

**MAKE ME BETTER: AN EVALUATION OF THE IMPACT OF THE SILVERBACK  
SOCIETY**

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## Abstract

The purpose of this evaluation report was to investigate the impact of the Silverback Society on the mentees participating in the program. The current report asked four questions, what impact does participating in the program have on mentee's perception of their academic achievement, their perceptions of the future expectations, their perception of being African American, and their perception of being a man. Both quantitative and qualitative evaluation methods were used to assess the questions. Quantitative methods did not show a marked change across the evaluation measures from time one to time two; however, quantitative data indicate that the participants perceptions of academic achievement shifted, and that their necessity to ascend to leadership roles in their homes and communities was illuminated and internalized. The data also show the participants understood the plight of African American men and boys but also articulated that it was their opportunity to shift the image of this demographic to a more positive light. Lastly, the data highlight the participants gleaned a greater understanding of what it means to be a man in current society and how what they do now will set them up for success or failure.

## **EVALUATION PURPOSE**

The Silverback Society is an organization that needs men to invest their time, and others to invest resources to accomplish the work we believe that it is important; thus I felt that we should have our work evaluated. What we do feels good, for both the volunteers and the boys with whom we spend time. However, but in order to be true to the families and sometimes workplaces that make allowances for men to be able to do this work, (as well to those foundations, companies, charitable organizations and individuals who are financing the infrastructure), we have to be accountable. Thus, we believe we have to be able to produce credible evidence about the impact we are having on our boys and the schools that are trying to educate them.

*-Lloyd Dennis, Executive Director, Silverback Society*

The findings of this evaluation report will be used in several ways. First, the results of the report will inform the organization of its impact on the boys participating in the program and its influence on the school climate in which the program resides. Second, the report will serve as a critique of the organization, appraising it to aspects that are working well as well as areas of growth both short-term and long-term. Third, the report will function as an opportunity for the organization to highlight to funders and schools, both current and future, the nature and impact of the organization. Last, the report will aid in showing other cities around the country how valuable and effective a program like the Silverback Society can be.

## EVALUATION QUESTIONS

The questions for the evaluation of the Silverback Society came after several in-depth conversations with the Executive Director, Lloyd Dennis.

1. How does the Silverback Society affect the overall development of adolescent males in New Orleans? (Main Question)
  - A. What role does the Silverback Society play in developing/changing adolescent males' perception of academic achievement?
  - B. In what capacity does the Silverback Society impact how adolescent males view their future life options?
  - C. What type of impact does the Silverback Society have on how adolescent males view themselves as men?
  - D. How does participating in the Silverback Society affect how participants perceive themselves as African American males in America?

## **PROJECT BACKGROUND**

Adolescent African American males face many struggles in regard to their development. Academically they lag behind their peers in areas of achievement, graduation rates, and advanced placement courses taken and passed (Noguera, 2003; Schott Foundation, 2013). They are also more likely to be suspended or expelled for school offenses (Noguera, 2003). Numerous reports link the aforementioned factors to the overwhelming numbers of incarcerated African American males, and higher unemployment rates (Amauro, 2013, Orleans Parish Place Matters, 2014). To put this in context, among black men from New Orleans, one in fourteen is behind bars; one in seven is either in prison, on parole or on probation. This is coupled with an unemployment rate of approximately 52% for African American males (Orleans Parish, Place Matters, 2014). Yet, these statistics do not come without explanation, with many being deficit-based. Most explanations for these failures do not explain the full complexities of developing as African American and male in urban contexts, which may include growing up under the auspices of low societal expectations, poverty, racism and discrimination, and exposure to community violence. For example, almost one-third of this demographic nationally have direct exposure to violence (Brady, Gorman-Smith, Henry, & Tolan, 2008). This may include physical beating, stabbing, or gunshot, which may occur in variety of contexts (e.g., school, neighborhood). African American youth are three times more likely to be victims of reported child abuse or neglect, three times more likely to be victims of robbery, and five times more likely to be victims of homicide (Brady et al., 2008). In fact, nationwide, homicide is the leading cause of death among African American youth ages 15 to 24 (National Center for Victims of Crime, 2013), and in New Orleans, it is the leading cause of death of adolescents 10 to 24 (Orleans Parish Place

Matters, 2014). Consequences to this exposure may lead to a host of mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, posttraumatic stress syndrome, and suicide (Ozner & Weinstein, 2004).

As a means of coping with the stressors they face, African American males may adopt hypermasculine attitudes and behaviors to feign susceptibility and vulnerability (Corprew & Cunningham, 2012; Cunningham, Swanson, Hayes, 2013). Corprew and colleagues (2014) define hypermasculinity as having anti-feminine attitudes, being devoid of emotion, and exhibiting dominance and aggression. Depending on the context, these attitudes and behaviors may be protective or maladaptive. However, adoption of these attitudes in both the school or community context can have deleterious outcomes, such as lowered achievement, anger, and aggression. Yet with the right supports these consequences can be tempered.

