this description the leader asked people to look around and identify those members who were here for the first time and to introduce them to the group. There were about eight new members. Each introducer in turn provided the person's name and not much else. They ended by saying that if you want to know more you should later ask that person. This, I found out later, was a way of encouraging members to extend selves to new members. Some of those introduced were done by the person with whom they came. Others were introduced by the person who happened to be sitting next to them.

Preparation for the sub meeting was begun by naming the topic for discussion today. The focus was on "positiveness." Three by five cards were distributed, one to each person present. By now additional persons had come in so that there were about a total of 65. The late arrivals had had chairs added for them as they came in. The two persons on the door had come in to join the group. They had collected \$7.00 from each person who entered, given them a label saying, "Hello, my name is _____", and taken each person's name and address on a list.

The leader asked the group members to use the card in the following way:

"On one side write any negative feelings, thoughts or behavior that you may be experiencing or have felt in the past. Think about some negative things that are happening to you -- some negative things about yourself."

The group leader then continued - "we all have life's problems, feelings and attitudes. It is practically a way of existence. It is true that some person's experiences may be more difficult, more challenging, more painful than the next person's, but basically we all must deal with negative situations in life."

"The message that I would like to see generated here

is one of thinking positively, being positive, trying to keep playing a positive tape in one's brain."

The leader asked the group members to then turn the card over and write positive things - feelings, attitudes, things that you feel are positive in your life. She asked them to also write the things that they felt were positive regarding being Black and being single. "What are the positive regarding being Black and being single. "What are the positive things in your life that you can positively attribute to being Black? What do you count as the positive benefits of being single?"

After the above description of the orientation or focus of the group the leader then described the following process. She asked the "older" members to become a partner with another by sitting next to someone new today or with someone relatively new in the group. It was not evident how anyone was to know because there was nothing that designated that information. The name tags which everyone was wearing did not indicate whether they were new or not. Members started moving about the room and talking. The leader did seem to facilitate the process by going up to people and making specific suggestions. She asked the writer if she would sit next to C. who was here for the first time today.

The coupled members were then asked each to share what they had written, but to limit the verbal statements to the positive side of the card. When someone protested that the positive did not have much meaning without starting with the negative, the response from the leader was that the focus would be only on the positive, that the question had been considered of doing both and the facilitators decided that to focus on one side would be more appropriate to what was expected out of the session.

In the six minutes allotted for the interchange among the pairs, one partner read what was recorded on his card. he started by saying that he was sorry that he could not start with the negative side. His written information indicated that he felt he was beginning to develop a positive attitude about his life's circumstance - having broken up with his wife a short while ago. He had been very angry and hostile with everyone and everything. He felt his world had been moved from under him. (He just could not start without the negative.) The positive thing that he could allude to was the fact that he had decided to come to the group on the basis of what he had heard from a friend. He had come all the way from southern New Jersey. One thing he had in mind in looking to the group was to get supports and also help with being shy. "Why did he feel the group could help him with being shy?" He had

heard that the group members were very tolerant and accepting and that whatever a person might think is laughable or unacceptable, the group seemed to feel it was okay. He referred to A. whom he had seen last time who has a speech defect. A. had gotten up in front of the group of 100, made a statement, apparently with little concern and little interference in his speech flow.

After the pairs reorganized to the sub group of 10-12 members, the request from the leader was to take the positive side of the card and discuss that in the group.

The sub group - five males, four females, the facilitator, a blind man who stated his role of facilitator as being not a leader, but just a person to insure that the group flowed, stuck with the topic and that those who wanted had an opportunity to speak.

One woman said that there was nothing positive in her life so she would like to talk about the negative. The facilitator responded immediately that the mandate was to talk only about the positive. The woman insisted that she absolutely had nothing positive in her life and should not be required not to speak about negatives in her life because she had nothing positive. She was asked if she felt positive about coming to BSR meeting. She hesitatingly answered, "well, yes, but only because there

was nothing else to do." She was asked in another way. "Did anything in your life take a turn that you had felt good about?" She said recently she had gone to the senior citizens' program with the intention of joining. When she looked at the participants, she did not want to be like that, so she left and went right on and enrolled in the adult program of a local college. When asked if she did not feel that was positive, she said, "no, it was just being realistic." She described what most people called positive as just being realistic to her. After many questions being directed at her, she said everything had turned bad for her when her husband died three years ago and nothing had gone positive or good for her since then.

A member asked her how she would have felt if she had not been able to enroll in the college course. She said, "pretty lousy." She was then asked if the alternative to lousy could not be thought of as positive. After this and other questions by the group, the woman said she felt it was really more a question of words and how they are used. She had probably used the term reality or necessity to perpetuate bad feelings she had had since her husband died.

Her bantering, evasive, laughing demeanor changed quickly to one of pensiveness and seriousness. She said, looking down in her lap, that she thought she had purposely been perpetuating negative feelings by not allowing herself

to admit to anything good. She continued in what seemed an obligation to the group, that she would try to stop denying positives and "take things more on the value of what they were."

Many members urged that she rethink some of her experiences and feelings that she considered "reality" and ask if they were not indeed positive. She said that she really wanted to give more thought to what she heard today and discover if there were not positive things in her life.

After about one hour and a half in the sub groups, everyone reassembled to the large group. The purpose of this reassembled group was to provide feedback from all mini groups. Anyone might share with the total group what they got out of their group or make any individual or personal comment that was relevant. Some of the ideas generated were the fact that we all have problems in life, bad feelings, bad days and times when things seem negative. It is necessary to think positively and to be positive, to keep playing a positive tape. "You can force yourself to say and do positive things. Everyone has something positive in his/her life, it is there and just to recognize this is important."

Some said that listening to others' positive experiences helped them to identify and reinforce attitudes

of their own and also ways that they did things. Some said that it was a good idea to restrict to the positive in discussion. Groups were slow getting started because there was the tendency to want to start with the negative. It seemed agreed that to start with or to permit discussion of the negative would have bogged down the direction of feelings and not have allowed people to end on a positive note. People could have gotten stuck on negative for the whole time.

After the community group, the sharing session took place. One young man said he had come to the group at a friend's insistence. He did not expect to get anything out of it. Even after arriving he had the idea of sitting it out. He did not like the idea of being programmed or structured and felt he would not be able to share his feelings and thoughts with other people. He listened at first and had such a sense of acceptance and non judgementality. He sensed that there was nothing he could say that would not be accepted or judged by the group. He surprised himself at being able to ease into the participation and sharing. A middle age man said that he had talked with six or seven people and after getting their ideas he felt more able to organize his thoughts. This was his first time and he felt he had to return.

A young woman in her late 20's or early 30's said in

relation to the topic of being Black that she used to resent being Black with all of its disadvantages, pressures and insults. She tried to overcome it by getting into Black things, listening to Dr. Martin Luther King, etc. She felt that a real sense of pride developed as she got involved in the group and with people at BSR. She was beginning to be able to feel better about her blackness. She broke down and cried while talking, and in spite of many members' going over to support and reassure her, she continued speaking until she finished her statement.

The woman just described in the sub group who had nothing positive in her life, shared with the large group that her group members had seemed to really care about her attitude, provided support and helped expand her thinking and reminded her of the fact that some of the positive things she had when her husband was alive were things she could capture again.

The networking session was used by people who had services for offering or exchange - a magician who reminded the group that a Black magician was very rare and he was a good one, a young woman described her mother's catering and baking business, a nutritionist who had just left his life's career as a chemist to go as a free lance nutritionist which he had always wanted to do.

After the networking was over, food was served as the basis of a social hour. Old members were encouraged to reach out to new members. At least three different people went up to the young woman who was ashamed of being Black to admire her courage and to support her feelings.

A retired N.Y.C. policeman said he could never imagine feeling so comfortable and supported by a group the first time he met them. The young man from New Jersey said he felt the same way and he was continuing to hope he could overcome his shyness.

III. Depression

After the regular ritual of the group of socializing during pre group coffee hour, members introduced selves to each other and especially to new members, convening the members, introducing new members, the leader's announcing the purpose of the group, description of the group and the topic of the afternoon, the process of dealing with the topic was ready to begin.

The group leader announced that the topic of exploration today was depression.

The questions that she raised were related to whether or not a person was depressed, if you have periods of depression, how do you handle it? What are ways that you

help yourself feel better? What are some things that you have tried that do not seem to work?

In the sub group there was a clarification of the difference between endogeneous and reactive depression and sadness or feeling blue or low about an event or circumstance. This emerged, not as expert definitions, but as people described feelings, behavior and what they thought depression was.

One woman described periods of depression in the following manner - she would start with a sense of sadness which would seem to get worse and worse. In a few days she would not be able to get out of bed in the morning. Once she reached that point, she seemed to lose contact with reality. She lived alone and would not answer her phone or door, she would not dress for weeks, would get out of bed only long enough to binge on food, feel worse, and literally had no contact with the world. She would lose sight of the newspaper, television, the fact that there was anything going on in the world. It was a lost period for her. She described a period of the worst pain and agony.

Another female member said her periods of depression could be described the same way. She had felt that her husband was responsible in some way for her state and had left him, only to discover her pain had worsened because he

actually was supportive as one could be living in such a situation. She currently had a close relationship with another male and her illness was driving him away as he looked on helplessly, not knowing what to do or how to help. A third woman with the same symptoms also separated from her husband and with a young child said that her son was totally neglected during her periods of withdrawal.

About one third of the group of 13 seemed to suffer from severe incapacitating depression. One young woman said that she had days in which she would awaken in the morning and know that everything was wrong. She felt bad, wrong, and sad, as if the world was against her. But she added that she had never heard of the kind of suffering just shared by four members of the group. The man agreed that they had days that they just felt sad and nothing seemed to go right, but had never heard the kind of depression they had just listened to.

The remaining members had periods of severe depression responsive to specific factors in their lives - loss of a loved one, a serious problem with a child, but it was the kind of situation where once they were past the situation, the pain seemed to diminish. Those in the first group said that situations like seeing the hungry children in Ethiopia or watching on TV the mass deaths from tidal waves in Bangladesh could send them into a depression.

The woman who first described her functional depression said that she had been for professional help but had seen no improvement in the depth or frequency of her depressions. She had already given up on any kind of relief.

One of the women suffering from the incapacitating depression said that she had spent two years with a therapist who made the decisions about what the client should be discussing. The patient reported that sometimes she would go for her session not really caring whether she lived or not and the therapist was concerned with how she was doing on her job, was she eligible for a promotion, was she being assertive enough. The member said she felt stupid that she had remained with the therapist so long.

Another sufferer who had tried therapy remembered that her therapist spent a lot of time pushing her to concentrate on sexual identity and seemed to be preoccupied with her attitude towards cooking and other household chores. They both felt that treatment had done very little for their feeling and had decided that maybe the illness was not a target area of focus anyway.

Two of the women who suffered the worst depression were surprised that others had it and that maybe a doctor

could help. They planned to seek some kind of help. Those who suffered, all of whom were women, shared ways that they managed. It did not really sound like managing, but more like just physically surviving. Those who had not suffered badly really seemed disturbed that people had to go through that kind of pain. They expressed a feeling of helplessness.

Time was spent in problem solving - what can be done for the disease and the symptoms? The members who had some feeling for it felt that only the symptoms could be managed. Three did feel that the edge of the acute episodes had been blunted since, joining BSR. They could not explain it, whether there were causal factors or coincidence.

