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Group Structure and Humor, Effects on Group Cohesion and Affective Meaning

Mary Ellen Rus

Western Michigan University

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GROUP STRUCTURE AND HUMOR: EFFECTS ON
GROUP COHESION AND AFFECTIVE MEANING

by

MARY ELLEN RUS

A Thesis
Submitted to the
Faculty of The Graduate College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the
Degree of Master of Science
Department of Occupational Therapy

Western Michigan University
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GROUP STRUCTURE AND HUMOR: EFFECTS ON
GROUP COHESION AND AFFECTIVE MEANING

Mary Ellen Rus, M.S.
Western Michigan University, 1985

The ability to identify therapeutic components of an activity
is an important skill of occupational therapists trained in activity
analysis. This study examined potentially significant factors in
activity analysis: the use of humor and group structure. Four groups
(two with a parallel structure and two with a project structure)
participated in a hat making activity designed to elicit humor.
Four groups (two with a parallel structure and two with a project
structure) participated in a bookmark making activity. Subjects' affective responses were measured by Osgood's short-form semantic
differential, and the cohesion among group members was assessed by
the Group Environmental Scale (GES). Results indicated that subjects
who participated in groups which included humor rated their activity
significantly higher on two factors of affective meaning (evaluation
and action) and significantly higher in terms of cohesion. There was
significant interaction between the two activities and the group
structure in terms of the action factor and in terms of cohesion. In
both cases the parallel groups making bookmarks, received particularly
low scores. The findings have implications for occupational therapy
groups and activities.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project was possible only through the encouragement and expertise on research of my primary reader, David Nelson, Ph.D., O.T.R. Thanks are also extended to my second reader Claire Callan, Ed.S., O.T.R., for her careful reviews and constructive criticisms of what I have written.

I want to express my appreciation to the Transitions day treatment staff who provided the stimulus for the idea of humor as a therapeutic medium in activity analysis. Special thanks to Lynn Braybrook who was always willing to run around the block with me when frustrations built up and my tolerance was low. Thanks go to friends and family members who participated in the pilot studies.

Special thanks go to my parents, Leonard and Lenore Rus, who instilled in me an appreciation of the written word and the persistence to accomplish a goal.

Mary Ellen Rus
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A fundamental assumption of the occupational therapy profession is that "activities of many kinds are characteristic of and define human existence" (Cynkin, 1979, p. 11). Early occupational therapists defined occupational therapy as the therapeutic usage of activities in order to encourage a patient's recovery from disease or injury. Thus, occupational therapists are concerned with those activities "that help to promote competence and achievement in the client's ability to function in his or her world" (Hopkins & Tiffany, 1983, p. 95).

Occupational therapists assist clients in improving their functional capabilities by matching activities to each client's current abilities, proclivities, and needs. Occupational therapists do this by a process termed activity analysis. Activity analysis is accomplished by breaking an activity into its component parts. Fidler and Fidler (1978) stated:

Planning therefore requires that activities be understood and analyzed in terms of the level and kind of motor skill requirements, sensory integrative components, psychologic meaning, cognitive requisites, interpersonal and social elements, and cultural relevance and significance (p. 310).

The Problem

The intention of this study is to examine the effects of two independent variables that are important in activity analysis.
These variables are: (1) a group structured to encourage humor as opposed to a group that is not, and (2) a parallel versus a project group structure. The dependent variables are the subjects' affective responses to the activity and group cohesion.
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF SELECTED LITERATURE

Humor has frequently been discussed in relation to affective behavior. Tooper (1980) noted that humor can assist in putting pain in perspective and can influence an individual's sense of group membership. Block, Browning, and McGrath (1983) asserted that shared laughter or amusement can promote intimacy, belonging, warmth, and friendliness among group members. Heuscher (1980) observed that humor can broaden an individual's thought and can facilitate insight. Young and Frye (1966) stated that humor can act as a releaser of tension and can be an expression of emotion. As these authors have indicated, humor can be a significant component of therapeutic activity. In order to examine this significance, humor will be incorporated into this study by: (a) having subjects participate in an activity which tends to provoke laughter, and (b) instructing subjects to have fun and create something amusing.

Group structure, the second independent variable in this study, has an impact on interpersonal interactions. Structure refers to the type of interpersonal interaction which dominates a group's functioning. It is also considered a significant component of activity analysis. Mosey (1982) identified the ability to interact with other people as a basic skill required for an individual to be able to participate adequately in the community. She identified five group interaction skills and five parallel group structures. These structures are:
(1) parallel, (2) project, (3) egocentric-cooperative, (4) cooperative, and (5) mature.

