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PREVIEW

ADVENTURE BASED COUNSELING
AS A THERAPEUTIC INTERVENTION
WITH COURT INVOLVED ADOLESCENTS

A DOCTORAL PROJECT
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY

BY

RICHARD S. MAIZELL

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
OF

DOCTOR OF PSYCHOLOGY

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PREVIEW

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ABSTRACT OF THE DOCTORAL PROJECT

Adventure Based Counseling
as a Therapeutic Intervention
With Court Involved Adolescents

by RICHARD S. MAIZELL

Doctoral Project Advisor: John Stokes, Ph.D.

This study explored the application of Adventure Based Counseling (ABC) (Shoel, Radcliffe & Prouty, 1988) as a model to enhance court adjudicated adolescents' self-concept and self-esteem, using outcome measures of school grades, disciplinary referral rate, attendance, self-concept and self-esteem inventories, participant self-report, and group progress notes. Thirty-one court adjudicated adolescents (23 males and 8 females) were selected based upon current probation status, school attended, and age. Three groups were created, including two intervention groups (G1, and G2) and one nonintervention group (NG). Quantitative assessment of results included the Battle Culture Free Self-Esteem Inventory (Battle, 1982), the Tennessee Self-Concept Scale (Flitts, 1965), analysis of grade point averages, disciplinary referral rates, and daily attendance. Qualitative assessment included student self-report through Experiential Rating Sheets (ERS), verbal

self-report, and group and individual progress notes. The major findings of this study were that participants in ABC significantly improved Physical, Moral, and Social Self-Concept, as well as Self-Satisfaction, and Total Self-Concept, as measured by the TSCS, when compared with a nonintervention group. Qualitative measures indicated a concordance with standardized measures. For G1, One-year follow-up on school-related measures indicated significant improvement in grades, and a significant reduction in disciplinary referrals. Additionally, significant improvement was also noted for grades and disciplinary referrals between post and follow-up measures. One-year follow-up on self-concept measures indicated significant improvement in Family, Social and Total Self-Concept, as well as Self-Identity and Self-Satisfaction, as measured by the TSCS. Additionally, significant improvement was also noted for Social Self-Concept and Self-Identity between post and follow-up measures. Significant improvement in Total Self-Esteem was also noted, as measured by the SEI. Qualitative measures for G1 indicated a concordance with standardized measures.

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There is quiet satisfaction in bringing closure to five years of learning, application and constant fatigue. It is a time to take stock, and recognize those who made the journey not just bearable, but even exhilarating at times.

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The staff of Sussex County Vocational Technical School deserves a note of thanks for their active commitment to Project Quest.

Without Jim Schoel, Paul Radcliffe, Richard Prouty, and Project Adventure, there would be no Adventure Based Counseling. For the personal and professional renewal that was gained through ongoing dialogue with these gifted and dedicated clinicians and their organization, I am deeply grateful.

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To my father, Jack, and my mother, Mae. The value you placed on education and the self-respect you engendered have played a principal role in my achievements. For the love you gave, the opportunities

you provided, and the lessons you conveyed of the value of service to others, I am indebted always.

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To my son, Benjamin, who in a world so fraught with difficulty, is a beacon of hope for the future. It is hoped that this work will offer a small contribution to making his way a little easier.

And finally, to the participants in Project Quest, whose often tragic histories have brought them to a time of crisis in their lives. I offer thanks for their willingness to share, and a promise that their contribution to this study will help other troubled adolescents toward a brighter future.