In the large group, many of the other members shared similar experiences - similar distributions related to functional depression, reactive depression or just plain sadness. The leader repeated the fact that people should not look for solutions to something as serious as depression in BSR. She spoke about the resources available and what people could do to get professional help.

The leader made no specific references to the name of an agency or person. She did mention the general categories of service such as psychiatrist or social worker

and how she could help with referrals. She also emphasized that even friends should not be relied on to handle such a serious problem as depression and that it clearly belonged in the hands of a professional.

A few members made statements that they would try professional help. An equal number indicated that they had tried it, been turned off by the therapist or therapy and would not return.

IV. Living with Your Children

After the traditional ritual the large group was convened by one of the male members of the council. The meetings had not been led by the regular leader for about four months. Members of the council had rotated the responsibility and plan to continue with this procedure.

The council member leading the group was a dynamic person with a deep, forceful, commanding voice. Just prior to convening, the leader had asked older members to select one new member, find out something about that person and be prepared to introduce that person to the group with some identifying information.

There was no direct way of knowing just who the new members were, but there must have been some sense about this on the part of those present because older members did

successfully identify new members, talked with them and were prepared to introduce them. There was a pretty large core group who attends every month. Most of the members were intermittent attenders, however, those in both categories seemed able to recognize those who were present for the first time.

After the introduction of new members, formal welcome and description of the group, the convenor asked the large group - about 70 persons - to pair off. This was carried out simply by turning to the person sitting next to them. He then distributed the 3 x 5 cards and asked each person to write the following information: (1) the number of children you have, if any; (2) what are the positives that you can identify in your relationship with your children? and (4) if you have no children, how do you feel about that, or about the idea of having some later?

Each member was then asked to turn to his/her partner and mention at least one of the positives listed on the card in questions (3) and (4). Five minutes were allotted for this exercise. After the five minutes were over, the leader reconvened the group even though many people felt that they were not finished and would like more time.

The leader then listed three categories of groups and then asked the large group to regroup in the sub groups

according to the following categories with which they identified:

1. Those with independent, autonomous, adult children.
2. Those with dependent children.
3. Those with no children.

To insure random groups, the members were asked to count off in their respective categories for group assignments. The distribution resulted in two groups in each category, averaging 12-13 members. There were two groups in No. 1 category; two groups in No. 2; and one group of 15 in No. 3. There were 5-10 members who did not join a group, but were involved in some other aspects of the organization such as, directing late comers, setting up for the after session, refreshments and social hour after the conclusion of the large group session. In one group, the one with members who had independent children, there were five males and seven females. The facilitator for the group opened by asking each member to introduce him/herself by name and to mention the number of years they had been in the group. He started as the first member and each one followed suit providing no other information than that which was asked. The facilitator asked if anyone wanted to start just saying what kind of relationship he/she had with his/her children. The first respondent mentioned that she had one daughter living at home after finishing college.

She earned a good salary as a professional, but felt that she wanted to get her expenses together before moving out on her own. The other daughter who was younger, moved out as soon as she finished college and got a job. They both earned about the same. The younger daughter had always wanted to be on her own and even though she was independent, she had had to sacrifice some luxuries, she felt that being on her own was the most important priority for her.

The facilitator asked the woman first how she would account for the difference between the two daughters. The woman had not really thought about it. She wondered if there might be, however, elements of overprotectiveness and dependency. One member wondered if it made any difference that two daughters were different. The one presenting the situation thought that it did and only mentioned it because she had lots of concerns. She did also say that she wanted to reflect a bit and to consider her role with the two daughters.

A male member spoke about the difference also in his relationship with his two children - a boy born when he was 18 and raised by his mother. The girl by the second marriage was very close, he adored her but he was intolerant and unaccepting of the son's behavior which he described as irresponsible and unreliable. He did take

accountability for the difference in the two by saying that he raised the girl and his mother raised and terribly spoiled the boy.

Most of the women could not understand why he did not raise his son, especially after he remarried. The father did not understand the women's questions since he had explained that he was 18, his wife had left him, he was a child himself. A woman who was new to this meeting felt that girls are generally more mature than boys, and if they aren't, the birth of a child matures them. There was a great schism between males and females on the issue. Women felt men had excuses not to parent and women generally never had access to an excuse. After much discussion, the facilitator indicated that facts and scientific documentation were not really important here. The only concern was the member's feelings, what his decisions were and how he felt about that.

There were other oughts and shoulds that were expressed, but the facilitator always moved the group away, reminding them of the rules of the group - only "I" statements.

As the group continued, the facilitator asked the member under discussion how he felt about many issues - his relationship with his daughter, other reasons he and his

son did not get along. The man felt that the facilitator was pushing too much and maybe asking for information that he was not ready to reveal. The facilitator suggested that he was only trying to help people with information that might be helpful to them in understanding relationships. One woman supported the position of facilitator by saying that she felt it was a good idea to probe because she had been able to notice some aspects of her parent/children relationships that she had not connected before. She also felt that she had learned some things about the Black male's attitude that she had never heard before and that that information would be very helpful to her in her interaction with her children and with men.

Comments from about four others in the group agreed with the man who felt that the facilitator had pushed too far, that some of the questions might have been somewhat imposing and intrusive and they asked for information that people were not ready to give up. The new member explained that since she was new and did not know anyone that she would feel very timid about saying anything too personal.

The facilitator wondered why the member was not able to say during the questioning that he/she felt the question to be a little too intrusive and that he would rather not answer it. The new member and the man who raised the issue felt that a person may not be capable of protecting himself

in that way.

In seeking to deal with issues on a personal level, the facilitator asked the man who raised the issue if he felt that he had been forced to reveal more than he wanted. The member said he did and he felt helpless at the time to refuse. For some reason, it was only later that he was able to raise the issue. He then asked the facilitator how he would feel if someone had asked him those probing questions. The facilitator felt the man's question was hostile and suggested that since he was not really a leader, his role was only to facilitate and not to lead so that members should feel free to ask him anything they wanted.

After verbal exchange with raised voiced between the facilitator, the man who raised the question and those supporting both points of view, the facilitator asked everyone in the group to join hands, stand up, shake legs and then to sit. The members followed and after resuming seated positions they continued. The anger and hostility was no longer apparent. The facilitator was more cautious after that and some member did ask him about a problem he was having with his college daughter. He had referred to a problem earlier, but had not described it. When he outlined the problem to the group, that seemed to relax those who had been concerned about personal exposure.

After that the new member spoke freely about her relationship with her daughter and how nervous she gets when the daughter and her boyfriend visit for the night how anxious she gets about sleeping arrangements.

Every member seemed to feel very strongly that they would be quite uncomfortable if their children, male or female, wished to sleep in the same bed with the opposite sex without being married. All felt a little less concerned with the same event with the son involved, but still would not approve. As for themselves, each member stated vehemently that they would not spend the night with a member of the opposite sex unmarried, under the same roof with children or their parents. The feelings on the issue were very strong. The consensus was that it was not just poor taste, but unethical to do so.

The members of the group who tended to be somewhat quiet were asked directly by the facilitator to share some feelings regarding their relationship with children. Once called on, each talked at length with comfort and ease. Each seemed to have sharp differences in relating to children finding it natural to have an easy relationship with some and a difficult relationship with the others. Fathers expressed that they were closer to all children since the separation. They visit each other often, borrow money from the male parent, share feelings and behavior and

basically enjoy each other. With the children with whom the feeling was not so positive, the parents felt the child's negative behavior generated feelings of intolerance and anger in them. No parent expressed any guilt or concern about their possible input into the negative behavior of the children. They just spoke of the relationship in a prima facie way.

When the groups reconvened, the original leader directed the group. He asked for feedback from all groups for the benefit of the entire population.

The group with no children were divided - about one half looked forward to having children, the other half had no children by choice, were glad to be able to talk about the phenomenon and not feel that someone was trying to make them feel guilty.

The groups with dependent children presented consensus strongly that there was a lot of resentment and hostility because the other partner was not sharing the load. They felt bound and constricted with immobile lives. The two males who had full child custody felt as strongly unsupported as the females. They all shared that there was never enough money or time or energy.

In this large group someone got up to summarize as a representative of their sub group. However, many others

spoke out in the large group, either about their perspective of the group that had been reported on or to share a further thought with all. New members and highly non verbal members stood and spoke in front of about 80 people. As they spoke, they seemed comfortable and relaxed.

Some mentioned that it was the first time in their lives that they had spoken in front of a group. Others indicated that they were making that statement for the first time. Insights were shared that had not been a matter of concern before.

The leader seemed adept in keeping the large group going - affirming a thought someone had made, encouraging someone to speak, making comparisons and differences between the groups, clarifying much of the information that came from the floor.

One member attempted to free associate and rambled along on many different subjects. The leader very skillfully reconciled the group demands that he be curbed and the needs of the member, who is handicapped, deaf and with a speech impediment - and very shy, to be able to get the feeling of comfort before the whole group. This was something that the handicapped man had never done before and was feeling quite accomplished about. The total group

supported him with a long round of applause when he finished.

Facilitator's Meeting

The purpose of the facilitator's meeting was to provide some instruction in group dynamics by way of interaction, discussion, teaching, roleplaying and exploration. The session was conducted on an ad hoc basis, by a group dynamics expert. The group was not restricted and was open to anyone who was a member of BSR. The goal was to help those who lead the sub groups to be more knowledgeable in group processes and also for those who have no plan to facilitate but would like to participate more effectively as members.

The facilitator's meeting was being presented here as a process meeting because the plan and course of the sub group meetings are based on discussion and principles set forth during the facilitator's meeting. Many of those present indicated that they had no intention to become facilitators, but were interested in learning how they could participate more constructively as a member.

The group leader reminded the group that the members who have reconvened to the sub groups are afraid even though BSR was perceived as non-threatening. The first

responsibility was to put people at ease because the anxiety that people carry around followed them to the small groups. It was necessary to find a mechanism to break the ice and help the participants become a group.

The facilitator should encourage, not force people to speak, but should be decisive about run on talkers. The suggestions that he made and illustrated were:

Have each person say something, such as responding to the questions - How did you get here? Who told you about BSR? What is your category of single? How do you feel today?

You may ask members to jot down a favorite animal, color, highlight of their week and what adjectives they associate with those words. They may also see if there are any questions regarding the topic. This helps sharpen the focus. The facilitator needs to observe who is physically or attitudinally not in the group; be careful not to label what you see, but describe it. As an example, "J., quite frequently you are frowning," and let the person do the describing. Pray to be an effective instrument because there is an importance in taking the facilitator role seriously. Fifteen people are not a group. If you don't make them into a group, you are in trouble.

He encouraged the group by suggesting that one does

not have to be an expert or extremely bright. It is just necessary to know how to lubricate the group, to keep it going, keep sight of one's role by not moving in too strongly and losing the role of facilitator. Too strong a participation may alienate the group and cause you to lose your role.

It is not necessary, however, to keep your stand a secret, but don't get into an argument and be the one who talks least.

He warned the group members not to be afraid of silences because they are natural and healthy. A silence should, however, be noted along with how members express feelings, voice tones and body language. If an expression is not clear, ask directly for clarification. As an example, "Are you talking directly to L. or is that for the whole group?"

He reminded the group that it is very important to reserve time at the end for closure. There is always the possibility of unfinished business being generated in the life of a group. As a matter of fact, sometimes problems were inherited from one month to the next because things were not finished. As an example, to two people who have disagreed, you may ask, "Do you feel you would like to state issues where you agree?" There may be points agreed

upon that have not been acknowledged. There should be some encouragement of coming together.

