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ABSTRACT

Proceeding on the assumption that humans learn behaviors by imitating the behavior of others, the author is concerned with the appropriate behavioral models needed in dealing with delinquent female adolescents in a group situation. Three potential models are discussed: (1) the group leader or leaders; (2) the group members; and (3) the invited visitors to group sessions. The ideal leadership team is described in terms of age, sex, socioeconomic background, personality characteristics, amount of training, etc. Primary, however, is the ability to interact successfully. Considerable emphasis is placed on the delinquent girls themselves and their potential modelling power, especially that of peer leaders. The optimal use of visitors is discussed. (TL)

"Role Models - Peers or Adults"

by

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Our concern with appropriate behavioral models rests on the common sense assumption that most human behavior is or has been copied from others. If I were to ask you at this moment to raise your hand--what would you see? (ask audience to raise hands, then look around). Certainly we have a diversity of hand raising styles. Now when I ask you to raise your hand exactly as I do I think you will agree that much of the diversity has disappeared. Perhaps such behavioral uniformity could have been induced through a clever set of instructions, but I doubt it. Even if it could, why bother? Isn't it a great deal more efficient to simply request one's audience to look and to imitate? Without laboring the point any further, or running to scientific validation of the kind to be found in Bandura and Walters' book on Social Learning and Personality, I hope that you will now permit me to proceed on the assumption that humans do learn behaviors by imitating the behaviors of others and I will move on to an attempt to look at the modelling concerns one should have in dealing with delinquent female adolescents in a group situation.

Who are the models?

When thinking about starting a behavioral training group, such as the one we are describing here today, how aware will you be of the potential models operating in the group situation? The group leader or leaders are obviously potential models. The group members can and will imitate each other. In addition to these two obvious sources one can add the invited visitor, who will be an adult or teenager invited to attend one or more sessions to teach some part of the content. Let us look first at the group leaders as potential models.

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Social learning theory suggests that behavior is initiated only when people are motivated to imitate. Look at your potential group leaders in view of the behaviors you wish to teach the girls and their ability to motivate the girls to imitate. In our situation we have been concerned in a general sense with three general classes of behaviors: (1) grooming or appearance behaviors, (2) female to female interaction behaviors, and (3) male-female interaction behaviors.

In attempting to maximize the potential modelling effects of the group leaders in these behavioral areas we have concluded that two leaders are essential. One, of course, is male and the other is female. We feel the choice of these leaders will be crucial to the success of the groups and I will attempt to describe to you the kinds of persons we look for. In our experience the female not only can be, but perhaps should be, a non-professional in terms of academic training in counseling psychology. Ideally she will be in her middle or late twenties and will have had a socioeconomic background similar to that of the majority of the girls in the group. If she has grown up in the neighborhood from which the girls are drawn then this is a big plus. She must be a woman who likes women and mixes easily with them, but she must also be reasonably attractive to men. In terms of grooming and personal appearance she must be a step ahead of the girls, but let me emphasize not too far ahead. Let me illustrate. If the group of girls is drawn from a low socioeconomic area, how can they expect to model a group leader's mode of grooming if each meeting night the leader arrives fresh from the hairdressers? Or how trend setting will our leader be if she arrives in \$150 Italian knit suits? We want her behaviors to be imitated; therefore she must appear well groomed

and stylish but such grooming and styling must be achieved on a budget that is within reach of the girls in the group. She must be prepared to talk freely about how she learned to dress, and use makeup, and such conversations must have the ring of authenticity if we expect emulation. She must have an eye for good grooming practices and be able to spot any efforts at change which the girls make and be quick to reinforce such endeavors. If she is the kind of person who is willing to spend a little extra time and effort early in the program with the one or two girls most likely to want to change their appearance then before long you will have two or three or even four well groomed "modellers" on your hands and you will be surprised at how catching the well groomed habit can get to be.