Adelstein and Nelson (in press) examined how the production of shared versus non-shared end products and materials would influence the affective responses of subjects. In their study, differently structured groups constructed collages. Some groups were structured in such a way that members worked individually on their projects, and other groups were structured so that members worked together. These structures simulate Mosey's (1982) parallel and project groups. A parallel group is characterized by persons being with others but involved in individual tasks. A project group is characterized by individuals participating in short-term tasks that necessitate some sharing. Adelstein and Nelson (in press) found that, when students constructed objects within a parallel structure, their affective responses toward the activity were no different than when they constructed an object within a project group structure.

A study by Schwarzberg, Howe, and McDermott (1982) resulted in a somewhat different finding. They examined the effects of three group structures on social interaction with a population of hospitalized patients on a psychiatric unit. The structures they examined were: (a) a verbal, process-oriented group geared for discussion; (b) an open parallel task occupational therapy group where each subject selected and participated in activity based on one's own treatment goals and interests; and (c) a self-expression group which had a combination of task oriented and process oriented features. Their results supported their hypothesis that these structures affect the quality and quantity of interpersonal interactions.
Although Adelstein and Nelson (in press) found no difference in the affective responses toward the activity, there may be a difference in the quality of interaction among group members. In the present study, separate groups of subjects will be involved in either a parallel or a project group structure. Group cohesion as a reflection of group members' interactions will be one of the dependent variables. Group cohesion may denote subjects' attraction to the group, group morale, or coordination of group members' efforts (Cartwright & Zander, 1968). Factors noted for increasing group cohesion are: (a) frequent group meetings, (b) similarities among group members, (c) competition with other groups, and (d) an increase in social status of the group (Mosey, 1982). Cohesion may promote group functions or it may deter them. Mosey (1982) stated that a high degree of cohesion contributes to group interaction, learning among group members, and goal accomplishment. Cohesion has been considered a valuable phenomenon in a group because studies have demonstrated that a group requires a positive social climate before it can work constructively on a task (Cragen & Wright, 1980). Conversely, "... involvement in an overly cohesive group interferes with opportunities to try out new ways of thinking, feeling, and acting with a variety of other people in different situations" (Mosey, 1982, p. 59).
CHAPTER III

DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Data Collection

This study will use two instruments. The Group Environmental Scale (GES) developed by Moos and Humphrey (1974) will be used to measure group cohesion and nine other dependent variables. The nine other variables are: leader support, expressiveness, independence, task orientation, self-discovery, anger and aggression, order and organization, leader control, and innovation. All ten variables will be measured; however, the main concern of this study is with group cohesion. Moos and Humphrey defined cohesion as "involvement and participation in the group; affiliation and commitment to the group; help, manifest concern, and friendship displayed to each other" (Pfeiffer, Heslin & Jones, 1976, p.232).

This study also uses Osgood's short-form semantic differential (OSD) to measure subjects' affective responses to an activity. Affective meanings are construed from paired opposites like "big-small", "nice-awful", "powerful-powerless". The qualities which can be measured by the semantic differential are: evaluation, power, and action. Power refers to an individual's feelings about the magnitude of effect something potentially has on its environment. Evaluation refers to an individual's positive and negative feelings. Action involves feelings about the degree of movement associated with an
activity. Several authors have used the short-form semantic
differential to compare different experimental conditions of activity
(Nelson, Thompson, & Moore, 1982; Gonzales & Nelson, in press; Rocker

Hypotheses

It is expected that humor as a component of an activity will
increase group cohesion and elicit a positive affective response.
It is also expected that a parallel structured group when compared
with a project structure will not alter to a significant degree
subjects' affective responses toward the activity; however, group
cohesion might be significantly enhanced.

Subjects

Pilot studies were conducted in order to ascertain how subjects
in groups with a mixture of male and female members felt when
participating in an activity. Based on subjects' responses which
revealed appreciable differences during pilot studies, the decision
to exclude male subjects was made. Twenty-eight subjects participated
in the study. They were asked their age. All were selected from the
student body at Western Michigan University. Half of the subjects
were occupational therapy students.

Instruments

Subjects were requested to fill out the twelve scales of the
OSD which rates an activity according to the three factors of affective
meaning; evaluation, power, action. Research has indicated that
the OSD is a reliable and valid instrument to document affective

The GES developed by Moos and Humphrey was used to measure
group cohesion and the nine other dependent variables. A reviewer
has noted that the scale is an instrument designed to measure gross
differences in the "personality" of the environment and that it
probably is a credible instrument (Campbell, 1978, p. 839-840).

Procedure

Subjects were randomly assigned to one of four groups. All
groups were provided with the following supplies: black, white,
red, yellow, and blue construction paper, a role of scotch tape, a
bottle of glue, and scissors. Each group was given the same amounts
and types of supplies.

Groups which were to have humor incorporated into their activity
process participated in an activity which had been selected for its
ability to stimulate playful behavior. These groups constructed
hats.