One of the most important figures in an African American male's development is a mentor. They play a crucial role, having the ability to alleviate cycles of frustration and failure experienced in and outside of the school context (Corprew, 2014). In essence, African American males need caring and supportive individuals to support their positive development (Corprew & Cunningham, 2012). "*Mentoring: A promising strategy for youth development*," a report by the research center, *Child Trends*, posits adults other than parents can provide necessary emotional support, advice, and guidance while also helping to build self-esteem and self-control (Child Trends, 2009). The report also suggests, overall, young people who participate in mentoring relationships experience positive academic benefits, including better attendance and better attitudes toward school (Child Trends, 2009). Research suggests school based mentoring programs are having an impact on the various developmental outcomes for adolescent African American males, such as lowered alcohol and drug use, gang membership, and peer violence as

well as increased self-concept, attitudes toward school, and achievement (Dapper & Iserhang, 2006).

## **What is the silverback society?** (Taken from Silverback Website)

**Purpose:** The purpose is to supply the next generation of women and children with men who will have the “capacity” to contribute to better living for those who depend on them.

**Mission:** To gather men and resources from the community to insure that every boy in middle school has an opportunity to meet his future, face to face, before he is challenged with the opportunity of high school and further learning. In doing so, we believe that the boys we inspire and support in their “coming up” will be more likely to have satisfying and fulfilling lives. They will not have to resort to violence to feel respected by their peers or their women and children. We also assert that their sons will inherit male capacity and responsibility as normal male behavior and their daughters, not starved for a man’s love, will expect the same and measure and handle men accordingly.

### **Silverback Society Methodology:**

By parading successful men who are proud fathers, we offer our boys the opportunity to sense how we feel about ourselves and what we can do for those who rely on us for support. Also by bringing to them resources to help enhance their school experience we model the very behavior we want to inspire in them, men making life better for children.

**Key roles** – the Silverback Society approach is planned, based on the boys emotional needs and is repeatable and trainable.

- **Mentors** - two to four silverback mentors (who are men who have achieved responsible respected manhood) are needed for each troupe of 15- 30 boys (all the eighth grade boys at a school). We will train mentors in 100% positive classroom management techniques.



- ***Role models*** - role model speakers rotate through the troupes to share their stories and detail a variety of pathways used by men who have often had to climb from difficult situations to achieve their success.
- ***Angels*** - and yes, we need a few “angels,” folk who will help us with resources.

### ***Silverback society structure***

The structure of the program entails a detailed curriculum followed by each mentoring team. Each week for the first six weeks of the program, the mentors use the curriculum as a guide to train the mentees on specific aspects of manhood. These six weeks entail discussions on preparing for respected manhood, keys to success, roadblocks to success, optimal careers for African American males, and the power of controlling yourself. After the initial six weeks of the program, each successive meeting with the mentees begins with a small lecture by a role model detailing his struggles and resilience. These stories are told to allow the boys to understand that there are men who have been in their shoes but found ways to overcome the obstacles they faced. After the stories, the boys are then allowed to fellowship with the mentors and each other on the “Yard.” Nearing the end of the calendar year, the boys are taken to Dookie Chase for an etiquette lunch and oral history of New Orleans. The goal of this field trip is to allow the boys to see another side of their culture and to be schooled in practices that can enhance their long-term success. The finale of the program is a convening of all of the mentees from across the city. At this event the boys interact with mentors and fellow mentees from different schools as well are given a keynote by an upstanding African American male in the community. In 2014, the speaker was U.S. Attorney Kenneth Polite.

## EVALUATION METHODS & LIMITATIONS

EVALUATION QUESTIONS	METHOD OF RESEARCH
<b>1.</b> What role does the Silverback Society play in developing/changing adolescent males' perception of academic achievement?	<b>1.</b> Quantitative survey- Academic Questions <b>2.</b> Qualitative Focus Groups- with students, principals, teachers
<b>2.</b> In what capacity does the Silverback Society impact how adolescent males view their future life expectations?	<b>1.</b> Quantitative survey- Future Expectations Scale <b>2.</b> Qualitative focus groups with students, principals, teachers –
<b>3.</b> What type of impact does the Silverback Society have on how adolescent males view themselves as men?	<b>1.</b> Quantitative survey- Adolescent Masculinity Index <b>2.</b> Qualitative Focus Groups- with students, principals, teachers
<b>4.</b> How does participating in the Silverback Society affect how adolescent males perceive themselves as African American males in America?	<b>1.</b> Quantitative survey- Multidimensional Inventory of Racial Identity <b>2.</b> Qualitative Focus Groups- with students, principals, teachers