The male leader can be the member of the leadership team with the therapeutic background and training. Of prime importance, however, is his capacity to relate freely and easily to all females including the female leader and the group members. We don't want the girls to imitate his behavior (heaven forbid); we do however want a younger man, who is attractive to women, and who can successfully model the best of all young male behaviors in terms of his capacity to reward females for becoming more female. In a sense he must be prepared to model (within limits of course) the kinds of behaviors an attractive young woman is entitled to receive from a young man when she is behaving as attractive women should behave. We expect our male leader to develop a warm friendly relationship with his female co-leader. He should compliment her, in front of the girls, on her appearance and, where appropriate, do this for the girls also. He should be able to demonstrate with words, gestures, and consideration, the fact that he values females as worthwhile persons with the added speciality of their femininity. If he is the right man then his potency within the group will grow tremendously

with the passage of time. Many of the delinquency problems of female adolescents are tied very tightly to their desire to be attractive to and comfortable with males. It is up to the male group leader to represent men in general and to level with the girls about what he responds to positively and what he responds to negatively. He must be alert to positive behavioral change in the girls. If they are successfully imitating desirable aspects of the female leader's behavior, then he has a responsibility to notice such shifts and to respond to them in a manner calculated to insure their continuance. When appropriate, he must be willing to be the practice male in role playing situations, to be the boy they had trouble with on a recent date, or the boy they wish would notice them. (As I try to describe him I wonder if he should first of all enroll in a few drama classes just to increase his versatility.) In later stages of the group's existence it is sometimes wise to bring another male or two into the group sphere. This can be done easily by inviting guest speakers of one sort or another to talk on topics of interest to the girls. Perhaps a social event such as a house party could be planned. In moving toward activities of this kind it might be wise to set public behavioral goals of the kind mentioned by the previous speaker and to then examine goal attainment in subsequent group sessions.

I hope I have been able to convey to you at least a partial picture of what we consider to be a good leadership team. The crucial point, I think, just in terms of our modelling principle, is that the two leaders must interact with each other and with the girls in socially desirable ways. Many of the girls will not have had much, if any, opportunity to see really healthy male-female interactions. Their concepts of how to please men are frequently tied to sexually promiscuous behaviors or notions that dishonest



game playing is essential to maintaining rapport. Any direct attack on these notions is likely to meet with indifference or outright rebellion. However, if the girl can watch for several weeks a good male-female leader to leader interaction then our experience tells us you will have opened a new door which can be explored in more leisurely fashion as the rapport and trust become more firmly established. As the girls permit the open exploration of male-female relating, you will probably be surprised at how much of the female leader's behavior has already been incorporated into the girls' own behavior patterns around the boys at school or brothers in their own homes, maybe they will even have tried a couple of new behaviors out on their dads.

Now let us look at the girls themselves and their potential modelling power. I will not bore you with a list of references designed to convince anyone that peer group leadership is a potent variable among adolescents. That much is a given. When a teenager joins a gang she dresses like the gang, talks like the gang, and behaves like the gang. She copies the others. When you start a new group you just might be starting a new gang. Hopefully it will be a gang of good guys rather than bad guys. Much will depend on who surfaces as strong peer leaders and how they behave. If you want to increase the group effectiveness you should begin by cultivating the emerging peer leadership people. Challenge them to improve their grooming and dress habits. Particularly strong leaders will frequently respond to what I call the what if approach. For instance, you might ask a girl what will happen at school if she drastically alters her hair style. You talk in terms of potential behavioral responses of teachers, female classmates, and male classmates. Having thus secured some predictions, you then challenge her to try it on a specific day, to take mental notes or written notes about the

responses of others, and to report her findings back to the group at the next meeting. If the girl is particularly curious or adventuresome, and adolescent leaders frequently are, she might continue with other what if projects thus providing other members of the group with a model that is implicitly condoning attempts at change as a desirable behavior in and of itself. Certainly pre-conditioned habits both in the peer leaders and in other group members will at least have a chance to begin to crumble. Hopefully those things that work out well will be incorporated into a new more appropriate behavioral repertoire. In the beginning group leaders will share the most responsibility for reinforcing such attempts at change. Hopefully over time the girls will learn to reinforce each other.