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Adventure Based Counseling
As A Therapeutic Intervention
With Court Involved Adolescents

Background of the problem

Therapists of varied orientations have found that engaging troubled adolescents in therapy can be an unsettling and counterproductive experience (Coleman, 1980; Offer, Marohn & Ostrov, 1979). Fritz Redl (1967) aptly summarizes the frustration that therapists must contend with in dealing with a delinquent population:

The prognosis for treatment of delinquents has been a hesitant one to begin with, and the odds against which the psychiatrist works have been expounded at great length and are so well known that we shall not endeavor to list them again. (p. 232)

Furthermore, there seems little unanimity as to the preferred structure of the treatment process. Psychoanalytic psychotherapists such as Blos (1979) view adolescence as an opportune period for psychodynamic intervention, while clinicians such as Glasser (1975), Haley (1976) and Nicholl (1988) argue for more of a focus in the here and now, a more active, or reality-based, problem solving approach.

Some therapists advocate a therapeutic strategy that involves the individual and the larger family

system (Bergman, 1985; Haley, 1975), while others opt for the structure of individual therapy (Blos, 1979), or a group process combined with individual counseling (Redl, 1966).

The issue has been raised as to whether treatment need occur at all. For example, Anthony (1969) indicates that adolescents perhaps should not be subject to therapeutic intervention, depicting their maladjustment as a transitory phase that they will outgrow. On the other end of the continuum, Masterson (1967) advocates intensive treatment of all adolescent symptomatology.

While not proposing a panacea for all delinquency, there exists in the Adventure Based Counseling model (ABC) (Schoel, Prouty & Radcliffe, 1988) an approach to treatment which seeks to address certain key deficits in the delinquent adolescent's developmental process, while recognizing, and working with, the reality of his/her current status and circumstances.

The ABC approach seeks to integrate the best that different therapeutic modalities have to offer the delinquent adolescent, across behavioral, cognitive and affective domains, while combining group and individual

work, and family and community involvement in the treatment process.

This section will offer an overall summary of the typical adolescent experience across biological, affective and cognitive domains in order to provide the reader with a conceptual framework from which to view the developmental process gone awry.

Following this review, a discussion of the delinquent adolescent will be presented focusing on where the normal developmental process can break down leading to behaviors outside the boundaries of social and cultural acceptability.

The key elements contributing to successful intervention with delinquent adolescents will be identified, and ABC will be fully explored as a group therapeutic model for addressing these key elements within a group therapy setting.

An Overview of the Adolescent Experience

As we know from empirical observation, the period known as adolescence is a time of dramatic biological, cognitive and affective change; a time of identity consolidation; of striving for independence from family with concomitant integration into the social and

heterosexual sphere of peer relationships that may become meaningful and long lasting.

Many adolescents progress through this period, successfully managing the stressors and moving into productive adulthood. The notion that adolescence is a time of "storm and stress", more so than incidence of disturbance in any other developmental period, is not supported by some authors (Coleman, 1980; Offer, 1969).

The salient message is that not all adolescents struggle through a time of discord and dismay. As Coleman (1980) concludes:

In general, the great majority of adolescents cope well with problems of adjustment inherent in the transitional period between puberty and adulthood. In saying this one would not in any way wish to underestimate the degree of distress experienced by some young people....Once it is acknowledged that the majority of adolescents cope reasonably well, then attention can be turned to the urgent task of learning more about the minority who are vulnerable and who are likely to find the pressures in the adolescent process too great. (p. 174)

However, it is important to note that the period of adolescence is unique and fraught with life experiences that are specific to the period.

Biological Changes in Adolescence

The emotional life of the adolescent is guided as much by the onset of biological change as it is by

previous developmental experience. As Lidz (1976) remarks, "First, children find themselves growing away from their childhoods as the prepubertal spurt of growth places an increasing distance between their eyes and their feet, and size alone brings them closer to the adult world (p. 308)".

Secondary sex characteristics begin to emerge, and erotic impulses increasingly demand exploration. Writers such as Blitsten (1971) stress the importance of these "biological strivings" (p. 101) as a centerpiece of the adolescent experience, wherein the anxiety around the taboos of sex, as transmitted by society, can provoke great conflict in the developing child.