## **Evaluation Procedure**

To investigate the questions posed for evaluation, a variety of assessment instruments were used. To ensure the validity and accuracy of the evaluation results, mentees participated in both a pre-test and post-test assessment. Mentees from the four evaluation sites were initially given pre-test measures assessing demographic information, future academic and general expectations, perceptions of racial identity, self-esteem, and perceptions of adolescent masculinity within their school settings. A researcher along with several mentors administered the surveys. Mentees were also asked to indicate how they perceived themselves academically as compared to their peers as well as to specify what kind of grades they earned in school. Mentees were given the same measures at the completion of the program along with mentoring survey. Additionally, six to seven boys from each of the evaluation schools participated in focus groups to enable the researcher to glean clarity to their perceptions of the impact of the program. They were asked questions corresponding to their future expectations, their views of themselves as young men, their perceptions of their race, and the overall impact of the program on them. To triangulate the information, teachers, principals, and mentors were interviewed.

### **Measures:**

The participants were asked several demographic questions, such as their age, the make-up of their household, and if their parents were separated or divorced. Participants were also queried about their perception of their scholastic performance, how many hours they studied during the week (e.g. 0 hours (1), 1-2 hours (2), 3-5 hours (3), 6-10 hours (4), 11 or more (5)), perceptions of how well they performed compared to their peers (e.g. much above average (5), above average (4) , average (3) below average (2), much below average (1)), and their self-reported G.P.A (e.g. Mostly A's (4.0), Mostly As and Bs (3.5), Mostly Bs (3.0), etc). All

measures were given at both time one and time two.

*The Future Likelihood Scale* was used to measure general future expectations (Spencer, 1989). This scale is composed of twenty-three questions that assess students' perceptions of how likely an event will happen ten years in the future. This construct is measured on a Likert scale of one, "I have not thought about it" to four "very likely." Questions include positive outcomes, such as "How likely is it that you will have a good job" and "... be a community leader" as well as negative outcomes such as "... be in trouble with the law." A score of one indicates *low expectation* and four indicates *high expectation*.

*The Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity* (Sellers et al., 1997) is a twenty-item, seven-point Likert scale (1= strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree) measuring three dimensions of Black racial identity, namely, racial centrality, and public and private regard. Racial centrality refers to the extent to which one emphasizes racial group membership as a part of his or her overall self-concept. Public regard refers to how African American people perceive people outside of the race feel about them. Private regard exemplifies how the individual feels about being Black. A sample question would be "In general my race is an important part of how I see myself." The centrality scale produced an alpha score of .83.

*The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale* (Rosenberg, 1965) is a frequently used measure of self-worth and value. The scale consists of ten items (e.g., "I feel that I have a number of good qualities") that respondent's rate on a four-point Likert scale ranging from one (strongly disagree) to four (strongly agree).

The *Adolescent Masculinity Scale* is a measure of a boy's adherence to traditional masculine role norms (e.g., "A guy should always seem as manly as other guys that he knows"). The scale consists of four subscales, Constant Effort (e.g., reflect the idea that boys must

constantly maintain a strong and confident persona in order to appear manly to others), Heterosexism (e.g., being masculine is defined in opposition to attitudes and behaviors traditionally considered feminine or “gay”), Emotional Restriction (e.g., reflecting the norm that being masculine involves hiding emotions and remaining emotionally invulnerable), and Social Teasing (e.g., expressing the norm that to be masculine boys must be able to tease and poke fun of their friends, and be able to stand up to such teasing when it is directed at them), all reporting on a five point Likert scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Example questions included, “A guy should always seem as manly as other guys that he knows,” and “It is not important for guys to listen to each other’s problems.” (Make sure to define the subscales)

At the end of the program, participants were given a mentoring scale to gauge the impact of the mentors on them. Participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement with a number of statements, which included, “While in the **Silverback Society**, I have had someone in my life that ‘I look up to about issues I have in school.’” Participants indicated their level of agreement on a five-point Likert Scale ranging from ‘strongly agree’ to ‘strongly disagree.’

## FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

### Quantitative findings:

We assessed each participant on the measures specific to the evaluation questions before the beginning of the program and after. However, because of time constraints, school day related issues, and standardized testing, all of the boys were not able to complete full packets at time two. Thus, quantitative results are based on thirty-nine participants who completed all relevant measures at both times.