The facilitator must build an end to the group and put a finishing touch on it. Members also need to be prepared for the community feedback at the big meeting.

The facilitator does need to become identified with having given people alternatives. This would include not giving too much time to two people or setting up time frames to allow moving on when the group is not ready to let go.

After Meeting Interaction

Following the monthly meeting which consists of pre meeting, an informal interaction over coffee and pastry, the introductory session, the main discussion group and the community session, there was a social hour with food and soft drinks. During this period, which lasts from one to one and one half hours, members congregated in an area of the building away from the meeting location. This interaction seemed to be very important to the group members as practically all participants became involved in this phase.

The stated purpose of this part of the group is to encourage members to become more familiar with each other

and to promote relationships outside the formal meeting. It was at this time also that the "older" members take the responsibility for identifying the newer members, welcoming and engaging them in conversation. Members also used this time to make plans for any follow up associations after the meeting. Some persons indicated that it was at informal sessions such as this that they sensed the organization atmosphere that helped encourage them to return to the group meetings.

In conversing with members of varying longevity in the organization, attitudes and feelings were shared with the writer. Many of the comments repeated and corroborated statements heard in the organized meeting. Some of the comments heard were:

"I protect this time from everything and any possible intrusion. I need what I get out of this group and don't want anything to interfere with it."

"I belong to other groups - church, another self help group but BSR provides a support, encouragement, understanding of myself that I have not found elsewhere."

"I had put my daughter out because I was so disgusted with her and how she neglected her child. After talking with other mothers here, I think I understand her better. Well, at least I have asked her to come back."

"I have looked up my children who I had not seen for three years. I'm just feeling more secure about myself."

"I have heard at least ten men state they have reestablished contact with their children."

"Over the two years that I have been coming here, after talking with others, I have been able to give up my husband's memory which had imprisoned me for years."

"I feel less embarrassed about living at home with my parents at age 28."

"I have gotten the guts to buy a house."

"I can now give myself a birthday party and invite other people."

"I was very much an introvert when I came in. I could not strike up a conversation with another person and avoided women. This group has helped me come out of my shell."

A few members summarized their feelings by saying that the process for them had been to present a dilemma of feelings and opinions to the group, get feedback and use that feedback as a means of sorting out their own feelings and trying to convert that to some kind of behavior.

One man shared that he was trying hard to solve his problem of depression. He felt the group had helped him a lot in dealing with it but it continued to be an ongoing problem. He did think that sitting together with people like himself and trying to solve his own problems had helped him remove a lot of obstacles in his own life and change his projections for the future around. He had recently set into motion plans for carrying out a life long dream that he has had.

Members revealed that there have also been benefits for individuals that have been demonstrated by specific changes in ways of living. For example, three female members who had been unsuccessful in finding an acceptable place to live for themselves and their children decided to come together, pool resources and buy a house. They worked and planned together and eventually were successful in purchasing a three family house. This move radically improved their living conditions and gave them a more positive approach in the manner that they were able to manage other situations in their lives. At a later date, they planned to enroll in a "do it yourself" course in order to keep the house up without spending a lot of money outside craftspersons.

One man gained confidence to leave a secure, well paying job to establish a business that he had always wanted to do. The change required a lot of support and encouragement as he went through stages from adjustment to the idea to actually resigning from the job and starting in the new venture.

Summary of Observations

All of the group sessions gave evidence of being well planned and highly structured. One of the emphasized purposes of the leadership was to play a very active

planned role in setting goals and program planning. The leadership was also committed to insure that members of the group, especially the new ones, were comfortable and had a sense of acceptance and purpose. This called for a strong, energetic leader who was able to provide a centralized focus of direction and leadership for the organization.

The members related to each other in a way that would not threaten or make anyone anxious. Even the way of introducing the curriculum topic for the day by having members write responses and feelings on paper first and next to share with one other individual before becoming involved in the small group discussion topics was an attempt at minimizing risk for each person.

Members were encouraged to speak, but not pressured to do so. There was exhibited, however, in comments of many new members that they felt relaxed to the point of sharing part of themselves from the very beginning.

The networking sessions did provide opportunities for members to offer help and services and also to choose services that would be of use to them. If the provider so choose, the service or product could also be listed in the monthly newsletter.

After the smaller groups reconvened, the community sessions encouraged members to share with the total group

any comments or ideas on the group session they have just participated in. The comments may take the form of additional ideas on the topic or feelings and reactions to others' statements. Members who commented usually referred to perceived benefits, ways they felt they have changed in attitude or behavior, what impact the session had on them and some way in which they were influenced.

The comments also emerged in the informal communications that were heard during the pre group coffee hour and the after group social hour. Members had shared many anecdotal stories to support their ideas of the organization and what they felt they had gotten out of it.

All the observations, the informal hours, the highly structured group and personal conversations converged on similar themes - members felt supported by peers, they felt a sense of increased ability to deal with certain problems in their lives, they were more comfortable about seeking help for some of those problems and they benefited from the forum of Black people like themselves.

Chapter IV

DATA ANALYSIS

This project was designed to study a cohort of members of mutual support self help group of Black single men and women. The focus of this study was on the members' experiences in seeking and using help in the social service system, their attitudes toward that system and their perception of the role the group plays in influencing their attitudes and behavior toward using help.

The members of the group under study have joined over a four year period after becoming aware of the organization by word of mouth from others, a few newspaper articles and listings in magazines. However, most members have heard about the group, its purpose and benefits through friends, co-workers and relatives.

The study was conducted by the writer who joined the organization six months prior to beginning the study. By the time of beginning the study many members recognized the writer as a member of the organization.

A sample of 25 members was used for the formal interview. The study had been announced during the networking session of a regular monthly meeting. The writer announced that she was doing a study of the

organization members, how they used existing services and how they felt BSR had helped them, and would soon be asking for their help as volunteers in participating as respondents to a questionnaire. The group leader had indicated to the writer that she viewed this request for respondents just as any request for or offer of help that was shared during the networking session.

The writer explained that she was trying to get a group of respondents with a balance of demographic characteristics and therefore would not need every volunteer. Forms were distributed which solicited name, address, length of time in the group and approximate number of sessions attended, the best day and time for writer to call and the best time and day for the interview. It was explained that the interview would be done at their home or any place to suit their convenience.

After members filled in the "Request for Volunteers" form, they were reviewed with the purpose of selecting twenty six, with a 3-2 female-male ratio, representative of the sex ratio in the group, and a balance of length of time in the organization and approximate number of meetings attended.

Any additional characteristics could not have been used for selection purposes since there was no more

information available at that time. The sample could not be generalized to the population in the organization or to the universe of Black people.

Those members who were selected were called by phone by the writer and an appointment made for an interview.

Characteristics of the Sample (Illustrated in Table 1)

Sixty percent or 15 of those sampled were female and 40% or ten were male. The largest majority of those sampled had been members of the organization for 24 months or longer. Fourteen were in this category, three had been in less than three months, two for six months or more and five for 12 to 18 months. Similarly, 36% or nine had attended 18 or more meetings with only two attending 12 but less than 18 meetings. Six attended six or more but less than 12 meetings and four attended less than six meetings.

After completing the questionnaires, the sample characteristics were further defined. The largest age category was the 46 and over with nine members, with the 36 to 45 and 26 to 35 categories having eight each. There were none less than 25 years of age. Twelve members of the sample were divorced with seven being separated and six single, never married.

Table I
 Characteristics of the Sample
 (N = 25, 100%)

<u>Sex</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Female	(15)	60%
Male	(10)	40%
 <u>Age</u>		
46 +	(9)	36%
36 - 45	(8)	32%
26 - 35	(8)	32%
 <u>Marital Status</u>		
Divorced	(12)	48%
Separated	(7)	28%
Single, never married	(6)	24%
 <u>Living Condition</u>		
Alone	(9)	36%
Head of household with children	(10)	40%
With parents	(6)	24%
 <u>Occupation</u>		
Professional	(10)	40%
Non-professional (L.P.N.'s, policemen, students, skilled workers, unemployed)	(15)	60%

table continues

Table I
 Characteristics of the Sample
 (N = 25, 100%)

<u>Highest Grade Completed</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Higher than college	(10)	40%
College	(3)	12%
High school, some college	(8)	32%
Some high school	(4)	16%
 <u>Income</u>		
\$ 30,000 +	(9)	36%
\$ 20,000 - 29,999	(9)	36%
\$ 10,000 - 9,999	(5)	20%
\$ Below \$ 9,999	(2)	8%

Nine respondents lived alone, ten as heads of households with children and six lived with parents. The occupations of the largest number classified themselves as professionals - ten, with four of those in that category being teachers.

The remaining occupations were divided among L.P.N.s, policemen, students, business persons, skilled workers and unemployed.

Ten respondents had completed education higher than college with three having college degrees, eight were high school graduates with some college and four had some high school education without graduating.

Nine of the sample earned incomes over \$30,000 with nine also earning between \$20,000 and \$29,999. Five earned between \$10,000 and \$19,999 while two earned below \$9,999.

How Members Became Involved in BSR

Most of the members sampled indicated that they had found out about the organization through a co-worker or a friend. Seventeen said they had first heard a description of the group through someone who had attended previously and invited them to attend. Six had become acquainted with the organization through the media. The remaining two had

family members who already belonged to the group and were responsible for bringing them in.

Perceived Benefits from BSR

As far as perceived benefits derived from BSR by members, 21 felt that they had developed personal contacts as a result of their interaction in BSR. Those personal contacts were described as opportunities to share in activities with other persons with common interests and to be able to express some of those interests in ways that people had not availed themselves of earlier - music, art and drama events. There have been opportunities to explore ideas and engage in phone contacts.

Psychological benefits were reflected by persons who indicated that the personal contacts helped to bring them out, allowing them to feel more comfortable with people and in social relationships. There was an expression of feeling more relaxed in initiating contacts with people in BSR which they could not have done with co-workers or people met through other organizations.

The name of the organization - Black Singles Resources seems descriptive enough, however, 23 of those interviewed attended the first time as a result of information provided by a referring person - it was described variously as a

place to help you look at and to understand yourself and your feelings and to help people deal with their needs and concerns. Some members felt the focus on interpersonal relationships would be beneficial to them in dealing with family members and colleagues. Two members felt the need for expanding their lives through social and personal contacts.

In answering the question about what respondents felt they had gotten out of the first session at BSR, practically all felt that they had a feeling of warmth and acceptance generated by the outreach and friendliness of the older members. They expressed the sense that there was always someone around to make sure they were not isolated, alone or not a part of the group. In addition to feeling accepted and encouraged, most of the members spoke about feeling comfortable and relaxed, without being pressured to be a certain type of person or to maintain a type of behavior.

Many members came into the group with a statement of the concerns that they wanted to work on in the organization. Their concerns ran from global ones, such as "to feel more positive about myself" to a need for a specific activity - "an opportunity to do something for myself and not to have to focus on or share with the

children." There was an expressed need for the comfort, protection and sense of importance in the group. Members perceived an honesty on the part of the members, a sense that people were able to see the good parts in a person that were not perceived or appreciated by the rest of the world.

Some did express that they were surprised but relieved that the meeting on their first occasion was not social. They were looking for something with more substance, something to provide support in dealing with problems and stresses of everyday life. Some members noted that they felt that the organization was a place for people who were like themselves, with whom they shared some things.

