Acquiring and Maintaining Conflict Management Skills: An Experimental Validation of the Effects of Homework

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ACQUIRING AND MAINTAINING CONFLICT MANAGEMENT SKILLS: AN EXPERIMENTAL VALIDATION OF THE EFFECTS OF HOMEWORK

by

Laurie L. Assadi

A Project Report
Submitted to the
Faculty of The Graduate College
in partial fulfillment
of the
Specialist in Education Degree

Western Michigan University
Kalamazoo, Michigan
August 1979
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks go to Michelle Stone and Renee Cook for their perseverance in transcribing and rating the tape recordings. I also want to thank R. Wayne Fuqua for his interest and guidance in the planning and execution of the study as well as his encouragement and constructive editing of the final drafts of this project. Finally, I wish to thank my husband, who gave me encouragement and support throughout my return to school.

Laurie L. Assadi
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INTRODUCTION

The assignment of homework has often been used to aid clients in acquiring and maintaining therapeutic behavior change. Shelton and Ackerman (1974) provide a brief history of the use of home activities in conjunction with various therapies and explicate some of the suggested advantages in utilizing the non-therapy hours of the week. They postulate that "homework...increases the client's ability for self-evaluation and self-regulation" and suggest that this may lead to greater therapeutic gains (Shelton and Ackerman, 1974, p. 3).

The use of assigned home activities, if completed by the client, would technically expand the number of therapy hours available to the patient and provide beneficial practice in behavior change skills. A number of professionals have assumed that the client's active involvement in changing his/her own behavior may facilitate the achievement of therapeutic goals (Ellis, 1962; Cautella, 1966; and Kanfer, 1961).

Little empirical research, however, has been conducted to support this assumption. Azrin, Naster and Jones (1972), for example, used homework assignments while training couples in reciprocal reinforcement in an attempt to enhance the positive qualities of their relationship. While the training package was effective in decreasing the aversive characteristics of the couples' communication, the role of homework assignments in producing the therapeutic changes reported was not systematically evaluated. Wolpe and Lazarus (1966) and Storrow (1967) have also postulated that substantial therapeutic
gains can be achieved if the client is actively involved in changing his/her own behavior in the natural environment. The rising popularity of the use of homework assignments as a therapeutic tool (Ellis, 1962; Shelton and Ackerman, 1974) points to the need for empirical validation of its effectiveness in the acquisition and maintenance of therapeutic changes.

Another therapy issue which has gained increasing attention is the generalization of therapeutic behavior change to the client's natural environment. It has been suggested that generalization of therapy effects does not occur simply because a behavior change is accomplished (Stokes and Baer, 1977). Stokes and Baer emphasize the need for systematic, active programming of generalization effects as opposed to passively observing and measuring their occurrence or non-occurrence.

Various studies have supported this supposition by finding only slight evidence for generalization of effects in the absence of an explicit transfer intervention. Patterson, Hops and Weis (1975), for instance, found only modest generalization of treatment effects in their study involving interpersonal skills training for couples. Johnston and Johnston (1972) and Garcia (1974) investigated the generalization of verbal behavior change to stimulus conditions other than those provided in the therapy program and found scant evidence to support the use of homework if it can be used as a systematic method of programming generalization in conjunction with the preferred intervention strategy.

Thomas (1977) discusses the importance of programming generalization
of therapy gains and suggests that practice of desired behaviors in
the client's natural environment may be one vehicle for promoting main­
tenance and generalization of therapeutic changes. The assumption
that the assignment of home activities may enhance the generalization
of desired behavior change has yet to be supported by empirical re­
search.

Shelton and Ackerman (1974) cite the Maultsby study (1971) as one
of the only known empirical studies on the effects of homework assign­
ments on therapeutic gains. Maultsby used rational emotive therapy
with 87 subjects, with written homework being the major therapeutic
tool. The subjects evaluated their own performance of homework on
a rating scale and the resulting scores were compared with the degree
of improvement the client achieved. The degree of improvement was
subjectively determined by the therapist at the termination of the
study. Treatment outcome was divided into no improvement, moderate
improvement, and much improvement. Assignment of subjects to these
classes was based on the therapist's evaluation of progress, self­
report of improvement, and reports by significant others. The results
of the study indicate a statistically significant correlation between
homework performance and progress in psychotherapy. A number of
technical criticisms, however, are evident when reviewing this study.