### Quantitative Results (These are average scores for the group for each time measured)

Table 1. Personal Measures

	<i>Time 1</i>	<i>Time 2</i>
<i>1. Hours spent studying during the week</i>	2.74	2.12
<i>2. How well do you think you perform academically as compared to your peers?</i>	2.36	2.34
<i>3. What is your current Self-Reported G.P.A.</i>	2.92	2.92
<i>4. Self-Esteem Scale</i>	3.02	3.01
<i>5. Racial Centrality</i>	3.55	3.61

Figure 1. Personal Measures

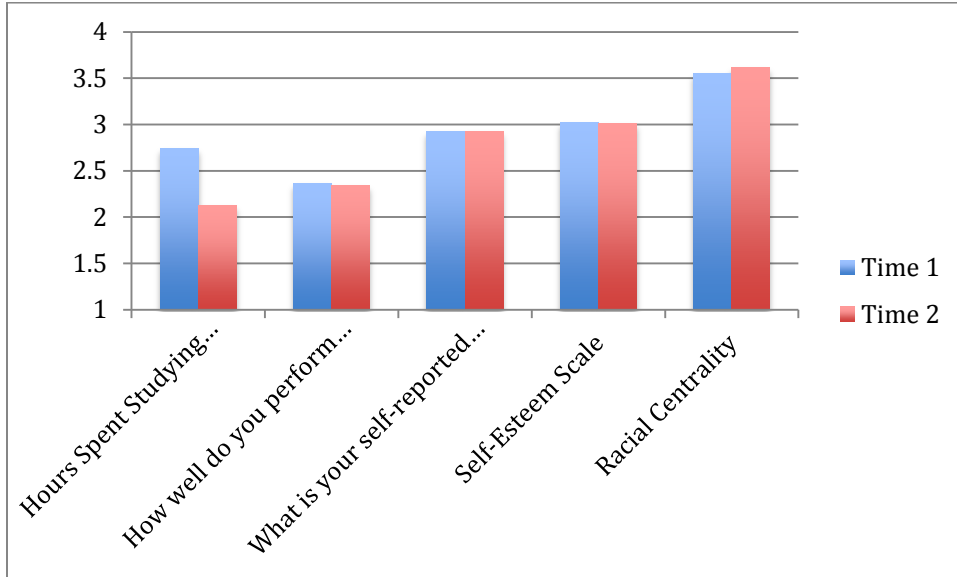


Table 2. Future Expectations Scale

	<i>Time 1</i>	<i>Time 2</i>
Career Likelihood	3.52	3.4
Academic Likelihood	3.24	3.18
Civic Likelihood	3.38	3.30
Religion and Spirituality Likelihood	3.52	3.44
Family Likelihood	3.27	3.17

Figure 2. Future Likelihood Scale

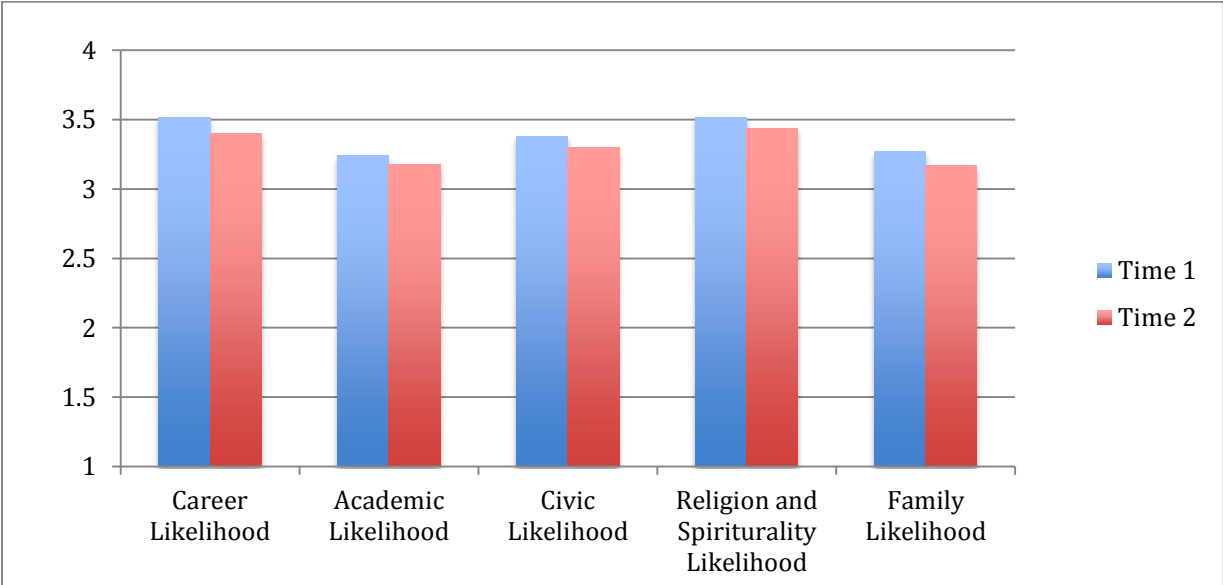
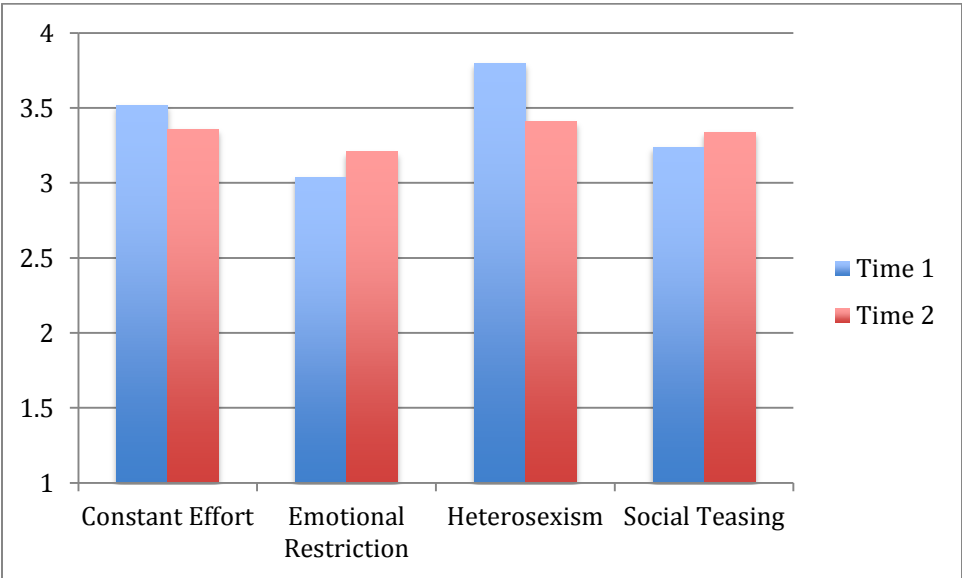


