A rationale is presented for using adventure activities in group counseling. Two case examples are used to describe the adaptation of these activities to group counseling with couples and single-parent-adolescent families.

Most counseling groups with couples or families face issues involving trust, support, risk, challenge, leadership, problem solving, cooperation, competition, or communication. Many group leaders have developed structured exercises that are useful in confronting these issues. Using structured activity sessions, arts, crafts, dance, drama, music, writing, story telling, running, exercise, physical challenge, and even board games to provide a primary therapeutic function. Nickerson and Lauflin (1982) have indicated that "Action therapies employ nonverbal modes of relationship as the chief therapeutic mode in which conflicts are sorted out and resolved and through which intellectual and emotional energies are fed for more adaptive and creative living" (p. 4). Activities involving physical challenge or adventure through leader-directed, structured exercises are the primary focus of this article.

PHYSICAL ACTIVITIES IN COUNSELING

Winn (1982) reported that physical activity and human communication has been overlooked in the field of counseling. He stated, "The active use of one's body in order to confront a physical problem will generalize to the use of one's psyche to master psychosocial challenges within and beyond the therapeutic environment" (p. 143). Winn summed, "Since many of our fundamental beliefs...have a physical-motor basis, therapeutic attempts to repair a self image or increase interpersonal trust may be very accessible to a physical intervention" (p. 160). Jean Houston's (1982) experiential process for enhancing physical, mental, and creative abilities through psychophysiological work is consistent with Winn's assessment of the need for an active, physical basis in counseling. Houston observed that many "...of the talking therapies do not work as well as they might since they do not knowledgeably involve the body in the therapeutic process." (p. xiv). Cleverly and Worthen (1975) cited several helpful functions of structured activities in counseling. These authors focused primarily on the standard of board games (e.g., Monopoly) and card games (e.g., poker) in counseling. They list of helpful functions, however, also applies to many of the ways that more physically active exercises benefit group counseling. These functions include (a) generating data for discussion after the activity, including the projective assessment of...
ADVENTURE ACTIVITIES IN COUNSELING

The definition of adventure includes such descriptors as dangerous, risky, uncertain, novel, exciting, and remarkable (Grove, 1971). In the context of activities, adventure is used as an adjective to denote elements of actual and perceived risk. Although the actual danger or risk involved in an adventure activity is usually thought to be physical, many activities also involve actual or perceived psychological risk. Psychological risk is involved when the activity requires the group members to be involved in a psychologically stressful situation. For example, in scuba diving, the pressure of being underwater and the potential for injury or death can be psychologically stressful. The group leader must be aware of the potential for psychological stress in an activity and be prepared to provide support and guidance to help group members cope with these stresses.

The role of the group leader in adventure activities is to help group members develop skills and strategies for handling the psychological challenges that may arise during the activity. This may involve providing encouragement, offering support, and helping group members work through any difficulties they may encounter. The group leader should also be aware of any changes in group members' behavior that may indicate the need for intervention. For example, if a group member becomes overly anxious or exhibits signs of distress, the group leader may need to intervene to help the member feel more comfortable and supported.

The group leader should also provide opportunities for group members to reflect on their experiences and what they have learned from them. This reflection process can be facilitated by using debriefing techniques, in which group members are encouraged to share their thoughts and feelings about what they have experienced. These techniques can help group members process their experiences and gain a deeper understanding of themselves and their group.

The group leader should also be aware of the potential for group members to develop new skills and competencies during adventure activities. For example, a group member may develop new communication skills, leadership skills, or problem-solving skills. These new skills can be used to help group members achieve their goals and improve their overall well-being.

Ultimately, the role of the group leader in adventure activities is to provide a supportive, structured environment in which group members can safely explore new experiences and develop new skills. The group leader should work to create a sense of trust and safety among group members, and provide opportunities for group members to share their thoughts and feelings. By doing so, the group leader can help group members achieve their goals and improve their overall well-being.
Adventure Activities with a Couple or Family System

The helping function that adventure activities provide for group counseling is extremely useful when working with couples or family system. Assumptions, playfulness, experimentation, modeling, and metaphor serve as means to an end, not a governing function, when working with a group of persons who also share a significant relationship (e.g., a group of brothers or sisters). We have observed that metaphor is a key component in the counseling of families and couples.

Case Examples

Family Groups

Four single-parent families (four members) with adolescents (one daughter and three sons) participated in four 90-minute group sessions offered through a child and family center at a large southeastern university. We served as counselor and super- visor. The group experience was advertised throughout the university community, using personal and radio announcements, letters to. "an adventure counseling experience.