First, there was no clear indication of what occurred during the
therapy hour. Therefore, the results could have been due to differ­
ent techniques or processes used by the therapist for different clients
(i.e., differential therapy). Also, all instruments used to evaluate
therapeutic progress were subjective measures, resulting in questionable
reliability. Finally, generalization of therapeutic gains was not systematically measured and follow-up data was not obtained for all subjects.

The present research attempts to remediate some of the shortcomings of the Maultsby study. First, therapeutic improvement was determined by independent observations of specific categories of verbal behavior in conjunction with self-report measures. Also, since all subjects participated in a common therapy session, the possible effects of differential therapy were eliminated. Third, all homework assignments resulted in the production of a permanent product, allowing for an objective monitoring by the therapist of assignment performance. Finally, the assignment of homework was used specifically to aid in the programming of generalization of therapy effects. Transfer and maintenance of behavior change were systematically measured throughout the study and follow-up data was obtained for all subjects.

The current research utilizes marital therapy as a vehicle for assessing the effectiveness of assigning home activities. Recent estimates show that approximately one out of three marriages end in divorce or separation (Shelton and Ackerman, 1974, p. 163). A number of pervasive social problems appear to be correlated with this increase in marital discord. Among them are the greater frequency of alcoholism among the separated (Gerard and Saenger, 1966) and an increase in crime and delinquency of children of unhappy or broken homes (Siegman, 1966). Given these correlations, marital discord appears to be a major social problem and requires effective therapeutic tools for its alleviation.
The assignment of home activities may serve to facilitate skill acquisition and generalization when used in conjunction with a program designed to enhance couples' communication skills. Shelton and Ackerman (1974) have explicated several types of homework assignments specifically for use with couples in conflict, suggesting that the area of marital counseling may benefit from its use. Azrin et al. (1973), in their study on reciprocity counseling with couples, also assigned home activities but did not isolate the effects of home activities from other components of the therapy package (e.g., didactic information, contracting). The present study attempts to provide empirical validation for the assignment of therapeutic home activities and its effects on the acquisition and generalization of conflict management skills with couples.

The current research emphasized conflict resolution via an improvement in communication skills between couples. Patterson et al. (1975) have stressed the importance of communication and problem solving skills for couples in conflict and provide evidence that this is directly related to marital happiness. Brim, Fairchild and Borgatta (1961) report that the same number and types of conflicts plague both happy and unhappy marriages, leading to the speculation that happy couples are able to resolve conflicts they encounter but dissatisfied couples may lack the conflict resolution skills to do so. Ables (1977) also points to the need for effecting a change in interactional style between couples from a blaming, argumentative orientation to one more amenable to compromise and change. According to the author, one of the major vehicles for this alteration is re-education.
of the couple in the area of communication skills. Clearly, there is a need for effective therapeutic tools for teaching more productive interactional skills to couples experiencing stress in their relationship. Maintenance and generalization of these conflict management skills to the couple's home environment is also viewed as distinctly important in attempting to achieve an improvement in the relationship.

The present study utilized a modification of the fair fighting strategy developed by Bach and Wyden (1968) with couples experiencing difficulty in communication and conflict resolution. This program is based on the premise that couples can learn to resolve conflicts through mutually satisfying means by using a set of "rules" designed to reduce the aversive qualities of their communication. Couples are taught that conflicts within the relationship need not be destructive but that their resolution in a fair and satisfactory manner is a vital component of relationship happiness. Couples are taught to use a set of fair fighting rules when attempting to resolve a problem issue. These rules are used to help the couple focus on problem solving and compromise instead of on "winning" the fight and getting back at the other person.

The fair fighting rules were utilized in the present study as a basis for teaching couples how to increase the positive qualities of their communication and at the same time to resolve conflicts in a mutually satisfying manner. Systematic homework assignments were used as the primary intervention tool in conjunction with the fair fighting technique to assess the advantages of having couples practice these skills outside of the clinical setting. The present study addressed
two major questions: 1) Does the assignment of homework effect the acquisition rate of the conflict management skills being taught? and 2) Does the assignment of homework effect the generalization and maintenance of these skills in the client's natural environment?
METHOD

Subjects

Three couples served as subjects in the study. Two couples had been married for five years and eight years and one couple had been dating for four and a half years. The subjects' mean age was 29 years, with a range of 25 to 35 years. One couple had two children. The occupations of the males were service mechanic, lawyer, and student. The occupations of the females were speech therapist, student and part-time teacher. The program was advertised as a communication skills workshop in flyers and local newspapers. All couples were self-referred, learning of the program either through the advertising or through friends. None of the couples had received prior counseling for relationship problems.