Table 3. Adolescent Masculinity Scale



Adolescent Masculinity Scale	Time 1	Time 2
Constant Effort	3.52	3.36
Emotional Restriction	3.04	3.21
Heterosexism	3.8	3.41
Social Teasing	3.24	3.34

Figure 3. Adolescent Masculinity Scale



As shown in the preceding tables and figures, the results of the measures used to assess the evaluation questions quantitatively do not show any significant differences across time 1 and 2. Participants reported that they studied an average of two to three hours per week and that they were above average academically as compared to their peers. Participants on average reported they received mostly ‘B’s in their classes. They also reported that they felt good about themselves and that being African American was central to who they were as individuals. The participants also reported moderate levels of future expectations across the subscales, with career and religious expectations being the highest. Additionally, the participants reported moderate

levels across the subscales of the *Adolescent Masculinity Index*, with heterosexism being the highest at time one, but lowering at time two. However, this change was not significantly different between the two measuring periods.

### **Qualitative Results**

Focus groups with mentees and one-on-one interviews with teachers and school leaders were conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of the mentoring program in coinciding with the evaluation's overall questions. Four focus groups with the participants were conducted, one from each of the schools evaluated. Mentees were randomly selected from three of the schools to participate. At one site; however, all of the mentees participated because of their small number. The students were asked several questions based on the overarching evaluation questions.

Participants were asked how participating in the program helped them develop or change their perception of academic achievement. The participants suggested that participating in the program helped them to think critically about their academic success. After going through the program, and dialoging with the mentors, the participants understood the positive benefits of doing well in school. One participant stated that,

I guess it showed me that since what I wanna do is more dealing with law, and like, English and all that, that I have to, like, make sure that I keep my grades up and know what I'm learnin' about and not just, like, sittin' there not payin' attention. Cause I might, uh, get a mistake on something and it could ruin my whole career and whatever I'm doin'.

This sentiment resounded with many of the participants and was evident in their behavior in and out of the classroom. Both teachers and school leaders noticed changes in the participants' academic prowess. Several school leaders detailed how the members of the program had taken over the winning of most of the academic awards at their end of year programs. For example, one leader at Arthur Ashe Charter School stated,

“I think our boys academically soared by being in the program and they took all of the awards—almost all of the awards at eighth grade graduation and then—and, I think a boy was the valedictorian then, and then the second year a boy was a valedictorian again.

The school leaders attributed the change to the mentors’ willingness to be consistent and involved the participants and the schools. As one school leader stated, “they [the mentors] reinforced the need for academic excellence just as much as we did.”

