An Analysis of the Effects of Gender on Outcome in Group Treatment with Young Adolescents

Craig Winston LeCroy

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This study investigated the ways in which the gender of group leader and client might affect treatment outcome with young adolescents. Seventh- and eighth-grade students were involved in programs for enhancing social competence. Mixed-sex groups of adolescents received treatment from either male or female group leaders. Results revealed gender differences between the male and female adolescents on the outcome measures, no difference on outcome due to leader gender, and one interaction effect on a measure of social skills between adolescent gender and group leader gender. Acquisition of social skills, which takes place through modeling and observation, may be influenced by matched gender between leaders and adolescents; however, other competencies and abilities do not appear sensitive to leader and adolescent gender.

INTRODUCTION

The implications of how gender might influence treatment outcome have not been adequately examined. The major purpose of this study was to explore the impact of gender on various measures of outcome and, more importantly, to determine if there is an interaction effect when gender of group members (in mixed-sex groups) is matched with the gender of the group

1Dr. LeCroy is currently Assistant Professor, School of Social Work, Arizona State University, Tempe, Arizona and Clinical Social Worker, Jane Wayland Youth Center, Phoenix, Arizona. He received his Ph.D. at the University of Wisconsin—Madison. His major interests include developing and evaluating interventions for adolescents, social skills training, and practice evaluation for social workers.
The influence of gender has become the focus in a number of investigations in a variety of areas, such as adjustment problems in school (Anastas and Reinherz, 1984), self-control problems (Karoly and Ruehlman, 1982; Van Duyne and Scanian, 1976), psychiatric disorders (Dohrenwend and Dohrenwend, 1976; Eme, 1979), and stress (Hoffman, 1980). However, less frequently examined is the concern of the present research—the effects of gender on outcome in group treatment. Moreover, most work has examined the influence of gender with adults rather than with young adolescents.

An increasing amount of research has examined the influence of gender on expectations and interactions between children and adults. A study by Hoffman, Tsuneyoshi, Ebina, and Fite (1984) examined differences in interactions between adult males and females and girls and boys. The results indicate that there was a significant main effect for adults, with male adults showing more praise and helping behaviors toward both girls and boys. Interestingly, no significant interactions between gender of adult and gender of child were found.

Research in counseling psychology has focused on the influence of gender and counselor credibility and expectations (see, e.g., Bernstein and Figioloi, 1983; Bloom, Weigel, and Trautt, 1977; Corrigan, Dell, Lewis, and Schmidt, 1980; Hardin and Yanico, 1983; Paradise, Conway, and Zweig, 1986; Subich, 1983). Subich (1983) examined how subject's expectations for counseling differ as a function of counselor gender specification and subject sex. The counselor's gender had no significant effect on subject's expectations but the sex of the subject showed significant differences in expectations. Females were found to expect stronger facilitative conditions, more personal involvement in counseling, and a more positive counseling outcome than males.

A similar study (Bernstein and Figiolo, 1983) on gender and credibility was conducted; however, adolescents were used for subjects because they may differ from adults in their expectations of credible counselors. This study of adolescents found that counselor credibility did not differ by counselor gender, a conclusion that was true for adults. Furthermore, the authors found no indication of an interaction between counselor gender and gender of the subject on the measures of expertness, attractiveness, trustworthiness, and confidence.

These studies suggest important differences in the kind of expectations and the kind of behaviors that occur between adult males and females and girls and boys. To what extent might these differences influence outcome in a group treatment situation? Practitioners frequently assume that better outcomes will result with gender matches between counselor and child, yet there is little research substantiating this view. Modeling theory would suggest that model similarity has an impact upon the acquisition of new behaviors.