Using "Challenges" To Increase Student Behavioral Generalization Via Group Social Skills Treatment

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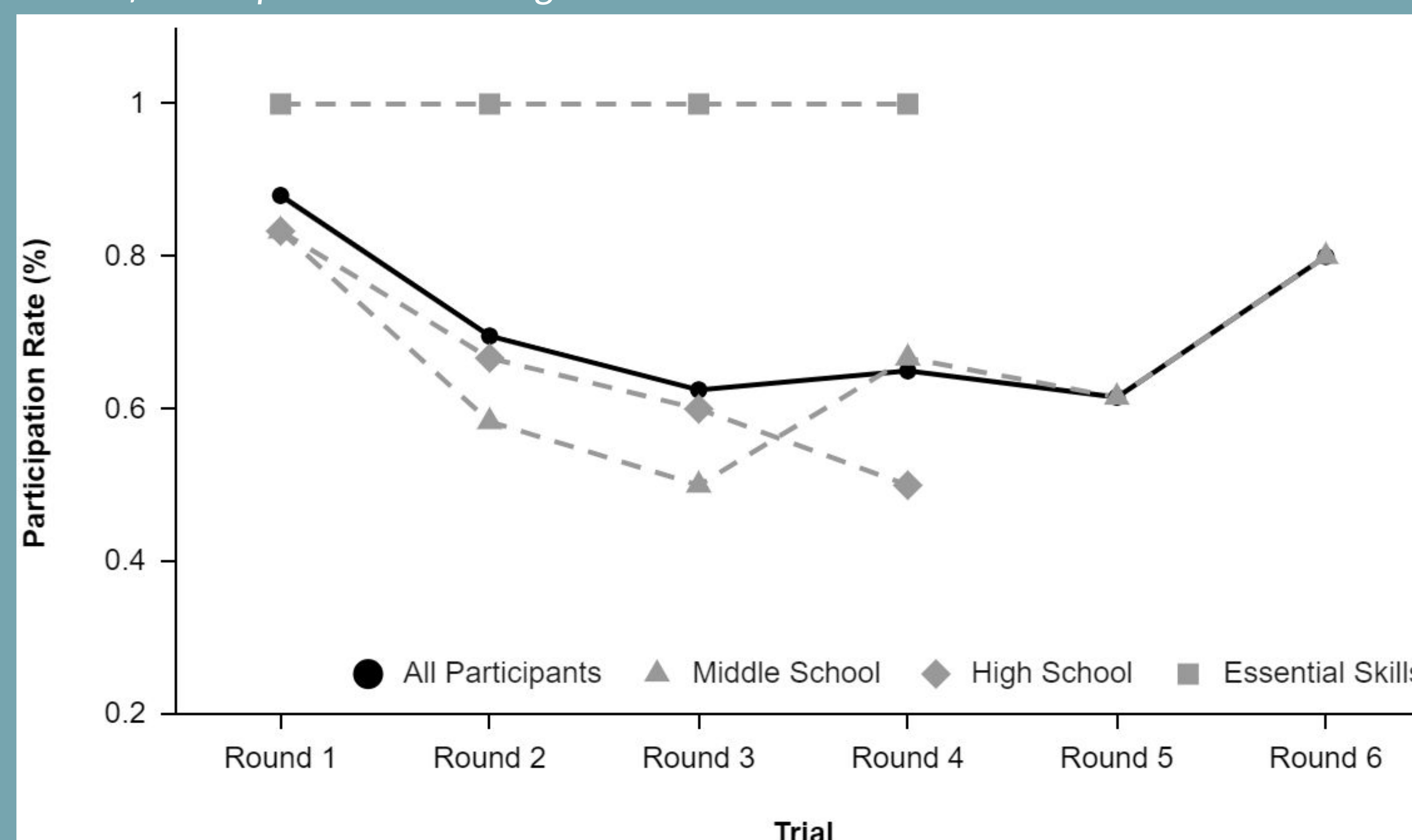Bruce M. Gale, Shayna R. Greenberg, Roselyn Poommai, Crystal Horowitz, & Chase Butler

