The purpose of this article is to present an approach to the resolution of scapegoating in the group: humanizing the scapegoat. A case example from a pre-adolescent boys' group in a community mental health center will be used to illustrate.

KEY WORDS: scapegoating; early adolescents; group work; group treatment.

INTRODUCTION

"The entire world is his jury. By the age of twelve he has experienced more crises than Lord Jim... (he is) the subject of savagery, scorn, and satire—who belongs to that great group that goes under several identifiable genera, namely, pansies, woosies, dinks, wimps, nerds, losers, screamers, pineapples, schlemiels, lunchmeat, turkeys, simps, geeks and dipshits." (Theroux 1974)

The purpose of this article is to present an approach to the resolution of scapegoating in the group: humanizing the scapegoat. A case example from a preadolescent boys' group in a community mental health center will be used to illustrate.

SCAPEGOATING

According to Garland and Kolodny (1973) "No single phenomenon occasions more distress to the outside observer than the act of scapegoat—
ing...Attempts to deal with the scapegoating, whether as a single event or as a pattern, are likely to leave the worker feeling about as inept as he will ever feel as a practitioner. Try as he will, he may find it difficult to get beyond, "but that's not fair. Give the guy a chance" (p. 55). Nevertheless, they go on to provide a range of twelve possible interventions. Approaches and analysis of scapegoating are also presented by Gadlin (1991), Soo (1983), Scheidlinger (1982), and Shulman (1967).

In his discussion of group therapy and social systems theory Klein (1992) states a common belief, that scapegoating is an expression of displacement or projection. Garland and Kolodny (1973) discuss various vulnerabilities which may leave an individual in the group open to attack. These include confused sexual identity, secondary pain, poorly organized or insufficient aggressive drive and visible unorthodoxy (pp. 61-63).

In his field study, With the Boys; Little League Baseball and Preadolescent Culture, Fine (1987) provides tape recorded accounts of various instances of preadolescent verbal combat. He demonstrates the "utility" of the preadolescent victim who unwittingly enables his attackers to impress one another with their verbal skills (p. 118).

While Fine reports no evidence of physical aggression, another author disabuses his readers of any such notion. In his exploration into the "professional avoidance of boyhood realities" Kolodny (1984) uses Bradbury's fantasy, "The Playground," to illustrate one harrowing context of children's lives that many an adult has long forgotten:

"Who said childhood (is) the best time of life? When in reality it (is) the most terrible, the most merciless era, the barbaric time when there (are) no police to protect you, only parents preoccupied with themselves and their taller world" (p. 153).

Redl and Wineman (1949) provide perhaps the premier work on what Kolodny refers to as "an unfettered view on the painful nature of much of the social life of boys of grade school age." Their descriptions of the "daily warfare among children" coupled with creatively framed prescriptions are unparalleled in the literature.

THE GROUP AND THE SCAPEGOAT

The group consisted of six boys, mixed racially and ethnically, and all roughly twelve years of age. They were all referred to the child guidance center for problems ranging from social isolation and depression to violent acting out behavior. The six boys were together for almost eight months at the time of the session to be described.