The mentees were asked how participating in the Silverback Society made them think about their futures. One of the most powerful themes that emerged was the belief that they needed to be leaders and not followers—that too many of their peers had chosen the wrong path because they lacked the leadership skills to stand alone. One mentee said, “You can be a leader and change and go your own way to make your life better instead of trying to be like everyone else.” Another stated, “It made me feel like I could be a leader. Like, when I’m with my friends at home I think about stuff we do at Silverback and I could lead them to not go into trouble and when we at school sometimes I lead people...” Yet another stated,

“It made me feel like I could help—like, encourage people more to do better because... sometimes it was, like, all about, like, me. I could do this and I could do that, but, like, if I, like, I can help others and maybe if I help others then others’ll help me, or something, I don’t know. Like—like, feel more community towards others.”

Another theme that resonated was that by participating in the program the boys developed the belief that they had to work hard to achieve their goals and fulfill their dreams in the future. This was evident, as many of the mentees discussed the first lesson of the Silverback Society, “The Rope.” This lesson details how what you do in the first quarter (twenty-five years) of your life will dictate how well you will succeed the rest of your life. (Make sure to ask Lloyd to detail this lesson). One mentee stated that,

“... [A]fter you have hard work, you can be—in a good direction to where you can spend your money wisely, you can have a nice family and all that. He always said, uh, if you work hard you can have whatever you want, can’t anybody tell you anything.”

Another mentee quipped, “They taught us to always put in that work.”

This feeling was evident amongst most of the mentees. They believed that nothing was going to be given to them, but by participating in the program and listening to the empowering messages about education and life they would have brighter futures. One mentee’s statement highlights this feeling. He states,

“They helped me because I was, like, at first—at first I wasn’t really thinking about what I was gon’ do in life. I always thought I was gon’ do rappin’, or whatever, but now they said, like, think of your future, like, start looking for colleges that you wanna get into and stuff like that and so you can, like, already have an idea of watchu wanna do in life. So, they kinda helped me to think about my future and what I—what I could be in life.”

The responses of the mentees across the board indicate that they may have had a singular outlook on their futures, rapping or playing sports. However, after participating in the program their thoughts changed. Their minds were opened to greater possibilities and opportunities for success.

One of the most important questions posed to the participants was how did participating in the program help them with their perceptions of being a man. Their answers were intriguing and thought provoking. The participants felt the mentors gave them a rode map to manhood, providing them with life lessons, detailing successes and failures they had encountered in work, love, and life. The participants internalized these lessons. One participant remarked, “They taught us to be responsible, respectful, how to be a man.” The responsibilities the participants mentioned included taking care of business in the classroom and at work, being protector and provider for their friends and families, making the right choices in life, and being respectful to women. As one participant put it, “They teach us how to be a gentleman, how to treat ourselves, how to treat others, respect teachers and respect people around us and have a good nature and change the environment around us.” Teachers and administrators echoed these remarks. Both entities described a shift in the mentees behaviors after being the program. “There was a level of

maturity about them that was not present before the program,” one administrator stated. “They began to police themselves, challenging each other to be respectful to others,” another administrator detailed.

Last, the participants were asked how did the program help them perceive themselves as young African American males in America. Several key themes emerged. The participants suggested their experiences in the program, conversing with the mentors, listening to the individual stories of guest speakers, and interacting with each other in positive manner gave them a sense of Black pride. One participant’s statement encapsulates this feeling,

“It make us—it make us feel proud to be Black young men, after we been through the Silverback Society, like, training...[I]t made us feel good, like, and make us feel like ‘man we gotta go through this’...but once you went through that [pauses] it just feel good to be a Black man.

Another participant’s statement is just as powerful,

“Like, some—it make me feel tough. It made me feel—how it made me feel as an American? It made me feel like a powerful man. It made me feel like [pause] like, I’m a king myself, like, how Martin Luther King back in.”

Another prevailing theme was the feeling that they had to work extra hard to be successful, that the odds were stacked against them, but by putting in the extra work they could overcome the obstacles in their way. One mentee stated, “It made us feel like nothing is given to us; so, if you want it, you have to put in the hard work and dedication. Another mentee remarked, “...I can be something and not just, you know, Caucasian people—nothin’ racist...they not the only people that can be successful, and Black people can do some [pauses] awesome things too.” These comments illustrate a sense of empowerment, a feeling that they can and shall overcome the adversities and atrocities they may face.