INTRO

- Generating youth motivation to engage in behavioral change and generalize gains is a common challenge for clinicians (Bonete et al., 2022; Osawa et al., 2018).
- Identifying strategies, such as developing self-efficacy (Bandura et al., 2003; Goolsby et al., 2019), that leverage a structured group therapy environment may encourage intrinsic motivation to engage, improve individual's ability to practice building independence in key developmental skills (e.g., self-monitoring), and enhance adherence via naturalistic social reinforcement (Gengoux et al., 2021).
- The present study explores the acceptability and impact of setting a "challenge" for youth to practice adaptive and social-emotional behaviors beyond clinical group participation.
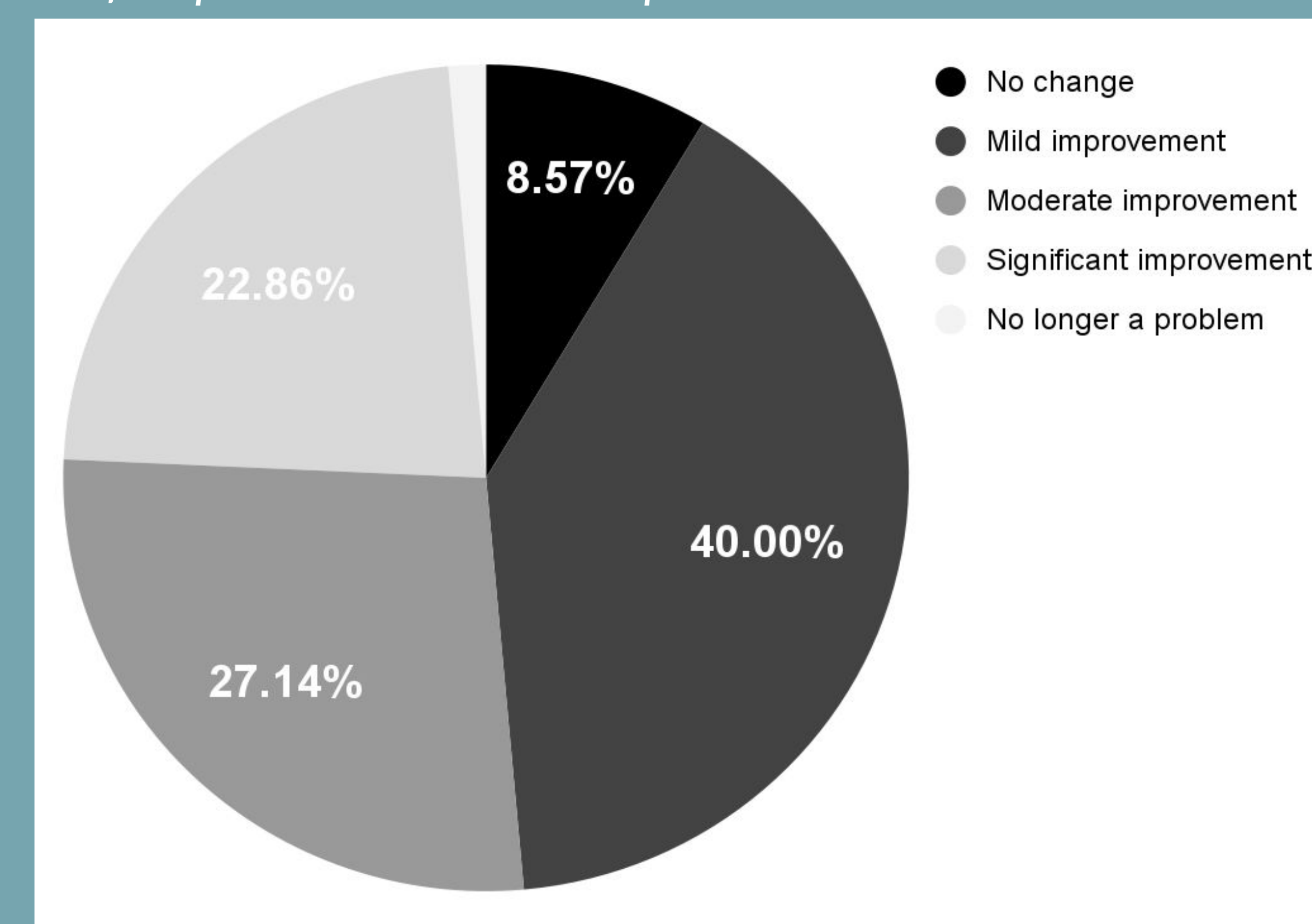
METHODS