Informed consent was obtained from all subjects. Subjects were given a complete description of the program, including possible risks and benefits, and told that they could withdraw from the study at any time. All three couples completed the eight week program. The sessions were conducted at the Psychological Services Component, a community based clinic affiliated with Western Michigan University's Department of Psychology.

Subjects were required to pay a $10.00 nonrefundable fee for the workshop. Each couple also signed a contract requiring a $35.00 deposit, refunded on the basis of weekly attendance, completion of homework, and return of any borrowed equipment.
Apparatus

Audio tape recorders were used throughout the study to collect samples of couples' interactions regarding a conflict issue.

General Procedure

Contract. The therapy program lasted for eight weeks, with one, 2 hour session each week. During the intake interview, all subjects signed a contract requiring a $35.00 refundable deposit. This money was refunded by increments each week if the couple met the following contingencies: 1) return any borrowed equipment (i.e., tapes, tape recorders); 2) complete and return all homework assignments; and 3) attend the session for that week. All three conditions had to be met in order for the couple to receive any of the deposit for that week. The money was refunded on an increasing basis each week. For example, at Session 2, $2.00 was returned, $3.00 was refunded at Session 3, $4.00 at Session 4, etc. The contract was utilized to help insure completion of homework assignments and attendance at the sessions. All couples met the terms of the contract each week.

Assignment of subjects to conditions. The three couples were assigned to either a homework or a no homework condition by the therapist. Couples 1 and 2 were assigned to the homework condition and received home activities at the beginning of the program. Couple 3 was assigned to the no homework condition, receiving home assignments at the fifth week of therapy. None of the subjects were aware of the assignment of the others.
Content of therapy sessions. The fair fight rules were presented to all subjects during the therapy sessions. These sessions consisted of didactic information on conflict management skills, modeling and demonstration of the use of the rules, guided practice, and open discussion periods. Written handouts consisting of rule definitions and examples were also given to all subjects. Appendix A is comprised of the rule explanations and examples.

Dependent Variables

The dependent variables measured were the couples' self-report of relationship satisfaction in ten areas, the couples' self-report of typical conflict outcomes, and the rate of breaking the fair fight rules in tape recorded samples of conflict interactions. Data on all dependent variables was obtained four times during the study: 1) baseline, which was obtained prior to the beginning of therapy; 2) during the fifth week of therapy, before Couple 3 began homework assignments; 3) posttreatment, gathered during the last week of therapy; and 4) follow-up, obtained two months after the termination of therapy.

Self-report of relationship satisfaction. Self-report data on satisfaction of the relationship was obtained as a measure of the couples' perception of improvement in the relationship. Couples rated ten areas of interaction on a scale of 1 to 10. Appendix B is a sample of the satisfaction scale used.

Self-report of fight outcome. Since one purpose of the program was to teach couples how to reach a mutually agreeable compromise, a self-report measure of conflict outcome was also obtained. The couple was
given a choice of ten typical conflict outcomes and instructed to check the one(s) most descriptive of their interactions. These outcomes were not tied to any specific conflict but were a measure of the couples' perception of how their conflicts usually ended during the period of time preceding the completion of the self-report measure. Appendix C shows a sample of the form used.

Rate of rule infraction. The rate of infraction of fair fight rules was determined by independent observation of the couples' tape recorded interactions concerning a conflict issue. Couples were instructed to discuss an issue, which had been causing discord in their relationship, for approximately 10 to 20 minutes and tape record the interaction. The issue to be discussed was determined independently by each couple. Fourteen rules were defined according to Bach and Wyden's guidelines (1968) and the number of rule infractions during each interaction was recorded. This number was then divided by the length of the interaction to calculate the rate per minute of rule infraction.

Taped samples of the couples' interactions were obtained in both the clinic and home setting. The clinic data was used to give an indication of skill acquisition in the presence of stimulus conditions similar to those existing during therapy. The data collected in the home was used to measure generalization of behavior change skills to the subjects' natural environment. Appendix D shows a sample of the form used to rate the taped interactions.

Observer Training
Two observers were selected from the Psychology Department at Western Michigan University to rate the tape recorded interactions according to the fair fight rules. The observers earned academic points in one of their classes for participation in the study. Training sessions were conducted twice a week for approximately one month prior to the beginning of the program. The observers were given written definitions and examples of each rule to study before training started.