These shared backgrounds and feelings were the need for others who understood the hostility of the white world and had an appreciation of the structural difficulties encountered by virtue of being Black. The relief for many was the freedom to express feelings and expose vulnerabilities in a non threatening safe environment. The comment was usually accompanied by the observation that it is difficult for Blacks to express feelings and weaknesses, yet it is something that they yearn to do.

Some members indicated that they had been in relationship groups before but were not gratified because

they felt the focus was more on issues and concerns of whites, whereas they felt they needed help in exploring issues resulting from the Black experience and Black male - female relationships. Many members were still affiliated with the church. Those who referred to the church tended to feel that the purposes that the church and BSR served were distinctly different and that they had a need for both.

Program Benefits (Described in Table 2)

Thirteen of the group strongly agreed that BSR had helped their ability and willingness to explore their own feelings. Six agreed and only three disagreed that the organization had helped them. Those who agreed stated that they had felt encouraged to self examine because the atmosphere of the group allowed and encouraged it. Some felt that the validation of the characteristics of Black and single encouraged admission and expression of feelings relative to those statuses that might have been repressed. There were responses that indicated that people were more willing to communicate with others. Males particularly felt that after hearing other ideas and approaches that they were able to relax and listen to their children more.

Table 2

Program Benefits: Participant's Perception
of Benefits of BSR

(N = 25, 100%)

<u>Benefits</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Support	(23)	92%
Ability to explore feelings	(19)	76%
Willingness to take risks	(16)	64%
More effective relationships with others	(15)	60%
Ability to do something for the first time	(14)	56%
Ability to accept help from others	(11)	44%
Discovering talent or interest	(4)	20%

The males were very definite about how their experience in BSR had positively influenced their relationship with their children.

Nineteen respondents strongly agreed that the group was supportive of them. Another four agreed about the support of the fellow members. They saw this support demonstrated in the way group members were able to accept them even after they exposed something about themselves they might not have found acceptable. Some felt support was shown when members provided special care and attention during crisis or problem times, such as illness, death of loved one, a special achievement such as attaining a goal or making a change or transition. People stated that behavior that they felt was worthy of a put down or laughter could be looked at sympathetically by group members. Even behavior that males had acknowledged that they felt was a part of their sex role and prerogative such as a macho attitude or an opinionated authoritative relationship with women and children was not responded to in any angry way as they had expressed.

Four of the women mentioned that they were self conscious about being "older" but noticed that the younger members seemed to relate to them as if age were no difference.

One male member said he had not noticed any support increased insight but other members continued to say that he had opened up and grown as a person. A member of the group for three years, others saw him as more relaxed and less offensive and arrogant to others.

Some members felt that support was shown by the group when they were encouraged to express a talent that they had not really attempted to develop. One woman was encouraged to read a poem that she had written. She knew even as she agreed to read it publicly, that in no other circumstances would she feel free to do so.

Others referred to concrete services as indicative of support such as help in finding a house or apartment and offers of transportation for those who had some form of handicapping condition. Most members referred to the use of another member when they felt the need for support. "It may be 2 a.m. but if I need to be listened to or understood I know there is someone in BSR that I can call."

About half the respondents strongly agreed that they felt that BSR had helped them to be more willing to take chances in their life and relationships. Five agreed. However, the majority or 17 felt that BSR had been of no particular help to them in discovering a talent or interest.

Seventeen felt that their participation with members outside the group meeting had helped them to use the organization more effectively. The extra contacts they felt potentiated the benefits of the regular meetings. "They are validating and special. The extra contacts are like friendships with added honesty and exploration."

Sixteen respondents were able to add that there were additional benefits that they derived from participation in BSR.

Bonding with Black people was frequently mentioned. There was a strong sense of individual self acceptance and growth. Many mentioned the ability to do things for themselves outside the organization e.g., going to a program to improve writing ability. Another was able to regain her children, another to lose a vast amount of weight they felt that these were not isolated gains but reflections of internalized security in dealing with the outside world. As one long term member expressed it, "the group is a place for social therapy, not psychotherapy. It is not the place to solve problems but the place to gain insight, ideas, directions, to guide people to help or other therapies." Another expressed BSR as a wedge to help people get help for problems - encouraging them to accept help. Some of the comments were:

"I have been able to increasingly put aside guilt in my relationship with my son and come to a decision that he would do better away from me. It was the hardest thing in my life to accept - to think that my son would be better off without me." (Son was seventeen and mother had helped him decide to join youth corps.)

"There is a continued struggle to improve the relationship between me and my guy. There are vast differences between us. BSR is helping me learn that it is not necessary for him to be like me. That is not easy.

In learning to solve problems, respondents said:

"What I do now is to plan my day or rather a week in a way to include at least one thing I have been reticent to do -- make a phone call to someone, look into further development of my career, protect additional funds for retirement."

"I listen in the group to advice that some people give. Some are very knowledgeable about certain things, e.g. child care. I could not listen to that kind of advice before. It caused me to almost lose my children."

"I have learned to deal with my children better. I could not manage them. They rejected me and went to live with their father. I've learned a lot about better ways of handling children. I tried them. After a visit from my children they asked to return to me.

Problems and Needs: Personal Adjustment

The question in this section asked respondents about problems and needs that they had or were encountering. The categories used are the ones most frequently mentioned as problems of living in our society (Table 3).

The area of relationships seemed to be the area in

Table 3

Needs Assessment: Participant's Perception
of Needs and Problems

(N = 25, 100%)

<u>Problem Area</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percent</u>
<u>Relationships</u>		
Stressful events	(20)	80%
Relationships	(24)	96%
Managing feelings	(15)	60%
<u>Basic Needs</u>		
Housing	(6)	24%
Money management	(7)	28%
Employment	(2)	8%
<u>Behavioral symptoms</u>		
Alcohol and drugs	(6)	24%

which all respondents had difficulties. There was an indication of need for improvement in relationships with parents, children, co-workers and members of the opposite sex. There were concerns about too much dependency on another person, guilt about dating, being in a relationship where they felt victimized. Many were looking for a way to end counterproductive relationships or to improve those they felt they would like to hold on to.

"My relationship problems were affecting my relationships on my job. I had never considered my role in those problems and difficulties until I started going to BSR."

"Prior to my first meeting at BSR, I had denied that I was a single person and therefore had lots of guilt about dating. At the first meeting I made apologies, excuses, cover-ups but I gradually learned to recognize, admit or acknowledge that I was part of the single community. When I was able to acknowledge this status, I was able to recognize the problems that go along with it. Dealing with guilt was one of them."

Four of the respondents indicated that they had relationship problems but did not want to talk about it. In addition to the specific problems cited, both males and females were very concerned about the difficult relationships between the sexes in the Black culture. Both felt particularly eager to look for ways to understand each other to mend the rift.

"The session on sexuality helped me to understand better how men see and feel about sex,

how society's attitudes and expectations force them to put on a macho front which in many instance turn women off. The group helped me see through the defensive veneer and appreciate better what is really there."

"I have learned more about women and have a greater appreciation of their problems. It is sobering to see women in a truer, more realistic role."

"We Black people are in a lot of trouble in the way we get along. I think BSR will help at least those of us who are here to be able to improve our relationships."

Other areas of problems as perceived by the respondents were problems in managing feelings and emotiuons, housing arrangements financial matters and medical problems. Sixty five percent or 16 did not have children less than 14 years of age, but of the 35% or nine that did, all of them had problems and concerns with the children that they felt warranted help."

"My second grand child (whose custody she has) has become very stubborn. She is 13 and will not listen to me at all. She does according to her own mind. She was different from the others as a baby. She seemed slower than the others in some things, better than her age in other ways. She is in special education in school."

"My son has a speech difficulty and handicap which causes him to be teased. He has trouble concentrating, he is overly sensitive, demanding and needs lots of care and attention. I have learned to be more supportive of him without feeling guilty."

"My son was very upset because of the divorce. He is very angry and has a lot to contend with."

Respondents also commented on problems in managing other aspects in their lives:

"I have been called too aggressive and too authoritative. I agree with this and am working on it."

"I grew up keeping my feelings to myself. That was how to be a 'lady'."

"I have learned comfort in disagreeing in a group. I am no longer afraid of rejection or a put down."

"Members are helping me to find a place to live. They are looking out for me. They call to give me leads and go with me to look for places."

As far as managing emotions, there was expressed a good bit of unspecified and repressed anger, compulsive overeating, depression and withdrawal, compulsive working, somatic symptoms, excessive fears about the future, lots of anxieties, insecurities and guilt, and explosive reactions to situations. All of these feelings were expressed not as emotions but as areas of concern that people felt they could use some outside help with. Fifteen respondents had what they considered serious concerns.

"I had been laid off from my job. Only Blacks were laid off. I had 23 years tenure with the company and it made no difference. The retrenchment was for financial reasons but that does not explain why only Blacks were laid off. That kept me from getting the proper retirement benefits. Just after that, four very close friends died. My daughter was concerned about my withdrawal and depression. She drove me to my first meeting and I have been returning ever since."

"I have lots of anxieties. Sometimes I wallow in it. Then I break out in hives and become physically ill. I have learned in BSR to consciously look at what is wrong and force myself to relax."

"I had wanted to go to a weight clinic but could not afford it. It seems that the increased feeling of security since I've been in BSR has helped me to lose some weight."

"When I came up against a stressful situation I would withdraw and get an awful headache. I'm trying to learn here how to deal with the stress."

Problems and Needs: Survival Concerns

Housing was not a predominant concern. Six of the sample felt their housing was somewhat unsatisfactory with two regarding theirs as very unsatisfactory.

Nine respondents worried about money matters very often with five seldom worrying. The ability to manage money and how it is spent remained about the same for eighteen respondents. The remaining seven were more concerned about their reduced ability to manage money than in the past.

Help for Needs and Problems

More than half of the respondents, 13, indicated that they had made attempts for help which included not just the formal service network but also the informal system of

friends and community members. Of those who went for help, four were very satisfied, three were somewhat satisfied and two were satisfied. Those who were satisfied did say that the satisfaction came more from the informal system or from Black service providers in the formal system. It was noted that because most felt that help was not available, they developed the tendency to do more problem solving or to become philosophically stoic. Many stated that it was really difficult to use help from anyone and that BSR was the first organization from which they had been able accept help. One woman said she had tried to use her friends and her own abilities, but found that it was insufficient to help her deal with the problem that was bothering her.

Other respondents had additional comments on how they had attempted to cope without using the formal system of services:

"I'll manage with my friends. With their help, encouragement and support I can work things out much better than with someone that doesn't care anything about me."

"I'll find that I go to friends who are professional. I get much more satisfaction and comfort from them than I would from an agency. As a matter of fact, I didn't even try an agency this time because I know how they feel about Black people."

"When I went for help, the doctor talked down to me so badly. Now I try to work it out myself. If not, I try to work it out in BSR."

"I am looking for a counselor now for my

daughter and it is very important to have someone who understands the unique needs of Black persons."

"I gave up on professional help. I have medical problems which are psychogenic. In BSR I deal with myself and the things I was trying to hide."

"If I had a problem, I would work it out by myself. If I were desperate for help, I would use a Black professional."

Some respondents said that they would ask help from a nurse friend before going to a doctor. No one mentioned the use of the church or minister for problems although many indicated that they do attend church.

