An Experimental Study of the Effect of Structured Videotape Feedback on Adolescent Group Psychotherapy Process

Billie F. Corder, 1 Reid Whiteside, 2 Mary McNeill, 3 Toby Brown, 4 and Robert F. Corder 5

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Group psychotherapy with disturbed undersocialized adolescents requires modification of traditional group psychotherapy methods. The effectiveness of a structured, brief video-tape feedback and discussion on group psychotherapy process with this population was studied by an analysis of detailed ratings of each "statement", or process unit, in randomly selected videotapes from a control and experimental group during a nine-month period. Significant differences in level of intimacy of verbal content and in frequency of feedback about behavior in content indicate that this technique is effective in facilitating group psychotherapy goals.

1Co-Director of Psychological Services, Child Psychiatry Training Program, Dorothea Dix Hospital, Raleigh, North Carolina, 27611. Received Ed.D. from University of Kentucky. Research interests are group psychotherapy process and methodology.
2Psychologist, Child and Youth Division, Dorothea Dix Hospital, Raleigh, North Carolina. Received M.A. from North Carolina State University. Research interest is adolescent group psychotherapy.
3Psychologist, Child and Youth Division, Dorothea Dix Hospital, Raleigh, North Carolina. Received Ph.D. from North Carolina State University. Research interest is adolescent group psychotherapy.
4Instructor, Department of Social Work, North Carolina State University. Received M.A. from University of North Carolina. Research interest is group psychotherapy process.
5Research Psychologist, International Business Machines, Raleigh, North Carolina. Received Ph.D. from Purdue University. Research interests include analysis of small group processes.

Correspondence should be sent to this author.
INTRODUCTION

Chwast (1977), Sugar (1975) and others (MacLennan and Felsenfeld, 1968; Corder et al., 1977) have emphasized the necessity for modification of traditional group psychotherapy methodology for treatment of young acting-out adolescents. The inability of this patient population to handle the high anxiety levels engendered by intensive insight-oriented therapy has been noted by Kraft (1961), Masterson (1958), and Sugar (1975). In general, the group therapy modifications reported in literature relevant to these adolescents have outlined goals which aim to develop techniques for impulse control, train patients in verbalization of feelings, and provide a structure through which the therapist can present opportunities to "build awareness and insight with considered caution" (Chwast, 1977, p. 225).

A number of therapists have begun to incorporate videotape use into work with young adolescents and have reported some success in providing improved feedback on behavior, verbal expression, and personal appearance (Wilmer, 1970; Marvit et al., 1974). Reviews of these videotape applications do not describe specific structures within which videotape feedback has been utilized with adolescents (Thelen et al., 1979).

In the present paper, a detailed experimental analysis was completed which studied the specific behavioral and verbal effect of a 15-minute structured videotape feedback and discussion period preceding therapy groups for young adolescents. These experimental sessions were compared with randomly selected control sessions without videotape feedback. The relative effectiveness of the two types of sessions in meeting defined goals of the therapy groups was measured in the analysis described in the procedures section.

METHOD OF THE PRESENT STUDY

Subjects

Subjects were adolescent group therapy members who were hospitalized on an adolescent in-patient unit in a state mental hospital. Typical patient profiles indicate that median age for the patients was 14, with 59% falling within the 70-to-99 I.Q. range. Most frequent reasons for hospitalization were suicidal attempts, aggressive behavior, and psychotic symptoms and behavior. All patients had been evaluated as inappropriate for referral to less restrictive treatment settings. Few had had previous therapy experiences. Adolescents were referred to an ongoing open-ended therapy