Sample interactions were tape recorded and rated by the experimenter for use in training. Both observers rated the tapes independently and were checked against the standard of the experimenter's rating. Reliability was calculated and a discussion of each rating was conducted to clarify the definitions.

The training continued until the observers reached 80% reliability. Twice during the study, a training session was held to check for observer drift and maintenance of reliability.

**Independent Variables**

**Baseline.** The baseline phase of the study took place between the couples' intake interview and the beginning of therapy sessions. This period lasted approximately 10 days for each couple. Instructions for collecting baseline data on the three dependent variables were given to all subjects at the intake interview. These instructions included completion of the self-report measures and instructions to discuss two separate conflict issues and tape record the interactions. Prior to the first session, a tape recorded sample was also obtained in the clinic by having each couple discuss a conflict issue for approximately
10 minutes in a private room of the clinic.

**Intervention.** The intervention phase of the study consisted of the assignment of home activities and lasted throughout the eight weeks of therapy. Couples 1 and 2 were assigned to the homework condition and were given home activities beginning with the first session. These assignments consisted of written practice of the rules presented that week. For example, a conflict situation was described and each subject was asked to write a solution to the conflict using the specific skills taught. To further facilitate acquisition and generalization, oral practice was also assigned but was arranged such that a written product resulted. For example, the couple was instructed to make an appointment and discuss a problem issue. This discussion was then entered in a Fair Fight Journal provided by the experimenter. A sample of this form is given in Appendix E.

Couples in the homework condition were also asked to record any arguments that occurred spontaneously during the week (i.e., without an appointment). A Spontaneous Fight Journal was provided by the experimenter for this purpose. This journal was used in an effort to point out to the subjects the differences in conflict outcomes and problem resolution when the fair fight rules were in effect and when they were not. A sample of this form is provided in Appendix F.

During the first four weeks of therapy, Couple 3 was given no specific home assignment. They were asked only to record any spontaneous conflicts that occurred in the Spontaneous Fight Journal. They were given no other instructions that might lead to systematic practice of the skills outside of the clinical setting.
During the fifth week of therapy, Couple 3 was given the same home assignments as Couples 1 and 2 for that week. In an attempt to equalize the amount of home practice for all three couples, Couple 3 was also given two additional assignments used in the first four weeks of therapy. Homework assignments were varied each week throughout the study.

Home activities were assigned and checked by an assistant during each therapy session. Each couple was given an envelope at the beginning of the program. This envelope contained either the homework assignments or only the Spontaneous Fight Journals, depending on the couples' experimental condition. Subjects were instructed not to discuss the contents of their envelopes among themselves. Before each weekly session, the envelopes were given to the assistant who checked the completed homework, assigned the next week's homework, and refunded the appropriate amount of money. The envelopes were then returned to the subjects at the end of each session. This procedure was used to insure the naiveté of subjects to experimental conditions.

Experimental Design

A multiple baseline design across subjects (Baer, Wolf and Risley, 1968) was used to allow the experimenter to assess the rate of skill acquisition before and after the introduction of homework assignments. An assessment of the effects of homework on the generalization of behavior change to the client's natural environment was also conducted. Table I summarizes the design of the study, illustrating when dependent variable measures were taken and when experimental changes in the
Table I. Summary of experimental conditions and dependent variable measures.
TABLE I
Summary of Experimental Conditions and Dependent Variable Measures

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<th>Baseline</th>
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<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>Follow-up</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>All couples</td>
<td>Make tape recorded samples and complete self-report measures</td>
<td>Make tape recorded samples and complete self-report measures</td>
<td>Make tape recorded samples and complete self-report measures</td>
<td>Make tape recorded samples and complete self-report measures</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Couples 1 and 2 only</td>
<td>Spontaneous and fair fight journals assigned; assorted homework related to fair fight rules assigned</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Couple 3</td>
<td>Spontaneous fair fight journal only; No other homework assigned</td>
<td>Fair fight journal and assorted homework assigned</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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program occurred.

**Follow-up**

Follow-up data on the three dependent variables were collected approximately two months after the last session to further assess maintenance and generalization of skills. Subjects were contacted and asked to complete the self-report measures of relationship satisfaction and conflict outcome. They were also instructed to discuss two conflict issues for 5 to 10 minutes and tape record the interactions. These tapes were used to provide information on the couples' maintenance of conflict management skills.

