

**PROSPECTUS:  
Power and Identity: Group Therapy for Female Delinquents**

Submitted to:

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### **Statement of the Problem**

The needs of teenage girls with psychosocial problems are not met by prevalent treatment models. Dr. Kathleen Bailey, a probation officer for 9 years in the Kent County Juvenile Court and now Professor of Criminal Justice at Grand Valley University, and Dr. Suzanne Wolfe, a psychologist who has specialized in female development for the past 12 years, seek to remedy this by offering an intensive group therapy program that addresses a common set of core issues confronting teenage girls.

The growth in numbers of female juvenile offenders has not been matched by changes in treatment approaches that serve this population. The prevalent theories of delinquency and treatment models have tended to be male-oriented: they have aimed to explain the behavior and identify the treatment-of-choice for male juvenile offenders, and have been researched on samples of male subjects (Daley & Chesney-Lind, 1988). It cannot be assumed that these theories and treatment models also apply to female juvenile delinquents (Smith & Paternoster, 1987). In fact, they may damage the development, needs, and concerns of girls.

It is now common knowledge that boys and girls face different developmental tasks during their adolescence (Gilligan, 1982; Jordan, Kaplan, Miller, Stiver, & Surrey, 1991; Miller, 1976). These differences are said to reflect gender-related differences in early socialization, most especially in the family of origin (Chodorow, 1989; Eichenbaum & Orbach, 1983). Briefly stated, little girls learn to focus their identities on their ability to be connected with others, and little boys are socialized to develop a more autonomous sense of self (Gilligan, 1982; Jordan et al., 1991). By adolescence, these differences will manifest in vastly different ways of being.

Our clinical experience has revealed a common set of core issues confronting teenage girls. These issues include the development of a boundaried sense of self, the right to pursue one's unique identity differentiated from others, and a positive sense of personal power and efficacy. We believe that when these developmental tasks are thwarted, teenage girls become depressed and may act out with dysfunctional behaviors. That is, depression and delinquency represent "solutions" to living with a poorly-developed sense of identity and positive personal power. Therefore, treatment that enhances the development of true self and positive power will ameliorate these dysfunctional behaviors.

We define "positive power" as the ability to direct one's life on a safe, meaningful, and fulfilling course, and to be one's true, best self in the context of daily life. We view positive power as both a basic need and a human right. When people lack positive power they may settle for a surrogate, or false sense of power, which may be self-destructive and/or hurtful to others. Self-destructive behavior is behavior that hinders or harms oneself. This may include negative perceptions of self, behavior that places one at risk for harm, involvement in relationships with others who demean or mistreat, gang involvement, violating the law, and sexual promiscuity. It may also include more subtle but equally destructive behaviors such as giving up on one's own talents, abilities, and dreams.

### **Treatment Approach**

Attachment theory (Bowlby, 1973) and research has amply proved that one's expectations of self, others, and the world are learned in the earliest relationships and form a set of "internal working models" that profoundly affect future experience. Internal working models serve as