The participants also felt an overwhelming sense of responsibility for themselves, for their families, and their community. There were also numerous comments depicting how they

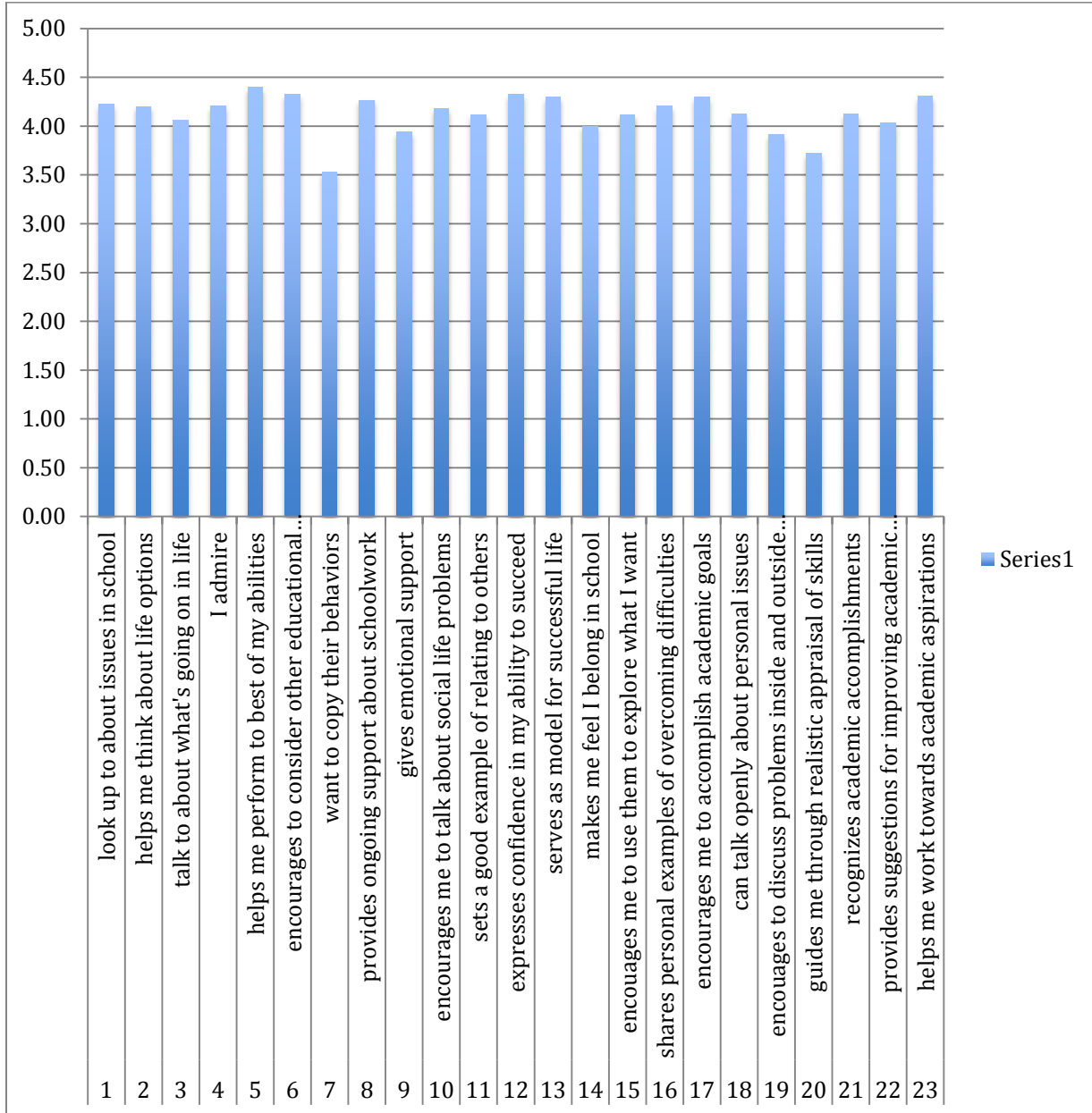
felt they needed to be role models for those coming behind them. However, one participant's comments strongly illustrate this overall feeling. He stated,

“It made me feel like we're—like, we gotta—it's on us. We gotta make the world a better place. We gotta take care of our family. We gotta keep everything in a good cycle, not a negative cycle, a positive cycle.

### **About the mentors**

The participants were asked quantitatively about their experiences with the mentors, rating their agreement with statements such as “While in the Silverback Society,” I had someone in my life who: “sets a good example about how to relate to other people”, “serves as a model for how to be successful in life”, and “expresses confidence in my ability to succeed.” Overwhelmingly, the participants reported they received positive mentorship. Nearly 60% of the participants answered ‘strongly agree’ or ‘agree’ on all of the questions. The following chart, figure 4, illustrates this.

Figure 4. Mentoring Scale



Qualitatively, the participants backed up their responses. The participants were asked why were they happy with their Silverback experience. Overpoweringly, the participants remarked they had men in their lives that gave them time, hope, and inspirational messages. They had men that prepared them for the future, and cared for them, ultimately showing them

how to be a man. The latter resounded throughout the statements of the participants; “They taught us to be men” was remarked numerous times. In essence, the participants felt they had “role models.”

## **Conclusions**

This report was commissioned to evaluate the impact of the Silverback Society mentoring program on several academic and developmental outcomes for adolescent African American males in New Orleans. The evaluation sought to answer four questions, what impact does participating in the program have on the mentee’s perception of academic achievement, their future expectations, their perceptions of being African American, and their perception of their masculinity. A mixed-method approach was used to evaluate these questions.