Peer leaders should be given special attention. They are probably more potent teachers of other group members than the adult leader can ever be. Spend extra time on them. Give them as much responsibility as they can handle. If they come equipped with a special skill such as "how to apply make-up" then use them to demonstrate the technique to others. If they are already skilled conversationalists use them as examples, let them role play with weaker members. Build their existing strengths and help them to acquire new ones.

Peer leaders will lead whether we professionals like it or not. It is our experience that it is wiser to avoid the competition for leadership and instead to support and to back the ready-made leadership in whatever desirable directions they are already headed.

What about the other group members who do not appear to be such strong leaders, are they imitated? In our experience I would have to say sometimes, but, and this is a big but, less often than my humanitarian bias would like to believe. Some sociologists have argued plausibly that the mantle of

leadership revolves among group members depending on the task at hand.

This is probably true in many situations but my experience tells me that it is not only possible but functional to think of delinquents as classifiable into three broad types which I choose to label (1) leaders (2) followers (3) isolates. Your experience may differ and you may feel compelled to argue with my heavy emphasis on the cultivation of indigenous leaders. If any of you ever get the opportunity to run several groups of this kind perhaps you might experiment with cultivation of leadership in some groups, and treating all members equally in terms of leader time in the other groups. I would be interested in knowing about your success rates however you choose to measure them.

The leadership question aside, be alert to the strength of each girl. As a general rule the adult female leader should never overtly demonstrate a skill that can adequately be demonstrated by a group member. Your girls will need recognition for the positive things they can do. They can be more readily imitated than you can because, they are the age they are, and the group leader is, after all, not really living in their world.

So much for the modelling power of group members and group leaders. Now what about group visitors. Mrs. Gabbert has filled you in on the Content principle of our group. It is readily apparent that if one adapts this principle then there are a myriad of opportunities to bring in visitors to handle different aspects of the content. I would personally tend to avoid bringing in visitors during the early stages of the group's existence. Visitors will bring to the group a variety of behaviors some of which you will consider desirable and some of which will be less than desirable. When group members are strangers to each other and lacking in a sense of group cohesiveness then visitors will have high potency and they could undo a lot of the work you have started. During later stages of the groups existence they



serve a very useful function by providing new stimulation that all members will have in common. Whether they behave in warm likeable ways or cool distant threatening ways they will provide a rich learning experience which can be dissected, analyzed or role played at the groups convenience. A well functioning group will, for instance, upon a female visitor's departure, have a chance to discuss her grooming, wardrobe, conversational skill, gestural mannerisms, poise and sureness, etc. If the visitor has been a good model then their own progress is reinforced and they may even be able to imitate a new desirable characteristic. Other visitors may make clear to them in a vivid way why they are changing a particular habit such as sitting spread legged, or frowning a lot, or failing to respond with a smile. New inputs of some kind are a big help to such endeavors. The use of teenage girls as visitors is particularly recommended wherever you may be able to find them. I would caution you however to use girls a little older (a year or two) than your group members. They will generally be listened to better without the negative feeling of being put down by someone their own age, which may result from using same age visitors.

Now let me conclude with my introduction to the topic of Models - Peers or Adults. This presentation will be an attempt to convince you, the audience, that delinquent female adolescents are normal at least in the sense that they will imitate the behaviors of others and that each girl will select for herself what she chooses to imitate. I will try to show you that the best you can do is to become very aware that this happens and that once armed with this understanding it is possible to try and arrange an environment in which there are plenty of worthwhile behaviors lying around just waiting to be imitated.

Put your memories to work and see whether or not I have accomplished my objective.

Thank you.