**Reliability**

Reliability measures were obtained for the tape recorded data of couples' interactions. Interobserver agreement was assessed on 75% of the tape recorded samples. The total number of infractions in each category was computed for the entire taped sample. Reliability was calculated by dividing the smaller frequency by the larger in each category of fair fight behavior and multiplying the result by 100 to obtain a percentage. This reliability figure was averaged across all subjects for each category of verbal behavior defined by the fair fight rules. Table II shows the reliability figures for each fair fight behavior during the baseline and intervention phases of the study.
Table II. Average reliability for each category of verbal behavior across subjects.
TABLE II

Average Reliability for Each Category of Verbal Behavior Across Subjects

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verbal Behavior</th>
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<tr>
<td>Made Appointment</td>
<td>98%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stated Problem Clearly</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partner Paraphrased</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interruption</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ignoring</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td>98%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Used Threats</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name Calling</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Placed Blame on Other Person</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Placed Responsibility Outside of Self</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attributed Unexpressed Beliefs to Partner</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brought up Past Issues</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commented on Irrelevant Details</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over-generalized</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over-reacted to Partner's Request</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
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RESULTS

Rate of Rule Infraction

Figure 1 shows the rate of rule infraction for each couple in both the clinic and home setting. Couples 1 and 2 were in the homework condition and were assigned home activities at the outset of therapy. Couple 3 began homework during the fifth week of therapy.

As shown in Figure 1, the baseline rate for the data collected in the home for Couple 1 varied a great deal, with the rate of rule infractions ranging from 16.2 to 1.3 per minute. Introduction of the therapy sessions and homework produced some effect, with the rate for the home data stabilizing below two infractions per minute. The follow-up data, collected in the home, shows a slight upward trend, but still remains at approximately the same level as during the intervention phase. From this data, it appears that the use of the fair fight skills had generalized to the home environment and maintained after two months for this couple.

The data collected in the clinic for Couple 1 shows less variability, with the rate ranging from 5.6 to zero. The rate during baseline in the clinic was zero. During the intervention phase, the rate for the clinic data decreased from 5.6 to .7 infractions per minute. The last data collected in the clinic show a rate similar to the data collected in the home during intervention, suggesting that the stimulus conditions of the clinic had little or no suppressing effect on the behavior.
Figure 1. Rate of breaking fair fight rules.
FIGURE 1

Rate of Breaking Fair Fight Rules

Consecutive Data Collection Sessions

Baseline  Sessions + Homework  Follow-up

Couple 1

Rate Per Minute of Rule Infraction

Couple 2

Couple 3

Sessions Alone  Sessions + Homework

Home data  Clinic data

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The rate of rule infractions in the home for Couple 2 during baseline ranged from 3.7 to 4.7 infractions per minute. The introduction of therapy sessions and homework appeared to be effective with the rate decreasing to 2.3 and 1.2 infractions per minute during this phase. The follow-up data collected in the home shows a slight downward trend, with a rate of .5 and zero infractions per minute.

The data collected in the clinic for Couple 2 shows a rate of zero during baseline. The introduction of sessions and homework produced a higher rate in the clinic data for both interactions.

Couple 3 did not receive home activities until the fifth week of therapy, allowing for an assessment of the effectiveness of therapy sessions alone and therapy plus home activities. The baseline data collected in the home shows a slight upward trend, with the rate increasing from .8 to 2.4 infractions per minute. With the introduction of therapy, this rate ranged from 2.3 to 2.5. The initiation of homework assignments shows a decrease in this rate to zero and .25. The follow-up data again shows a rate of zero infractions for both interactions taped in the home, suggesting that maintenance and generalization of skills had been achieved.

The data collected in the clinic for Couple 3 shows a steady decrease in the rate of rule infraction. This rate declined from 3.7 during baseline to .3 infractions per minute at posttreatment.