Quantitative data did not show marked changes in scores on the evaluating measures across times one and two. As mentioned, because of time constraints, academic scheduling, and survey fatigue, only 39 full packets were assessed for results. Future evaluation with the organization should continue to measure the impact quantitatively; however, it should ensure the barriers encountered be avoided in order to gain the best possible data.

Qualitative results highlight that participating in the program had an influence on the mentees in regards to the evaluation questions, at least in the short-term. The mentees felt that participating in the program motivated them to strive better in school. In particular, the mentors reinforced the academic standards set forth by the schools and reiterated consistently that what you do now will set the tone for the rest of your life. The participants internalized the latter statement as many of them described how they planned to shift their priorities to more productive academic endeavors in and out of the classroom. Both school leaders and teachers noticed this shift in thinking, as Silverback mentees received end of the year academic honors at the schools being evaluated. These results indicate that having the mentors in the school on



weekly basis, assisting school leaders and teachers in the academic pursuits of the mentees aided creating a philosophy, culture, and environment of academic success for the mentees.

The mentees also described how their interactions with the mentors allowed them to think critically about their futures, with many of the participants suggesting that being in the program was a catalyst for a transformative shift in what they wanted to be in life. Similar to many adolescent African American males their life goals mirrored what they were privy to see, athlete or hip-hop star. Yet, by being exposed to men with diverse backgrounds and employment opportunities, the mentees broadened their scope. They wanted to be doctors, lawyers, and writers: to be leaders in their communities. This aspect is critical as adolescent boys begin to think critically about who they are and who and what they want to be. There is a need for them to see models of success, men getting up and going to work everyday. The mentors provided this aspect, detailing their failures and successes, ultimately showing the mentees they had more than the atypical options for African American men. In essence, they showed them they could be whatever they wanted to be.

The participants also detailed how partaking in the program made them think about being African American. The participants understood the struggles facing many African American males, which include poverty, poor education, unemployment, and community violence. All of these outcomes are prevalent in New Orleans. However, the mentees described a sense of pride and responsibility they felt, that the fate of the race was on them. They perceived they needed to be beacons of hope, believing they needed to take leadership roles as they continued to develop so that those traversing behind them might have an easier road. At heart, they wanted to model the behavior exhibited by the mentors. This facet should not be taken lightly as it chronicles the influence the program is having on adolescent males as they develop, motivating them to think analytically about not only themselves but also those around them in hopes of making

revolutionary change.

Lastly, the participants discussed how being in the program aided them in thinking about how to be a man. This is the crux of the Silverback Society, preparing young boys to take their rightful place as leaders of their families and communities. The mentees detailed how their interactions with the mentors showed them how to be men, in particular, how to treat women, to be responsible fathers, and to be community leaders and stalwarts. They perceived they were given a legacy to uphold. Many of the boys noted that they did not have positive male figures in their lives. Some of the participants discussed that their fathers were absent or in jail, and that the Silverback mentors were father like figures. As noted, in the absence of familial leadership, mentors have an opportunity and charge to fill the empty spaces for these young males. It would seem that the mentors provided the necessary stop gap and offered varied models of masculinity that allowed the mentees the ability to shape who they wanted to be as man in a safe environment.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The organization has shown through its current efforts that it is making a difference on the lives of the mentees; however, the purpose of this evaluation is not only to assess the impact of the program, but also to provide recommendations for the organization to grow. As the results of the quantitative data do not show significant change across time points, I recommend the organization undertake a more rigorous longitudinal study of the effects of the program, such as following a cohort of mentees through high school and beyond, querying them at specific time points to investigate how the teachings imparted during the program resonate with them long-term and how the lessons have been enacted in their lives. This will highlight to important entities such as funders that the program has lasting effects.

Speaking of lasting effects, currently, the participants are eighth graders and receive mentoring at maximum an hour a week for 20 weeks. Once they leave their respective middle schools, they attend high schools that do not have a Silverback program. This poses a concern, as long-term effects may not materialize without consistent mentorship and the reminder of the Seven Silverback ways. High school, as well as middle school can be an arduous navigation for African American males. Without proper role models, outside influences such as negative peers and friends, and the lack of father figures, males may choose detrimental life paths. Thus, I recommend the organization to expand into high schools, creating chapters of Silverback mentees. However, the organization and structure of the program should coincide with the development of the participants, resonating with their shifting life goals, which may include college planning and attendance, various types of relationships, career interest, employment opportunities, and community service. In shifting the structure for high-school aged participants, the organization can partner with other entities within New Orleans to help provide the necessary leadership and mentorship the participants need.

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