Groups which were designed so that they did not include humor
as a component of their activity process participated in an activity
which had been selected for its repetitious routine nature. They
constructed bookmarks. All groups had the same materials.

The following instructions were put on a poster board and were
read to each group by the same person. Groups 1 and 2 were parallel-
humor groups. They were given these instructions:

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I want to thank you for coming today. The goal of this group is to create silly hats. I want you to make your hats so funny that group members will find them ridiculous and will want to laugh. I would like you to work individually on your hats, although you may occasionally ask other group members for ideas or suggestions. I have provided you with a few examples of the type of hats you might make. However, you do not need to copy these examples. I would like you to finish within forty minutes. Just keep making silly hats. I will return to the group every ten minutes in order to answer any questions you might have. Have fun!

Groups 3 and 4 were project-humor groups. They were given these instructions:

I want to thank you for coming today. The goal of this group is to create silly hats. I want you to make your hats so funny that group members will find them ridiculous and will want to laugh. I would like all of you to work on one hat at a time. Do it together. I have provided a few examples of the type of hats you might make. However, you do not need to copy these examples. I would like you to finish within forty minutes. Just keep making silly hats. I will return to the group every ten minutes in order to answer any questions you might have. Have fun!

Groups 5 and 6 were parallel-non-humor groups. They were given these instructions:

I want to thank you for coming today. The goal of this group is to make bookmarks. I would like each of you to work individually on your bookmarks, although you may ask other group members for ideas or suggestions. I have provided you with a few examples of the type of bookmarks you might make. However, you do not need to copy these examples. I would like you to finish within forty minutes. Just keep making bookmarks. I will return to the group every ten minutes in order to answer any questions you might have.

Groups 7 and 8 were project-non-humor groups. They were given these instructions:

I want to thank you for coming today. The goal of this group is to make bookmarks. I would like all of you to work on one bookmark at a time. Do it together. I have provided a few examples of the type of bookmarks you might make. However, you do not need to copy these examples. I would
like you to finish within forty minutes. Just keep making bookmarks. I will return to the group every ten minutes in order to answer any question you might have.

Data Analysis

Each of the twelve scales which make up the OSD were assigned a score from 0 to 6. These scores were summed. Then, the four scores of power were added up. Each of these three factor rendered a score within a range of 0 to 24. A two-way ANOVA was done on each of the ten variables from the GES.
CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Results

Table 1 summarizes the results.

Table 1

Affective Response and Group Cohesion as a Function of Participation in Two Different Activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dependent Variable</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Parallel</th>
<th>Project</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation</td>
<td>Hats (humor)</td>
<td>16.0 (1.9)</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bookmarks (non-humor)</td>
<td>13.7 (1.9)</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power</td>
<td>Hats (humor)</td>
<td>12.3 (2.8)</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bookmarks (non-humor)</td>
<td>10.0 (4.2)</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action</td>
<td>Hats (humor)</td>
<td>16.4 (1.9)</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bookmarks (non-humor)</td>
<td>10.7 (1.6)</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cohesion</td>
<td>Hats (humor)</td>
<td>54.6 (10.2)</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bookmarks (non-humor)</td>
<td>32.0 (10.7)</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Evaluation Factor

Analysis of variance (ANOVA) revealed significant differences between the hat making subjects and the subjects constructing bookmarks on the evaluation factor $F(1,20)=10.7$, $p<.01$. This finding confirms the hypothesis that an activity designed to elicit humor can increase subjects' positive affectual response. Subjects liked an activity designed to elicit humor regardless of whether they did it in a parallel or project structured group. There was no significant interaction between the two independent variables. However, the main effect comparing parallel and project group conditions approached statistical significance $F(1,20)=3.4$, $p<.10$. In both activities subjects tended to evaluate the activity higher when in a project group then when in a parallel structured group.

Power Factor

Results demonstrated no statistical significance.

Action Factor

Hat making was rated significantly higher on the action factor than bookmarks making, $F(1,20)=15.9$, $p<.01$. There was a significant interaction between the structure and its nature (humor versus no humor), $F(1,20)=5.4$, $p=.05$. Subjects making bookmarks in the parallel group rated their activity particularly low on the action factor ($M=10.7$) in comparison to the other conditions.

Cohesion

Hat making was rated significantly higher than bookmarks making,
\[ F(1,20) = 8.7, \ p < .01. \text{ ANOVA also revealed a significant interaction,} \]
\[ F(1,20) = 7.4, \ p < .05. \] Subjects making bookmarks in the parallel condition recorded especially low scores in terms of cohesion (\( M = 32.0 \)).