**Self-report of relationship satisfaction**

Table III shows the results of the self-report measure of relationship satisfaction for each couple during each phase of the study. For
Table III. Self-report scores of relationship satisfaction scale.
TABLE III
Self-Report Scores of Relationship Satisfaction Scale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area of Interaction</th>
<th>Male</th>
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<th>Female</th>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>Sessions + Homework</td>
<td>Follow-up</td>
<td>Baseline</td>
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<td>Sessions + Homework</td>
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<td>General Happiness</td>
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Note: A score of 1 indicates mostly dissatisfied; a score of 10 indicates mostly satisfied.
Couple 1, the male of the relationship reported positive changes (i.e., higher ratings) in nine of the categories between baseline and the second session plus homework phase or posttreatment. In one category, he reported no change. The female reported positive change in two categories, negative change (i.e., lower ratings) in four categories, and no change in four categories between baseline and posttreatment. During follow-up, the gains reported by the male at posttreatment were not maintained, with eight of the classes being rate as lower between the posttreatment and follow-up phases. Four categories were rated as lower by the female at follow-up and five of the classes showed no change.

The male of Couple 2 reported positive change in four areas, negative change in three areas, and no change in two areas between baseline and posttreatment data collection. The female of the relationship reported greater satisfaction in four areas, less satisfaction in one area, and no change in four areas. Follow-up data show five positive changes for the male as compared to the posttreatment phase. Two categories were unchanged and two areas showed lower ratings. The female of the relationship reported positive change in two areas, no change in four areas, and negative change in three areas at follow-up.

The male of Couple 3 rated six areas as more satisfactory between baseline and posttreatment. Two areas were rated as unchanged and one category was scored as less satisfactory. The female reported seven areas as more satisfactory at posttreatment. One category was rated as less satisfactory and one category was scored the same as compared
to the baseline data. At follow-up, the gains appear to have been maintained. At that time, the male reported five areas as more satisfactory than at posttreatment, four categories were scored the same, and no category was reported as less satisfactory. The female scored two areas as being more satisfactory, seven areas with no change, and no category as being less satisfactory. It should be noted that for this couple, the ratings at posttreatment were relatively high, mostly eight and nine, with the follow-up scores remaining at this level. In this instance, then, a result of no change between posttreatment and follow-up can be viewed as a positive result.

Because the program focused on communication and problem solving skills, it is important to note the changes in ratings for the general area of communication on this self-report measure. All couples rated this category as more satisfactory at posttreatment as compared to their scores at baseline. The improved ratings of this area were maintained at follow-up for all subjects except both the male and female of Couple 1.

Self-report measure of conflict outcome

The self-report measure of conflict outcome indicated that by the end of the program, all couples felt they were ending the majority of their conflicts with a mutually agreeable compromise. Couples 1 and 2 did not choose this alternative during baseline. At posttreatment and follow-up, however, this category was chosen by both couples. Couple 3 chose this alternative, in addition to others, throughout the data collection.
This form was comprised of ten choices of conflict outcome. Nine of these choices were designated as undesirable by the experimenter in that they indicated that a solution to the conflict had not been reached, even though the conflict may have ended through apologizing, walking out, etc. It is important to note that as the program progressed, all couples chose fewer of the 'undesirable' outcomes as indicative of how their conflicts usually ended. In addition, by the posttreatment and follow-up phases of the study, all subjects chose the category of mutually agreeable compromise as their perception of how their conflicts typically ended.
DISCUSSION

Review of the data shows that the use of home activities can be effective in the acquisition and generalization of conflict management skills. All three couples demonstrated a decrease in the rate of rule infraction with the introduction of assigned homework. This decrease appears to remain in effect at follow-up, two months after the termination of the program.

In reviewing the data, however, there are certain factors that should be considered. First, the baseline data taken in the home for all couples is highly variable, showing the possibility of either upward or downward trends. Ideally, baseline data should have been continued until stability occurred. Because of the limited time available, however, it was not possible to prolong the baseline phase of the study.

The increase in the rate of rule infraction for the clinic data for Couples 1 and 2 after the introduction of therapy and homework is also of interest. The reason for this increase from the baseline measure is unclear, since the stimulus conditions of the clinic should have had a suppressing effect on the behavior. One potential explanation is that the baseline data taken in the clinic was a biased sample since it was obtained in an artificial or unfamiliar setting. Therefore, it might have been difficult for couples to interact in their usual manner in this setting. It is possible that these couples had adjusted to the clinic setting by the time of the second data collection in
that environment. Therefore, the higher rate obtained during the intervention phase may be a more accurate measure of their rate of rule infraction.

The data obtained from the self-report measure of relationship satisfaction also necessitates some analysis. Even though the rate of rule infraction decreased for all couples at posttreatment and follow-up, the results of the relationship satisfaction scale do not strongly reflect this. One possible explanation for this discrepancy is that even though the skills may have been acquired, they may not have been applied to other areas of the relationship included on the self-report form. Therefore, the use of the fair fight skills would not be reflected in all areas of the self-report measure. It would have been useful, in the present study, to determine what areas of interaction the fair fight rules were being applied to by each couple. The logistics of collecting reliable and accurate data in this area, however, would be extremely difficult.