Coleman (1980) also speaks to the issue of how rapid change in physiology impacts on the psychology of the adolescent. Rapid growth spurts tend to cause clumsiness, at a time when self-consciousness argues against being identified as having two left feet. In males, the voice breaks at the most inopportune moments. Other physiological conditions such as nocturnal emissions and menstruation engender emotions ranging from anxiety to panic.

Generally, the adolescent becomes exquisitely aware of his/her body in a self critical and comparative manner. The global impact on one's sense of identity can be seen as rooted significantly in the physiology of the period. As Blitsten (1971) remarks, "Adolescence is the period of extreme self consciousness, a state about as comfortable as schizophrenic panic and not unlike it" (p. 115).

The elements of the ABC model that seek to support the strengthening of physical self-concept will be addressed as part of the overall description of the program.

Affective Changes in Adolescence

Perhaps the most critical issue of adolescence in the affective domain is the question, "Who am I?"; that is, the development of self-concept and self-esteem. To be sure, there is a strong cognitive component to this question, and this will be addressed at a later juncture. As the adolescent becomes preoccupied with emancipation from the family, a separation of identity occurs, reminiscent of the separation/individuation process that the adolescent moved through at an earlier time.

What is in infancy a "hatching from the symbiotic membrane to become an individuated toddler" (Mahler, 1963) becomes in adolescence the shedding of family dependencies, the loosening of infantile object ties in order to become a member of society at large, or simply, of the adult world. (Blos, 1979, p. 142)

Dynamically, this can be described as the letting go of the internalized mother, with a concomitant press to replace this representation with love objects outside the family.

Regressive adolescent behavior is also attributed to the process of giving up internalized infantile representations (Blanck and Blanck, 1974). As Coleman indicates:

The French have a phrase: 'reculer pour mieux sauter', which roughly means: to retreat first in order to leap further, which seems to describe succinctly the psychoanalysts' view of the importance of regression. (p. 4)

The process of separation, contains for all of us the seeds of ambivalence. It is the feeling one experiences when leaving a loved one for even a short time. Ambivalent feelings are quite powerful in the adolescent, as the emotional leave taking is quite profound and hopefully permanent.

The manifestation of ambivalence in the adolescent is often played out as oppositional and nonconforming behavior, particularly directed toward parents or

parental representations. Blatt and Offer (1971) provide insight into this process, deeming acting out against authority as a way of resolving the need for emancipation versus the infantile dependent yearnings that are still at work.

And finally, the issue of separation and loss is reflected in the adolescent experience. There is an actual grieving process that occurs within the adolescent as past ties with the family are inexorably altered, and an inner hollowness manifests until new attachments outside the family are consummated.

Not only is the death of relationships mourned, but also the loss of innocence. As Bloch explains, the adolescent also mourns "the death of his infantile fantasies and expectancies" (p. 418). Interestingly, Bloch sees this as a healthy process, wherein the adolescent is impelled to redefine expectations and seek fulfillment of them in opportunities offered by adult society.

Of particular value, in contributing to an understanding of the developmental process of adolescence, is the work of Erik Erikson (1963). Implicit in healthy psychic development is the successful passage through preceding stages including

the development of trust, autonomy and initiative. Adolescence is associated with a particular stage: the establishment of autonomous identity.

Successful mastery of this stage demands the integration of the identifications of the past with new sexual strivings, a different social milieu, and increasing degrees of cognitive and physical competencies.

The sense of ego identity, then, is the accrued confidence that the inner sameness and continuity prepared in the past are matched by the sameness and continuity of one's meaning for others, as evidenced in the tangible promise of a "career". (pp. 160-161)

According to Erikson, identity diffusion may occur for a number of reasons. For example, the adolescent may avoid intimacy, fearing the loss of his/her own identity. Diffusion may also occur around demands for future planning, or due to an inability to assimilate that time is passing. The adolescent may also experience difficulty in focusing his/her resources on productive tasks. And finally, there is the potential for identity formation in oppositional reaction to the standards of the community or significant adults in the adolescent's life.

Erikson's overall conceptualization will again be employed when linking the developmental deficits of