Those who did go for therapy said that they had not had a satisfactory experience with a white therapist. Three had changed to a Black therapist and were now satisfied. Those remaining said that they decided not to continue with anyone else.

"Next time I would look for someone quicker who took a more active role in the therapy. I need a less Freudian, less analytical, more here and now based person. He refused to believe that was not appropriate for me. I think it is partially a problem of Black needs. There were some things about being Black he was not familiar with."

"I have seen how Blacks are treated from the inside. Blacks are not thought to be important and no one really makes an effort if they know the client is Black".

One member related taking her son for evaluation at a private child evaluation clinic. The evaluating social

worker proceeded to compare the method of child rearing she had used (white upper middle class) with the methods that she assumed the parent was using. She was so thorough in negative criticism and holding the mother accountable for the child's school behavior that the mother felt embarrassed. Another female member, who was an assistant principal in the N.Y.C. school system said she had fought hard to get her promotion over white people with less experience and less education. Her fight to maintain her position was unrelenting, not because of lack of qualification or performance but because many colleagues felt a Black person should not be in her position. She welcomed the afternoon spent in BSR where people appreciated and encouraged her abilities and her sense of competence.

One man, who had discussed the strain of trying to negotiate two worlds that were very different, said that the group became for him one day to be free from playing a role strain. It was a comfortable day for him.

One grandmother recounted how upset she was with the color of her new born grandchild in a N.Y.C. hospital that catered to middle and upper class clientele. She complained that his color was wrong but the obstetrician and pediatrician assured her that the baby was fine. When a Black L.P.N. returned to duty on the third day she

exclaimed to the mother that something was wrong with the baby's color and suggested that she be more insistent with the doctors. After protest and tests the baby was found to have a deteriorating liver problem. The grandmother, after five years, was still angry that the medical personnel did not "bother to learn that a brown baby who is jaundiced did not have the same appearance as a jaundiced white baby."

Some members mentioned benefits they felt they had received from the organization:

"I was extremely obese and had medical and marital problems as a result. The confidence that I gained from BSR provided the impetus and competence to lose weight. I have lost 200 pounds since joining the group. (Respondent now wears fashionable, exotic clothes, looks like a model and carries herself with security and confidence.)

"My family and friends complained that I worked too hard and too much. I felt it was necessary to get ahead. I have been coming here for three years and am beginning to think that maybe I was afraid of people. I am less isolated now and can do things with women and others that I normally could not."

Members expressed additional benefits that they felt they had gotten from the group:

"I have learned that the face that people present is not necessarily the true person. This has opened up relationships for me."

"Feedback from the group has helped me to end a relationship I knew was bad for me but felt helpless to do anything about."

"I am separated but kept putting off

divorce. Recently, I decided that I needed closure in my life and relationships. I recently was able to start proceedings for divorce.

The only person who went for help outside informal and Black helpers and was satisfied was a woman who joined a self help group. She felt that the problem commonality of the participants transcended any ethnic or class differences.

Half of those using legal services felt they were satisfied. There seemed to be no dissatisfaction along ethnic or class lines in that area. Those who did seek counseling help felt that being a member of a minority group had a lot to do with what they considered undesirable service. Thirty five percent or all but one of those who sought help felt that the helper did not understand Black people, that white people knew very little about Blacks and did not seem motivated to learn the difference. We get what white people think we need and that is probably why most of us don't go for help." Specifically, the therapists who were therapeutically or psychologically oriented did not appreciate the needs that Blacks have for the here and now survival issues. "Counselors and therapists know circumstances of Blacks but do not know Black people."

One respondent said that he would recommend the Black

psychotherapist because "he helped us (respondent and children) feel the importance of being Blacks."

Six respondents had made their decision not to use services because in their professions they had seen differential treatment between Blacks and whites. Only one interviewee had not thought at all about the issue of why he was reticent about service use.

"You can't help a person well without a serious sense of respect and appreciation for the person. People who provide services, mostly white middle class, know very little about Black people and respect them even less."

"I would not go for help but if I needed counseling, I'd have a hard time because I don't think a white person could help me. They know nothing about Blacks and care less."

"I did at one time consider getting help but figured that I as a Black person did not see myself fitting into a service relationship on the receiving end with white people. I work as an L.P.N. and see the varying treatment that people receive depending on whether they are white or Black."

"I work as a police officer and I have seen Blacks getting inferior legal and court services, misinformed and misrepresented in court. No due process for Blacks. Many end up in jail and are always guilty until proven innocent."

One respondent said he saw no difference in treatment between Blacks and whites. He felt it could have been because he knew the system and knew how to shop for the service that would be the most conducive to his needs.

The remaining eight cited having made a decision in advance of seeking a service that they felt they would want someone similar in background and perceptions to them, someone who had lived through the Black experience and understood the needs of Blacks.

When asked if BSR had motivated them to go for help, six indicated that it had and 19 said it had not. Those indicating that they had been motivated to go for help explained that being exposed to others who had used professional help encouraged them to feel more positive about the possibility. Two members felt that BSR had served the purpose for them of socializing them to the use of professional counseling and therapy. Three indicated that they had gone for help, not felt any benefit and consequently ended. After participating in BSR they felt they would return but only to a Black professional. Three others said they did want to go for help with depression which they now felt more hopeful about. One was more available for help without having thought about plans for it. One indicated that he used BSR consciously to avoid use of professional help.

The remaining 19 who felt they would not go for or return for help mentioned the feeling of alienation and lack of acceptance and also a sense that the BSR program had helped them to use their own resources and those of

others more effectively.

Overall, 23 of the respondents felt they were being satisfactorily served by the program in BSR. Five of those came to the organization to ameliorate specific conditions about which they had concerns. The largest number, 11, felt that BSR had helped them to cope and deal with their own problems and needs more effectively. One member even mentioned that she had been making little progress with her therapist and that BSR had helped her to be more honest and make more demands which improved the overall relationship for her. Others learned to take more responsibility in their relationships with other people, sensing and understanding more and becoming more aware of their own role with others.

Relationships seemed to be much more important to the respondents and to members in general than survival considerations such as housing, income and jobs.

Responding to the questionnaire, five mentioned that income was insufficient or that they had difficulties taking care of needs with the money that they earned and some felt that their housing arrangements were not satisfactory. However, they minimized their concern over these issues and suggested that the true area of concern for them was a desire for improved interpersonal relationships.

The expressed reasons for looking for help in the group was in practically every instance concern for how an individual was getting along with other people in their lives - relatives, friends, colleagues. Even those who had concerns about personality or personal characteristics were really seeking ways that those traits could promote better relationships with other people.

Some felt that their housing arrangements were not satisfactory. However, they minimized their concern over these issues and suggested that the true area of concern for them was a desire for improved interpersonal relationships.

Male and Female Differences

All of the men except two tended to be extremely reluctant to admit any type of concern or feeling of a problem or need that had directed them to the group or had helped maintain their presence there. Males tended to be very cautious, guarded and defensive regarding questions about what they considered admission of a problem or a want. The only service provider that they could discuss as a part of their service needs was the lawyer. This service need was usually in cases of legal needs implied by divorce.

However, probing in the questionnaire area regarding problems encouraged the males to respond without the restriction imposed by the interview. The males free associated much more readily than the females once they opened up and actually resulted in interviews that were twice as long as those with females. Once the verbalizing began, each of the males seemed to welcome the opportunity to share pent up feelings, observations and needs that they had denied in the beginning. These needs, as with females, were mostly in the areas of relationships. The men were also the lesser likely to have gone for help in the past. This information would seem to indicate that there was a need for Black males to have the opportunity to request help and support with some of the needs and problems with which they were struggling in a context that was not too threatening.

As shown in figure 4, among the middle class respondents, there was an equal number of those who had used a formal service system resource and those who had not. But, as far as attitude towards service provision, 90 or 9% indicated that they had negative attitudes toward the service system and would not use it. Some in the 90% had used services before but indicated that they would not continue.

Use of Services and Resources by Class

(N = 25, 100%)

	<u>Former Use of Referral</u>	<u>Negative Attitude towards Services</u>
(Middle Class) Professional Group		
10	6	9
40%	(60%)	(90%)
Non Professional Group		
15	3	11
60%	(20%)	(73%)

Figure 4

The percentage in the lower socio-economic group who had used formal services was 20% or three, but 73% or 11 had negative attitudes towards use of the social service system.

Members of BSR spoke of negative attitudes towards services in the formal system based on many different reasons - an unpleasant experience in the service system, feelings developed by virtue of living in the society, feedback from relatives and friends. There was, however, a small number of members who did not have the negative attitude towards using services in the social system.

Figure 5 depicts that of the 10 members of the organization who had been in the group less than one year, eight or 80% had a negative attitude towards service in the larger system. However, those who had been in for more than one year, only 67% or 10 felt negatively about services in the formal system. What is not reflected is the fact that those who were influenced positively to use services indicated that they would seek a Black professional.

Of the 10 respondents who had been in for less than one year, seven or 70% felt they had received benefits from BSR. However, those who had been in for more than one year, 13 or 87% felt that they had received benefits from BSR.

Length of Time in Group by Negative Attitude
towards Service Use and Perceived Benefits of BSR

(N = 25, 100%)

<u>Length of Time in Group</u>	<u>Negative Attitude towards Service</u>	<u>Perceived Benefits of BSR</u>
Less than one year		
(10)	(8)	(7)
40%	80%	70%
One year and more		
(15)	(10)	(13)
60%	67%	87%
100%		

Figure 5

Figure 6 shows a similar pattern using the number of sessions attended by the respondents as the independent variable. Of those who had attended less than twelve sessions, seven or 70% had a negative attitude towards the use of outside services. However, those attending 12 or more sessions, 11 or 68% had negative attitudes towards service in the social system. As stated above, the change in attitudes towards the use of formal service is a reflection of respondents indicating that they would use a Black service provider.

Those respondents attending less than 12 sessions, 14 or eight or 88% felt they had derived benefits from BSR. The same 88% or 14 respondents who had attended 12 or more sessions perceived benefits from BSR.

There does seem to be some significance to the effects of being in BSR over a period of time with a difference of negative attitudes towards services, but also with the accompanying increase in perceived benefits from BSR. It does appear that as members gain more experiences in the organization there are benefits in the organization which affect individuals directly and which also help them to use outside services.

Perceived Benefits of BSR
by Number of Sessions Attended

(N = 25, 100%)

<u>Number of Sessions Attended</u>	<u>Negative Attitude towards Service Use</u>	<u>Perceived Benefits of BSR</u>
Less than 12 sessions		
(10)	(7)	(8)
40%	77%	88%
12 or more sessions		
(15)	(11)	(14)
60%	68.7%	87.3%

Figure 6

Summary

This project was designed to study a cohort of members of a mutual self help group of Black single men and women. The goal was to investigate their attitudes toward service use and to determine if there were any increase in service use and to determine if there were any increase in service use as a result of participating in the group.

Twenty five members were selected for the exploratory study. Those were chosen in order to acquire a sex ratio representative of the group and a balance in the length of time and number of sessions attended.

The respondents ranged in age from 25 to over 46 years of age. The largest group defined themselves as professional but with the remaining 15 being skilled workers, paraprofessional and civil servants.

The responses seem to indicate that the Blacks in the survey were looking for a service that could help them to manage some of the problems and stresses of living. Although the name of the organization - Black Single Resources might initially imply a social or dating resource, members joined because they had heard a description of the organization as a source of support and help. Only two members came and maintained membership for strictly social or recreational purposes.