**Nine other Factors of the GES**

Data on the nine other factors of the GES were also collected. Significant interactions were revealed on the following seven factors: leader support, expressiveness, independence, task orientation, self-discovery, leader control, and innovation. Each factor analyzed revealed a statistically significant interaction between the groups' structure and whether or not it had been designed to elicit humor. Subjects who participated in a parallel group structure making bookmarks rated their groups lower on all of the above mentioned factors of the GES.

**Discussion of Results**

This study confirms the premise that it is important for occupational therapists to consider humor when analyzing an activity for its therapeutic potential. Results indicated that humor as an activity component alters subjects' affective response toward the activity.

Affect, or lack of affect, has been considered a product of one's perception. Clinically, occupational therapists often work with populations who suffer from inaccurate and distorted perceptions which contribute to inappropriate affect. Humor, because it alters affect and perceptions, can be a potentially therapeutic medium of activities.
"Humor", wrote Block et al (1983), "presents a novel and unexpected aspect of the world which is accompanied by tension and released by laughter" (p. 90). This process can provide a sense of proportion to one's problems, promote social skill, and facilitate self-disclosure.

Humor and its accompanying laughter results in:

- the collapse of the boundary between domains of thought and experience, the sudden presence of the extraordinary in the ordinary, a sudden realization of paradox, or the appearance of a negation in an affirmation (or affirmation in a negation), all of which, again, state that things are not as they seem (Rossel, 1979, p. 411).

Therefore, humor provides a way to integrate feelings, thoughts, and perceptions.

Another finding of this study was that activities and group structures can be manipulated in order to elicit a humorous response from subjects. A study limited to the investigation of the duration of humorous interaction among variously structured groups would seem warranted. Therapists need to be aware and informed of the impact of controlling both activities and group environments in order to satisfy client's needs through humor.

Findings also indicated that activities can be constructed which will elicit a certain pattern of group interrelationships. Occupational therapists often encounter persons who have not developed adequate group interaction skills. If therapists can synthesize activities which involve group interaction skills and relationships among group members, clients may learn interpersonal skills which can be generalized.

One cause of the humor in project groups may have been the sharing that subjects were required to do. These subjects had to share both ideas and materials as they created their end products. Brown,
Dixon, and Hudson (1982) noted that laughter is facilitated by the presence of others. Perhaps one's perceptions of being with others is influenced by the act of sharing. Another possible cause may be that subjects in these groups had a higher level of arousal due to the expectation of force sharing. The results of Yates and Miller (1982) indicated that prior arousal state does effect subjects' appreciation of humor. Being in a project group with others may enhance arousal level more than being in a parallel group.
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

This study documents some of the therapeutic potential of humor as an activity component. It establishes the importance of humor and group structure as considerations in activity analysis. In addition, this study identifies some of the affective meanings present in activities.
APPENDIX A:

LETTER OF INFORMED CONSENT
Dear Participant:

I am a graduate student in occupational therapy at Western Michigan University. I am conducting research in order to understand how different individuals are affected by two activities and how they are affected by different group structures. The information gained in this study might provide evidence for the health-promoting effects of activities, and also might increase understanding of group differences. Your participation in this study would be greatly appreciated.

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to complete the Group Environmental Scale which was developed by Moos and Humphrey to measure different aspects of a group's environment. You will also be asked to complete Osgood's short form semantic differential which was developed to measure subjects' affective response to an activity.

You will be asked to participate in one activity group. After your activity group you will be given two forms to fill out. The first part of the study will take approximately 40 minutes. Filling out the two forms will take approximately five minutes.

Your participation is voluntary. You are free to discontinue participation in this study at any time, and any questions you have will be answered promptly. Your participation, lack of participation, or withdrawal from this study will in no way affect your status as a student at Western Michigan University. There are no special benefits or risks involved in this study.

To insure confidentiality, your answer sheets will be assigned a code number. If the results of this study are published, you will be in no way identifiable since scores will be reported anonymously in aggregate form.

If you have any questions, please call me at 1-534-6400, or call my research advisor David Nelson at 383-4956.

Thank you for your consideration of this project.

Sincerely,

Mary Rus, O.T.S.

I have read and understood all of the above information. All of my questions have been answered to my satisfaction and I agree to participate in this study.

Signature of Participant
APPENDIX B:

OSGOOD'S 12-SCALE SHORT-FORM SEMANTIC DIFFERENTIAL

(reduced in size from the original)
Below are 12 pairs of words. Between each pair are 7 spaces. Mark an "X" in one of the 7 SPACES of each pair of words (make 12 "X" marks on each page). Choose the SPACE to be marked with an "X" depending on how well the word on the left compares to the word on the right in describing how you felt about the activity while you were doing it.

nice _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ awful
fast _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ slow
quiet _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ noisy
sour _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ sweet
powerless _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ powerful
young _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ old
bad _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ good
weak _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ strong
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