- The sample consisted of 27 youth from 11 to 18 years (Mage = 14.33, SD = 1.85, 85.19% male).
- Groups were stratified by chronological age and developmental level, yielding 14 participants in the middle school program, six participants in the high school program, and seven participants in a program designed for students with lower cognitive abilities.
- Participants were presented with a "challenge" to select a difficult behavior to improve throughout two weeks until the next session. After two weeks, students accepting the "challenge" self-reported improvement levels and were rewarded raffle tickets upon completing the "challenge." Four to six rounds of "challenges" were offered and feedback was collected upon concluding the final round.
- Exploratory analyses were conducted to observe trends in engagement, as well as assess the feasibility, acceptability, and clinical impact of participation in an elective challenge.

Providing the opportunity to accept and accomplish a **challenge to improve socioemotional functioning** may **encourage youth engagement** and **improve clinical outcomes.**
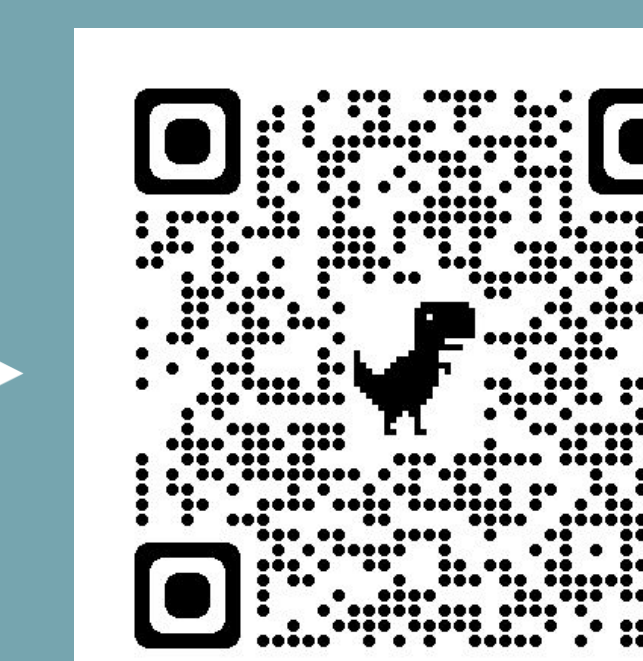

Rate of Participation in Challenges Across Trials

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RESULTS

- 88% of participants initially elected to partake in a challenge intended to promote improved functioning. Participation did not significantly differ by the final challenge for each group, $\chi2(1, n = 13)$, $p = .625$. On average, participants accepted 73.15% of all opportunities to participate in a challenge.
- Students reported intrinsic motivation as the most common reason to participate in a challenge (58.82% of excerpts $n = 10$), followed by extrinsic motivation (35.29%, $n = 6$) and social motivators (11.76%, $n = 2$).
- Conversely, disinterest (71.43%, $n = 5$) was reported as the most common reason that student declined participation in a behavioral challenge, followed by extrinsic motivators (14.29%, $n = 1$), social concerns (14.29%, $n = 1$) and fear of failure (14.29%, $n = 1$).
- In total, 25 students elected to participate in 70 challenges over the course of the intervention. Among students that partook in the challenge, 74.29% independently recalled a behavior selected to change and 71.43% recalled the challenge accurately.
- Additionally, 87.14% of participants reported that they had met the selected challenge and 91.43% reporting some improvement on the target behavior.

Self-Reported Behavioral Improvement

- No change — 8.57%
- Mild improvement — 40.00%
- Moderate improvement — 27.14%
- Significant improvement — 22.86%
- No longer a problem

DISCUSSION

- Offering a challenge to youth is one low-resource strategy for improving clinical outcomes within group settings.
- Findings highlight that providing youth with the opportunity to self-select and independently accomplish a challenge aligned with improving adaptive and socio-emotional behaviors may leverage intrinsic motivation to encourage self-reported behavior change.
- Future research may consider fading extrinsic motivators while prioritizing natural rewards (e.g., social accolades) to promote generalization as well as opportunities for reflection upon success to consolidate learning and support the transition to intrinsic motivation.