The majority of the respondents felt that their initial decisions to continue in the group were based on sensing a warmth and acceptance generated by outreach and friendliness of members. They indicated that they had come into the organization with the purpose of working on specific personal concerns that they felt caused problems in their lives.

They articulated that they were looking for others who shared and understood the hostility of the white world and had an appreciation of the structural difficulties encountered by virtue of being Black.

In addition, they reported that the organization had helped their relationships with other persons, their ability to communicate and their sense of security through support from fellow members. The respondents, by and large, perceived the benefits of BSR to be a process of internalized growth, security and insight.

Those who grew to accept help from an outside system felt that it was not due to a structured process of being referred successfully to services but a process of "social therapy" that helped them to grow to the point of getting help for problems.

In defining the types of problems that they felt they had, the respondents seemed to be most concerned about

relationship difficulties. They sought improvement in relationships with parents, children, co-workers and friends. They seemed to be less concerned with issues such as housing and income even when they were stated as problem areas. Males and singles, never married particularly spoke of housing and income as being inadequate.

In most instances, males had moved away from home and established a new household. Most of the single, never married were dissatisfied because of financial inability to move out on their own.

Many of the respondents had tried to get help but from the informal system of friends and community members. Only eight felt more positively since being in the group about services from the formal system and all except one of them indicated that they were either using or would look for a Black service provider.

Overall, at least 23 of the 25 respondents felt they were satisfactorily served by the BSR program.

Chapter V

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Jenkins has described a service delivery system that is not attuned to the needs of minorities (1982, 4). Historically, the tradition of social services provision has been through private auspice, immigrant associations, language and religious societies which understood and considered cultural and ethnic differences as basic to the provision of services. However, the public sector which now provides most services for low income and Black persons has assumed the characteristics and ideology of the dominant culture (Jenkins, 1982, 8; Green, 1982, 41). The consequence has been obstacles and barriers to Blacks in receiving their appropriate entitlements in the social services system.

Other studies showed alienation from the dominant society to be effective in establishing attitudes that mitigate against the use of the formal service system (Devore and Schlesinger, 1981, 197; Bullough, 1972, 350). Bullough showed further that the alienation was generated and encouraged by feelings of hopelessness, powerlessness and social isolation (1972, 357; 1969, 969). Suchman found similar alienation in his study of underutilization of medical facilities (1964, 331).

In the review of literature, it was determined that the material on underutilization of service and the reasons thereafter derived mostly from studies regarding use in health care and medical services. As a result, this study focused on investigating the service use phenomenon from the point of view of need for services more commonly provided by the social work system of services. Previous studies also tended to report projections as a result of studies on service use without asking potential users their thinking on explanations for lack and underutilization. The current study asked potential consumers what were the factors associated with lack of use.

For these reasons, the current study focused on exploring people's acknowledgement that they did have needs and problems and finding out from them first hand if they had sought help, why or why not and how. Because of the participation in a self help group, this study assumed the participants had needs and these people used the group in resolving needs and in motivating towards increased use of service.

Summary

The self help project that was described in this research study was the design, implementation and evaluation of a programmatic intervention designed to meet

some of the affective, problem solving and referral needs of a population of single Black males and females.

The major proposal of the project was to study a cohort of members of a mutual support group of Black single men and women. The focus was on their identification of their own needs, their perception of the uses of the group in meeting those needs and their perception of the role of the group intervention in their seeking and using help outside the group.

The area of needs was those that most people have in the daily problems of living. The needs can be further defined as those that are usually handled in the social services system and would include areas of personal adjustment, family problems, housing, employment and health.

The study sought information on needs and problems the members had experiences, how and when they sought help in dealing with those needs and problems, their perception of barriers and obstacles that they encountered as they sought to use that help and what effect, if any, their experience in the mutual support group had on their other help seeking efforts. A determination was also sought on any possible association between the members' pattern of use in the group and the way that they went about using outside help.

The study was an exploratory and descriptive one. The importance of the exploration here was to generate some information about Black client's need, problems and attitudes towards service. It was also hoped to provide some knowledge regarding ways that a Black client population would use a program intervention into which they had some input into the nature and direction of the service.

The practice principles which focused on the role of the consumer as being central in an intervention effort was supported in the findings through benefits perceived by members in their feelings of support, importance and being respected. Although the leadership was centrally strong, members figured importantly in the governance of the organization. The successful member participation in leadership positions, developing and being a part of smaller groups and being encouraged to do things independently all contributed to a sense of competence and mastery of the members.

Some of the theories which informed the intervention successfully supported the accomplishment of the group's goals. Power and equity were encouraged in the group as people's experiences were validated and rewarded as positive. Positive experiences, in turn, helped promote autonomy and identification of options. Reducing the

importance of status characteristics strengthened people's sense of importance and of security in giving as well as receiving, of offering as well as taking.

As a member became more secure with the supported positive feelings, he was able to integrate additional experiences and knowledge that could be stored for later use.

All of these concepts were organized into the andragogical approach reflected in the use of facilitators rather than leaders and the encouragement that the members bring their own experiences to bear in attempting to grow.

The needs assessment part of the study was important in future planning and program needs for a cohort of similar persons. The program facet of information would be useful in making decisions about service delivery that would accommodate and be of use to this or a similar population.

Because of the benefits perceived so far, the organization might become a model for other groups. Professional persons could find it beneficial to be able to see ways in which people's needs can be satisfied in ways other than professional services.

The participant observation method of research was

used along with individual interviews of participants in the program. After observing in the organization for six months, the researcher discovered a lot of rich anecdotal information available in observing the group, contacts before and after the formal meeting and in the interest groups to which the members belonged. This participant observation method of research allowed an exploratory study which, the writer hopes, will lead to more precise research problem or hypothesis development. As a descriptive study, there will be a benefit from a varied format in order to maximize the chance of capturing fully the social process involved in the study (Settig, Wrightsman and Cook, 1976, 104).

The process of the self help group was particularly important as this form of intervention emerged as a legitimate means of helping individuals to achieve control and participations in solutions regarding their future. Katz and Bender (1976, 64) indicated that people do join self help groups because they feel rejected by the larger society and its institutions, have feelings of powerlessness over decisions and feel helpless to make changes.

The purposes for which most members of the group indicated they had joined - help with problems in adjustment and living and refuge to a more benign

environment were ones that were well suited to amelioration by the self help process.

The researcher participated directly and shared the experiences of those observed. Caution was taken not to get emotionally involved in the group and lose objectivity. Reliability of data was encouraged by comparing anecdotal information from informal contacts with interview responses. Data from observation seemed to support findings in the interview data and information.

Twenty five respondents were selected from 75 volunteers for the sample to be interviewed. Those chosen were selected on the basis of developing a sample with a sex ratio proportionate to that in the overall group and to have a group of respondents with a balanced number in the categories of length of time in the organization and number of meetings attended. A sample of respondents chosen on a volunteer, non-probability and self selection basis made the respondents easily accessible to researcher, but probably precluded a sample representative of the group or of the population of Black women and men in general. This, then, is one limitation of the study - the findings are not generalizable.

Findings

1. Needs Assessment

The questionnaire sought information from the respondents about needs or problems that they had or were encountering. The categories used were the frequently mentioned problems of living in our society.

The area of relationships seemed to be the area in which all respondents had difficulties. Relationships seemed to be the most important area to members in general. The expressed reasons in practically every instance was concern for how an individual was getting along with other people in their lives. Even those who had concerns about personality or personal characteristics were really seeking ways that those traits could promote better relationships with other people. Relationships mentioned were those with parents, children, colleagues and members of the opposite sex. In part this may be due to the fact that the members participated in a self help group emphasizing relationships.

As an intervention BSR purported to be a place where people could come to work on relationships and personal concerns. Most of the reasons indicated by the interview respondents as to why they returned to the group after the first meeting was reasons that were generally affective in

nature. This indicated a selection process present that favored persons who would use the group for those reasons.

a. Sense of Alienation

The feelings and attitudes of Blacks in the sample seemed to substantiate those of Blacks described in the literature review. In the literature, most of the studies tended to be about low income Blacks, their perception of condescending and stereotypical behavior by workers, discrimination, ignorance of cultural patterns (Jenkins, 1982, 108), lack of motivation (Peterson, 1981, 800). The interpretation by low income clients of being unwelcome in private agencies (Cloward and Epstein, 1965, 626) or that an offered service is incongruous with their needs (Normand, et al., 1974, 37) has caused Black clients to reject many resources and services in advance.

The findings in this study suggest that the perceived alienation was a feeling of Blacks along ethnic rather than socio-economic lines. The respondents in this study represented a cross section socio-economically and educationally of Black men and women with about 40% being professional. The explanations for low service use by the Blacks in BSR generally was very similar to those provided in the literature review on service use behavior among low income Black persons. Support for this concept was further

affirmed in findings that low income mothers of other ethnic groups did not have the same sense of alienation and powerlessness as Black mothers even though they were recent immigrants, did not speak the language and were less well educated.

The middle class professional respondents indicated that they had entertained conscious consideration of possible benefits of using services in the larger system and, in most cases, rejected the idea. They stated feelings of racism that they had witnessed, personal experiences and those of relatives and friends had influenced their decision. In addition, they had purposely joined a Black self help groups with the notion that the characteristic and experience of a Black organization may help them to resolve problems that they perceived as having racial/ethnic genesis.

There has been a history of Blacks having been excluded from the private provision of services which has generated provision of their own formal services as well as attempting to handle many needs on an informal basis. The communal origins of Black people has also contributed to feelings and attitudes of mutual aid. Respondents in the survey did tend to seek help for problems from friends, relatives or someone in the local community.

In addition, the fact that a large proportion of the respondents were professional would indicate problem areas that were on a higher level than basic level of needs as described in Maslow's hierarchy of needs.

Those who had sought counseling or social services felt that being a member of a minority group was the reason for their getting undesirable services. All but one of those who sought help felt that the helper did not understand Black people, and that whites knew very little about Blacks. One area mentioned was that whites have little understanding and appreciation of the needs Blacks have for here and now issues. They also referred to an inadequate concern for Blacks' focus on relationships as a priority.

Both males and females seemed particularly concerned about the difficult relationships that exist between the sexes in Black society. They also felt eager to look for ways to understand each other and to mend the rift.

Problems in this area are related to the divorce rate in Black society which is the highest of any ethnic group in this country. Other phenomena related to this issue are Black men are the least recognized group in our society and Blacks, as opposed to the majority norm, tend to have women more highly educated and job secure than men. It is

suggested that these facts are societally reflected in aggressive behavior in crime, the passivity of low education, poor work skills, high dropout rate from school and in the withdrawal through suicide, drugs and alcohol on the part of Black males (Staples, 1984, 13).

b. Orientation to Present

As indicated in the literature review, Black people tend to focus more on practical survival issues. Instances of rejection of services were cited because the Black client was more interested in dealing with day to day issues while a therapist was focusing on causes, explanations and insights. Some respondents in the interview stated that they had problems reconciling with therapists over these concerns.

2. Program Uses of the Group

The members who joined BSR indicated that they had heard about the group, its purposes and benefits through friends, colleagues and relatives. Ninety two percent or 23 of those interviewed indicated that they came to the group with a statement of concern that they wanted to work on. The areas included global ones, such as "to feel more positive about myself" to a need "to have an activity of my own without the children." Some expressed relief that the

meetings were not social, but substantive in terms of helping them to deal with problems and stresses of everyday life. They had perceived the organization as a sharing experience with others like themselves - people who understand the hostility of the white world and who had an appreciation of the structural difficulties encountered by virtue of being Black.

