

*BAM! Boys Advocacy and Mentoring: A Leader's Guide to Facilitating Strengths-Based Groups for Boys, Helping Boys Make Better Contact by Making Better Contact with Them* by Peter Mortola, Howard Hiton, and Stephen Grant (2008, Taylor & Francis Group, LLC). *Reviewed by Marsha L. Borden, M.S., NCSP*

Anyone who has ever worked with the middle school-aged population understands the significance of a book like *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* (by Jeff Kinney). I own the sequel, *Diary of a Wimpy Kid: Rodrick Rules*, and I'm amazed at how well the author has targeted the thoughts and behaviors of preadolescent boys. The book offers serious commentary about how boys treat boys and what it takes to fit in at school, served up with cartoon illustrations and a lightness of touch that appeals to kids and grown-ups alike.

While not exactly written in the humor genre, *BAM! Boys Advocacy and Mentoring* offers the reader a crash course in boys' development, including comprehensive descriptions of the social and biological influences on boy's behavior. The guidebook includes twelve weeks-worth of activities to use in counseling groups for boys at around a fifth grade level. Week-by-week narratives of the authors' own BAM group experiences provide the reader with real-life commentary about what works and what doesn't work.

On the positive side, each group session description is nicely organized and includes clearly stated objectives. Most sessions include a five-minute opening activity and a closing or debriefing activity, in addition to the main activity. The authors appropriately emphasize that activities may need to be modified with respect to the tone of a group or

the physical environment in which the group takes place. The first few chapters in the book are very good and give the reader a solid, up-to-date frame of reference for the biological and social influences that shape boys behavior. The Appendix contains excellent forms, including Pre- and Post-Evaluation forms for both group participants and group leaders.

On the negative side, the authors support the use of non-traditional counseling techniques, such as holding and physical contact, which may be uncomfortable for some group leaders in some settings. One activity in particular involves blindfolding boys and leading them into a “Monster’s Room,” invoking scary things like dead animals and skulls. The group sessions are an hour long – too long to fit into most elementary and/or middle school schedules. And many of the activities would work best with fairly large groups of boys (up to nine) and with many group leaders (up to three), something that may not be possible in these staff-challenged times. Finally, the authors might have paid a bit more homage to those who first began talking about boys’ unique developmental needs, including Michael Gurian and William Pollack.

Ultimately, *BAM! Boys Advocacy and Mentoring* strives to celebrate the joys of boys. It gives the school-based practitioner readily accessible, easy to duplicate activities for use with boys, while also describing why and how boys are different. Despite its weaknesses, this is a thorough, practical guidebook that will help professionals not only understand boys more fully, but provide them with the tools they need to support boys in our schools. Helping our “wimpy” kids face the challenge of growing up is in everybody’s best interest.

Marsha L. Borden, MS, NCSP is a school psychologist in Connecticut. She currently works as a Field Interviewer for the Connecticut Longitudinal Study (Yale University School of Medicine, Pediatrics Department).