Many of the adolescent family members were resistant to participate during the initial session, not knowing what to expect from the counseling. The goals of the group were received with acceptance, but there were reservations after the activities, that significant bene- fit can be gained from children observing parents, men observing women, and women observing men. The consistent and unconscious modeling of facilitator can occur in group counseling with couples outside the counseling session relationship. It is this interfacing function, the emergence of metaphor, that seems to be the most powerful and useful function of adventure activities. As noted above, the focus on metaphoric, the awareness of group dynamics, the awareness of individual dynamics, and the awareness of individual dynamics are all components that are necessary for effective facilitation of group counseling. As a result, the group counseling session can be a good means to an end, not a governing function, when working with a group of persons who also share a significant relationship (e.g., a group of brothers or sisters).

As noted above, the focus on metaphoric, the awareness of group dynamics, the awareness of individual dynamics, and the awareness of individual dynamics are all components that are necessary for effective facilitation of group counseling. As a result, the group counseling session can be a good means to an end, not a governing function, when working with a group of persons who also share a significant relationship (e.g., a group of brothers or sisters). We have observed that metaphor is a key component in the counseling of families and couples.

Journal for Specialties in Group Work

November 1986
assessed as salient to the group and to generate data for discussion after the activity. The counselor was allowed to become aware of behavior that might have gone unnoticed in a traditional parent-adolescent group. The activity also provided an opportunity both to experience and to "play with" power as used in the relationship and in the home. There was also an opportunity for both parents and adolescents to learn new behaviors provided by activities. During the post-activity discussion, the group reported that the activity was advantageous because the focus could be on what everyone had witnessed instead of on reports by family members regarding how power and control issues developed outside of the group. In addition, both parents and adolescents were able to translate the metaphor of the activity into relevant situations in their own lives. A similar translation of physical experience into a psychological concept was experienced by couples involved in an enrichment experience conducted by the senior author.

Couples Groups

Five couples participated in an 8-hour group session offered at the same university. This group also was advertised in the university community, through posters and radio announcements, as "an adventure-based enrichment experience."

The group was designed as a 1-day, outdoor couples enrichment experience centered around adventure activities. As with the family group, the initial hours of the couples group were spent doing warmup activities designed to bring the group together. The goals and purposes of this group centered around issues of communication, problem solving, trust, and risk. Adventure activities were designed to focus specifically on these issues, and discussion sessions centered on translating the physical activities into psychological concepts related to each couple's unique relationship.

To focus indirectly on communication styles in a nonthreatening and nondirective way, we used a blind-mate walk. Each couple was asked to decide which partner would be blindfolded first and led by the other partner. Adapted from the familiar trust walk, this activity added an additional handicap, prohibiting the sighted partner from speaking.

During the introduction both partners were asked to be aware of their ability to communicate with the other in ways that were similar to or different from their usual ones.

During the blind-route walk, each couple was led along a "hazardous" trail designed by the counselor. The outdoor trail involved crossing streams and gullies, crossing under branches, and climbing up low walls. (Indoor "trails," which went over and under tunnels and chains, through homework "tunnels," and up and down stairs, also have been designed.) Couples switched roles during the middle of the exercise so that each had an opportunity to both lead and follow.

The blind-mate walk was one of the most talked about activities during the 1-day counseling experience. Couples experienced the difficulty of trusting their nonspeaking, sighted partner. Sometimes one member of a couple was more trusting than the other. On many occasions, microcommunications led to real consequences, such as bumping a head or stepping into the middle of a shadowy stream. Some couples moved along their path quickly and confidently, but others would stop and smell the flowers and still others wouldumble slowly along the trail, having difficulty with each "hazard." Again, couples most functional in their relationships were the most adept at this experience. This assessment is based on observations, but these observations became "grist for the therapeutic mill" when couples were allowed to share their perceptions of trust as well as old and new communication patterns. Both functional and dysfunctional couples benefited.

SUMMARY

The activities mentioned above are two of numerous possibilities for adaptation of adventure activities into counseling groups with couples. The selection and sequencing of activities are at the discretion of the group counselor, according to his or her style. We have found it important to ask ourselves why a particular activity was used in order to project what the likely outcomes of that activity will be.

Using adventure activities just to have something to do during a counseling group seems not to have the same effect as introducing activities that have been put in a systematic sequence for success. Activities threaten to come together randomly and followed by a discussion of what was learned and how it might be applied does not seem to be as powerful an experience as strategically introducing leader-designed activities in a sequence that seems to fit together for the group.

Counseling must be exercised by the inexperienced counselor who wants a meaningful activity into his or her bag of therapeutic tricks. Some of the adventure activities explained by Robtke (1977, 1981), are potentially dangerous if not properly administered. Treatment goals and purposes, and experimentation are necessary before implementing a new activity with couples or families. The trained group counselor is also protected from mishandling the many issues involving liability and litigation when using potentially risky physical activities. He or she may be more likely to have potential group members sign an informed consent waiver, acknowledging the possibility of physical injury inherent in such activities. The novice user of adventure activities must be reminded of the possible physical and professional injury that might result from negligence on his or her part. Professional liability insurance policies may need to be reexamined to ensure that the counselor is covered while employing indoor and outdoor adventure activities.

REFERENCES