More than half the interviewed members indicated that participation in the organization had helped their ability and willingness to explore their own feelings. Other benefits that members felt they had enjoyed were: feeling comfortable in revealing unacceptable traits and therefore learning how to use the self assessment for growth, learning better how to be more comfortable in communicating with others. Males particularly felt they had learned better how to talk and listen to their children. Emotional and service support was an important benefit felt by the majority of group members as fellow members sustained them through an endeavor or difficult period or through validation of a behavior about which there was some discomfort or that was being tried out for the first time.

Members' perception was that they also learned to take risks, to use the group more effectively toward self acceptance and growth.

Although most of the benefits were described by members in these affective areas, there was also evidence that participants acquired cognitive learning especially in the sub and mini group meetings. People shared information about practicing new ways of dealing with stresses, problems and specific feelings. There were reports of trying different approaches to dealing with depression, relationships with others and problem solving efforts. The community feedback allowed members to learn additional resources such as services and opportunities. Learning skills and using unutilized talents in the drama, poetry, Black literature and music group also promoted growth, self acceptance and expanded contacts.

Many members did mention that the church did play an important role in meeting many of their needs. Historically, one of the few places that has been open to Blacks where they can predominate has been the Black Church. The Black Church has served as a "refuge in a hostile white world (Frazier, 1969, 45) a place for meeting not only social, but political needs, opportunities for leadership for private business concerns and as social agencies (May and Nicholson, 1969, 9; Hamilton, 1972, 13).

In every instance, the member indicated that there were some needs that could not be met for them in the church. Those mentioned were the one traditionally

recognized as social service needs.

3. Impact of Intervention on Service Use

BSR did seem to have a moderate influence on members seeking help from the formal system. About one half of the respondents had made attempts to get help but had discontinued because they were not satisfied with the service. Those who had some degree of satisfaction attributed it to the fact of asking for help from someone that they knew.

Some members did indicate that they had learned new information in one of the mini sessions that had encouraged them to seek professional help. Those interview respondents who indicated that BSR had motivated them to go for help felt that exposure to professional people and some who had tried professional help themselves encouraged them to feel more positive about trying. The response from some was that they felt one of the specific benefits they had received from the group was the socialization to the use of professional service.

Members did come to the group specifying the need for help with problems that they had usually identified in advance. The greater impact of the group was to help members to articulate, express and discuss many of the

needs and issues that they generated.

With the tendency to take a stoical approach to enduring certain discomforts or to work out inconsistencies in private or to seek support and problem solving help from those close, it is not surprising that most members found the resolution that they needed from the dynamics and processes of the group.

The processes of the group were such that they would be found useful to a population who were looking for extra help during a period of increased stress and pressure or when there is a reduction in the ability to manage one's own life. The BSR philosophy sought to support, to direct to alternatives, to understand, to be sensitive and to bring Black people together under less conflicting circumstances than they encounter in the larger society.

The structured social relationships could have preventive and therapeutic functions (Caplan, 1976, 47) which were functions sought by many of the organization members. In having a large number of the needs met directly by the group, it became unnecessary to use the group as a referral point for an outside service. Only a few members with more serious problems than they felt the program could handle indicated that they would seek help elsewhere from a mental health professional.

Even though alternative ways of dealing with problems were described and encouraged in some cases members tended to wish to use the group for its own autonomous and self sustaining purposes.

4. Members' Attempts at Service Use

There was a relationship along class lines for those who had used the formal service system and those who had not. As would be expected, professional members had attempted to use the formal service system twice as much as those of the non-professional group. The indication in both socio-economic groups was services such as social work, counseling and psychotherapist. The areas of need revealed were coping with problems and managing daily living requirements.

As for attitude toward the service provisions, 92% or 23 indicated that they had negative attitudes toward the service system and would not use it. Of those who had formerly used services, most indicated that they would not continue.

The negative attitudes were based on many different reasons - an unpleasant experience, feelings developed by virtue of having lived in the society, feedback from relatives and friends and having observed service delivery

from inside the system themselves.

These reasons for non service use confirmed findings in the literature that Black people tend to feel rejected and alienated by the social service delivery system. Significant also was the finding that there was very little difference between the attitudes along class lines. Professional middle class persons were just as disaffected with service provision as were those from the lower socio-economic group. Bullough's studies likewise found the alienation to be racial rather than socio-economic (1972, 348).

There was a decrease in the numbers of those who had a negative attitude toward formal services after having been in the group for more than one year - from 80% to 67%. However, those who did acknowledge a change in their attitude indicated that their positive decision was based on a plan to seek a Black professional. The same pattern of change was reflected in the difference between those who had attended more than twelve sessions. A reduction from 77% to 68% was the change in that group of those with negative attitudes toward formal services.

5. Structure and Process As Intervention

Many of the benefits and advantages of the group

inhere in the structure and processes which were very carefully designed in order to carry out purposes of the group. The leadership in the group was a strong centralized one with most of the decision making emanating from the one person. As a professional person the leader uses scientific information as well as her intuition to inform the activities in the group.

In spite of the strong centralization, there were many sub and interest groups which provided for the members the opportunities to enact some of the roles denied in the larger society. The downplay of stratification based on conventional status characteristics such as age, occupation, sex, wealth or education was strongly discouraged as an organization principle.

The activities of the process groups were designed to prevent an in depth or therapeutic focus on one person and encouraged a more behavioral approach in which there is a focus on the behavior itself and how it can be improved or changed so the member can function more effectively with him/herself and the environment. There was little tolerance for explaining or understanding what caused the behavior.

Concepts of self help and ritual also figure very importantly in promoting the purposes of the group.

There was a supportive function served by ritual even in a person's day to day living. The ritual of the religious service has been an important feature in mobilizing and maintaining people who would otherwise feel so oppressed that it would be difficult to function (Laird, 1984, 125). Ritual is also symbolic of the way that Black people have constructed a reality for themselves which is different from the larger society.

Conclusions

A group such as BSR has provided a beneficial service for the majority of the members joining the group. Although data from the 25 respondents were not generalizable to the whole group of 400 members, the data obtained from the participant observation confirmed and corroborated the findings from the interviews.

The findings suggested that the group satisfied many of the members' needs for an arena to identify personal needs and problems and offer a program that could help satisfy and resolve identified problems. The target population which the group sought to serve was one that was geographically distributed throughout the metropolitan area. This location was one that was also emotionally attractive, being located in an area that was ethnically the same as the population under study and one with which

they could identify. These considerations were important in light of expressed needs for a service that was convenient, attracting and comfortable. One potential obstacle in the group's attractiveness may be the \$7.00 per session admission fee. The issue of the role of the admission fee in the membership selection process was not investigated nor considered. With the service being located in a working class neighborhood, the charge could have had a regulating effect on the membership.

Although the research did not propose to study any particular socio-economic group, most of the literature in this area has been with low income groups. Even though 40% or 10 of the respondents in this study described themselves as professional, the results of the study were very similar to those done on low socio-economic Black groups. The results in this group were not at variance with previous studies on attitudes towards the social service system which seems conclusive that Black persons tend to have similar perceptions regardless of the education and economic level.

The needs assessment section of the study did identify information on members' perceptions of their needs and problems which could be of value in program planning and design. The preponderance of concern with interpersonal issues as opposed to issues of housing and finances is more

of a reflection of priority of preference rather than perceived seriousness of problem. Members did acknowledge needs in the areas of housing and income but their indication of what was perceived as problematic was those issues related to how they got along with others and how others evaluated them. These choices or decisions seem to be consistent with Afro American origins and values of communal concerns and relationships with an emphasis on people and natural events.

Information on the difficulty of the males in sharing personal information could be helpful in programming to address their needs. There was staunch denial from all males except two in responding to questions of needs and problems. It was only the persistence borne of suspicion that to continue in a group such as this was an acknowledgement of a need. The degree to which the males shared once they started talking implied needs as "weakness" and communication relative to this perception becomes problematic also.

Concerns about the vulnerability and precariousness of Black male-female relationships was very considerable. An often repeated theme was how the group could be used to address, understand and deal with the problem. A group like the one described is probably one of the few places that Blacks have that needs can be targeted and problems

dealt with in a helpful way.

In the literature review, Jenkins found that parents felt social service providers to be condescending and stereotyping in their behavior and that there was an ignorance of cultural patterns of the community (1982, 108). These considerations figure importantly in understanding the role of cultural awareness and differences in the provision of services. Green described this phenomenon by saying that different cultures have their own definitions, explanations and expectations regarding a need or a problem (1982, 32). If a helper does not understand or appreciate this, it will be difficult to provide a service that is usable by the client. The grandmother in BSR explained this concept by saying that the white doctor should know that a Black baby who is jaundiced will not have the same appearance as the white jaundiced baby and it is inexcusable for a doctor not to know this.

This research based on the literature and data collection in the group under study has demonstrated that Black people do have problems and needs that are peculiar to their position in this society as victims of racism and oppression. Attitudinally, case work services "offered to Black persons are viewed as suspect because the theoretical model utilized viewed the person as the problem" (Green,

1982, 99).

This information would imply the need for additional Black agencies that provide options for those Black service users who would be more comfortable with providers with whom he had more in common and by whom his problems were better understood.

An intervention to help Black persons with problems and needs should include a more lateral or peer relationship with the helper in order to reduce their sense of inferiority brought on by the vertical case relationships that exist in the larger society. Increased mutual exchange could discourage the Black's sense of low self worth and encourage the importance of their own experiences and strengths and how they can be used in a valued way. Pinderhughes has indicated that it is the responsibility of social work to reinforce the client's sense of power and competence (1979, 121).

The content and process were also useful in encouraging Black people to deal with themes and issues that were important to them and not handed to them by an outside source. It was only they who can identify what the themes are and what should be the focus as they were discussed. Green found that Black values on the importance of children and interpersonal relationships to be much

stronger and more intense than outsiders have recognized (1982, 99).

Caution should be exercised in seeking to incorporate the group as a service in a traditional social agency. Beyond the basic principles applied to organizing the group, the importance of minimizing hierarchy, emphasis on strengths of clients and placing the client as the central focus, there were structural and processes considerations that encouraged the success of the group in answering needs of the member population. Many would be difficult to replicate in the traditional agency - the location, setting, two hierarchical levels, but with strong central management and a cultural identity similar to the target group.

Self help as a process might also be difficult to transfer to the traditional social service agency. People who are attracted to self help groups are not tolerated or have been outrightly rejected by society. The self help form of intervention assumes that people can take an active role in making plans and decisions regarding their own lives. The self help group, however, can be used for attempting purposes of interpretation, education and referral to other resources.

The purpose of helping members to use other resources

more profitably was not very successful. Although there were few who felt the group had pointed the direction for them to other solutions, the number was very low. In view of the fact that the program was not very successful in effecting referrals to other resources, it is then crucial that it evaluate an alternative method of carrying out that purpose and/or focus on strengthening the facets of the program that carried some successes.

In addition to the recommendations made so far, additional ones that can be made are:

1. It is very likely that the leadership could carry the learning theory and instructional purposes somewhat further and establish more formal recommendations and solutions for the members. If the behavioral conceptions of dealing with problems and needs are going to be the preeminent ones, it would seem beneficial to the participants to go a few steps further and consciously and planfully work with people in following through cognitively as they seek to resolve the many concerns with which they have come to the group.

As an example, in the session, *The Black Male - An Endangered Species*, the majority of the males seemed to have little tolerance for the Black male who was not "making it." Even though the majority of those present had been attracted to this group by the opportunity to be

isolated from a hostile society, they failed to appreciate the effect that society could have on others. A cognitive approach introduced at this time could have been an excellent learning situation for those who were not connecting the structural disabilities suffered by those men who were having difficulties "making it" with the problems that they were defining as being crippling in their own lives.

2. It is important to recognize that there are certain program concerns in working with a group of Black people which would indicate an ethnically closed group based on concerns identified as those common to Blacks. This naturally does not preclude ethnically mixed groups as a means of dealing with matters that are more general and less specific to the psyche of Blackness.

3. The purpose of this study was to explore and describe some of the issues in Blacks' resistance to the use of the social services system. This research was able to get descriptive explanations from a group of persons as to their feelings about the social service system and some of their difficulties in using those services. This information suggests further research using a larger sample and one that is more statistically representative of the target population as a whole. More precise study is needed to get a more specific definition of the problem as Black

persons define it. Since there do seem to be differences in service use between Blacks and other minority groups, there is much more information needed that is more relative to culture rather than status. Further descriptive studies would encourage more information from the potential clients "in their own words."

Green discusses the concept of ethnographic interviewing as a way to eliminate culture bound tactics and to elicit rich detailed material that can be used in qualitative analysis (1982, 76). This approach to gathering information should be much more revealing than an approach such as the Community Behavioral Inventory (CBI), used as an instrument to study help seeking behavior among urban Blacks.

The instrument gave respondents opportunities to answer questions on their help-seeking behavior by asking them to make decisions on choice of help by placing themselves in the place of a person described and make a choice of two options as a source of service (Hendricks, Howard and Gary, 1981, 161). This method of collecting data on this topic seems somewhat restrictive by preventing respondents from exploring or giving consideration to their own feelings on the issue.

The literature review has identified needs minorities,

especially Blacks focusing mostly on those of lower socio-economic status. The findings from this study - that there was little difference between attitudes along socio-economic lines imply the recognition of the Black middle class as potential needers of the services provided in the social services system.

The findings that Black women are more readily available to acknowledge need for service than Black men is helpful information in planning services to meet the needs of the men. This knowledge is necessary to those human service professionals seeking to ameliorate the lives that are subject to the worst social and economic conditions. The Black male, being the most subject to unemployment, underemployment, low skills and education and poor chance at successful marriages, is a long neglected group from the benefits of social service providers.

Processes from the Black Church on ritual, catharsis and recognition should be considerations in designing structures and programs to meet the service needs of Black people. The application of these processes might well be helpful to persons who tend to shun the formal system.

INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE

Hello, I am Louise Sindos. I am a member of BSR doing a study of the organization. In this study I am asking members of the organization about their usual ways of handling their life's problems and needs and also if and how they feel BSR has had an effect on how they solve their problems.

As I indicated earlier, everything you say will be kept in strictest confidence and your name will not be a part of the findings. The questions will not ask extremely personal or private information.

I. The first group of questions that I ask will be concerned with your participation in BSR. Please pick the response that seems most appropriate for you. Some answers may require some detail.

1. How did you first come to know about BSR?
2. Why did you come to BSR for the first time?
3. Had you gone elsewhere before that purpose?
4. Were you satisfied?
5. Why or why not?

6. What did you feel you got out of the first session at BSR?
7. Why did you return the second time?
8. What types of activities are you involved in BSR?
9. How long has it been since your first attendance at BSR?
- A. 3 months or less
 - B. More than 3 months and less than 6 months
 - C. 6 months or more and less than 12 months
 - D. 12 months or more and less than 18 months
 - E. 18 months or more and less than 24 months
 - F. 24 months or more
10. Approximately how many sessions have you attended since your first time at BSR? (count all including big meetings, interest groups, trips, social functions, etc.)
- A. Less than three meetings
 - B. 3 or more but less than 6 meetings
 - C. 6 or more but less than 12 meetings
 - D. 12 or more but less than 18 meetings
 - E. 18 or more meetings

II. The following questions refer to the way you feel BSR has affected you and situations in your life.

1. Have you developed some personal contacts from your participation in BSR?

___ Yes

___ No

2. Could you tell me about it?

3. Have you developed some business contacts from your participation in BSR?

___ Yes

___ No

4. Could you tell me about the contacts you have made?

5. Do you currently participate in activities outside BSR that you did not join before?

___ Yes

___ No

6. Please explain.

7. Do you think BSR had any influence on these other activities?

___ Yes

___ No

Please explain _____

8. Do you think that BSR has helped your ability and willingness to explore your own feelings?

___ A. Strongly agree

___ B. Agree

___ C. Neither agree nor disagree

___ D. Disagree

___ E. Strongly disagree

9. Could you give me an example? _____

10. Do you feel the group members of BSR are supportive of you?

___ A. Strongly agree

- B. Agree
- C. Neither agree nor disagree
- D. Disagree
- E. Strongly disagree

11. How is this support shown? _____

12. Has being in BSR helped you to be more willing to take chances in your life and relationships?

- A. Strongly agree
- B. Agree
- C. Neither agree nor disagree
- D. Disagree
- E. Strongly disagree

13. Can you give me an example? _____

14. Through BSR have you discovered a talent or interest that you did not know you had?

- A. Strongly agree
- B. Agree
- C. Disagree
- D. Strongly disagree

15. Would you tell me what it is? _____

16. Has BSR helped your ability to accept help from other persons?
- ___ A. Most of the time
 - ___ B. Very often
 - ___ C. Sometimes
 - ___ D. Very little
 - ___ E. Never
17. Can you give me an example? _____

18. Have you had contacts with other members in BSR outside the group meetings?
- ___ A. Most of the time
 - ___ B. Very often
 - ___ C. Sometimes
 - ___ D. Very little
 - ___ E. Never
19. Do these contacts help you to use BSR more effectively?
- ___ Yes
 - ___ No

20. Please explain. _____

21. Have you had a significant number of contacts with people who are not members of the group?

_____ A. Most of the time

_____ B. Very often

_____ C. Sometimes

_____ D. Very little

_____ E. Never

22. Have these contacts increased since you joined BSR?

_____ Yes

_____ No

23. Has BSR helped you deal with others more effectively?

_____ Yes

_____ No

24. Can you recall an instance in the last month in which you were able to do something for the first time?

_____ Yes

_____ No

(If necessary "give it some thought and we can come back to that question.")

Probe with examples - family, hobby, trip, behavior.

25. Did BSR help you in being able to do this?

_____ Yes

_____ No

26. Can you think of other ways BSR might have helped you?

Studies have shown that most of the people in our society develop some of the problems of living. The areas included in the questions below are the ones that are the most frequently mentioned. Some of the questions have preset choice of answers. Others can be answered in your own words.

111. Personal Adjustment

1. During the past two years have you been concerned about your relationship with another person? (Either keeping, stabilizing or ending it?)

_____ Yes

_____ No

2. Are you comfortable in telling me about the relationship? _____

3. Have you had any particular changes or experiences in your life that were upsetting to you or difficult to overcome or get used to?

___ Yes

___ No

4. Would you describe at least one of those experiences.

5. Do you have times when your emotions seem to get out of hand? e.g., anger, guilt, fear, aggressiveness, hostility, nervousness?

___ Yes

___ No

6. Could you give me an example? _____

7. Do you have children less than 14 years of age?

___ Yes

___ No

8. (If yes), do(es) your child(ren) have needs in school that require your time and concern? ,

___ Yes

___ No

9. (If yes to Numbers 6 and 7 or both) what has been the nature of the problem? _____

10. Are your housing arrangements (including costs and persons living with you)
- ___ Very satisfactory
 - ___ Somewhat satisfactory
 - ___ Satisfactory
 - ___ Somewhat unsatisfactory
 - ___ Very unsatisfactory
11. Were you steadily employed during the past year?
- ___ Very often
 - ___ Often
12. During the past year did you worry about money matters?
- ___ Very often
 - ___ Often
 - ___ Sometimes
 - ___ Not very often
 - ___ Seldom
13. During the past year were you able to manage how you spent your money?
- ___ Better than usual
 - ___ About the same as usual

Not as well as usual

14. During the past 6 months have you had sickness or an accident?

Yes

No

15. Practically everyone in today's society has a relative touched by alcohol or drugs. Do you have a concern for yourself or someone close to you about alcohol or drugs?

Yes

No

16. Have you had any of the following needs in the last two years? Check as many as apply. (Some that I just asked may be repeated).

A. Employment

B. Medical

C. Help in managing family situation more effectively

D. Children concerns in school

E. Help in your relationship with another person

F. Alcohol, drugs management

G. Managing your own emotions (anger, guilt, fear, hostility, etc.)

H. Arrangements for child care

I. Developing a business or promoting a service

- J. To separate from spouse or lover
 - K. To return to school
 - L. To develop a new relationship or maintain an existing one
 - M. Counseling or therapy
 - N. Other (please specify)
-
-

17. (Refer to past question) I notice that you had concerns about (cite), did you make any attempt to get help for it (them)? _____

18. Where did you go for help? (ex., friends, social service agency, professional)

19. Were you satisfied with the service that you received?

- Very satisfied
- Somewhat satisfied
- Satisfied
- Somewhat dissatisfied
- Very dissatisfied

20. Do you think that your being a member of a minority group had anything to do with the kind of service you

received?

Yes

No

21. Could you tell me more about it? _____

22. Has your participation in BSR motivated you to go for help with any of your needs?

Yes

No

23. Please explain. _____

24. Has BSR been of use to you in dealing with any of your problems?

Yes

No

25. Could you please give me an example? _____

Demographic Data

1. Sex

- A. Male
 B. Female

2. Age

- A. 20 and under
 B. 21 to 25
 C. 26 to 35
 D. 36 to 45
 E. 46 and over

3. Marital status

- A. Single
 B. Separated
 C. Divorced
 D. Widow(er)ed
 E. Married

4. Living condition

- A. Alone
 B. Head of household with children
 C. With parent(s)
 D. With parent(s) and children
 E. With spouse or lover and children
 F. With spouse or lover
 G. Other

5. Occupation

- A. Clerical
- B. Professional
- C. Unemployed
- D. Student
- E. Business
- F. Public assistance recipient
- G. Household employee

6. Highest grade completed

- A. Up to 8th grade
- B. 9th grade through 12th grade
- C. High School graduate - some college
- D. College graduate
- E. Higher than college

7. Income

- A. \$4,999 and below
- B. \$5,000 - \$9,999
- C. \$10,000 - \$19,999
- D. \$20,000 - \$29,999
- E. \$30,000 and above

8. Place of residence

- A. Westchester County
- B. New York City (Bronx, Brooklyn, Queens, Manhattan, Staten Island)
- C. Long Island (Nassau and Suffolk Counties)

- D. New Jersey
- E. Connecticut
- F. Other

REQUEST FOR VOLUNTEERS

Willing to respond survey

Name _____

Address _____

Phone Number _____

Length of Time in BSR _____

Approximate number of sessions you have attended _____

Best time to call you? Day _____ Time _____

Best time for interview? Day _____ Time _____

***** THANK YOU VERY MUCH *****

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