The discrepancy existing between the self-report data and the rate of rule infraction may also demonstrate another important aspect of the study. A number of the categories included in the self-report measure (e.g., sex, money, social activities) were not specifically covered within the framework of the program. Communication and problem solving skills were the main areas of concentration during the therapy sessions and in homework assignments. It appears likely, therefore, that satisfaction with the relationship is based on many factors in addition to communication. This may be one explanation for the somewhat variable scores in other areas of the self-report
measure on relationship satisfaction.

Analysis of the data points to the effectiveness of the homework assignments in both the acquisition and generalization of conflict management skills. The data for all subjects show a decrease in the rate of rule infraction with the introduction of therapy plus homework. Generalization and maintenance of these skills is demonstrated by the follow-up data, which show a rate of less than .5 infractions per minute for each couple.

Several aspects of the present study could be improved with future research. First, it would be advantageous to collect more data during each phase of the study. Ideally, the data for each couple should stabilize before introducing the independent variables of therapy sessions and homework assignments. Second, it would be useful to utilize a control group of subjects to determine if the rate would have decreased with the use of therapy alone and maintained at a low level at follow-up without the use of home activities. In the present study, there were not enough subjects available to comprise such a control group.

The effectiveness of the use of home activities in helping clients acquire behavior change skills required further research in areas other than marital counseling. The possibilities for its utilization in the clinical field are endless if its efficacy and effectiveness can be empirically determined. Maintenance and generalization of therapeutic gains is considered a major aspect of the therapy program and could be enhanced with the use of assigned home activities. The present study suggests the use of homework for both the acquisition and
generalization of behavior change skills. Little empirical research is currently available, however, to validate the use of home activities on a widespread scale. The results of the present study are encouraging but should not be considered conclusive. Considering the increasing use of homework as a therapeutic tool, there is a definitive need for replication of these results and further research of its effectiveness in other areas of psychotherapy.

Future research should concentrate on the benefits of homework in more diverse areas of therapy such as weight control, assertiveness training, anxiety management, and parent training. Another area that requires further exploration is the determination of home assignments that are most effective for the treatment of specific behavioral problems (e.g., bibliotherapy, oral practice, written assignments).

In summary, the two objectives of the study were met. With the use of home activities, subjects demonstrated acquisition of the conflict management skills by reducing their rate of rule infraction. Subjects also reported greater satisfaction with the relationship as they learned to adhere to the fair fight rules. Generalization of these skills was also demonstrated by the decreasing rate of rule infraction in the home setting during both the intervention and follow-up phases of the study.
REFERENCES


Kanfer, F. Comments on learning psychotherapy. Psychological Reports, 1961, 9, 71-78.


APPENDICES
APPENDIX A

Fair Fight Rule Definitions

1. Make an appointment to discuss the conflict issue: This appointment might be a regularly scheduled time or made whenever the issue arises. This encourages couples to deal with conflicts openly, as they occur and prevents adverse events such as fatigue or hunger from interfering in the conflict resolution process. If an appointment was made, the couples were instructed to state this on the tape and the observers would score it accordingly.

2. State the problem or request for change as objectively and specifically as possible: Object to behavior rather than provide a description of the person's traits. This rule provides a specific request for change so the partner doesn't have to guess what is being asked for. It also focuses on the possibility of change rather than on the 'unlovable' characteristics of the partner. If the request was stated such that the behavior change would be observable, the observer would score this category. For example, a specific statement would be "I'd like you to hold my hand more often when we're together" as opposed to "I'd like you to be more affectionate".

3. The partner should paraphrase the problem or request for change: This rule insures that both people are discussing the same issue. The use of this rule also reinforces the initial focus on behavior and problem solving. The observer recorded this if the partner re-stated the problem issue immediately after the opening statement.
by the other person.

4. Avoid interrupting: This indicates to the speaker that the other person is not really listening but is planning what to say next. Interruption was defined as one person beginning a sentence before the other had finished speaking. Affirmative comments such as "uh-huh" or "yeah" were not scored as long as they were used in isolation.

5. Avoid ignoring the other person: Prolonged and unexplained silence indicates an attempt to 'get' the other person. If it is necessary to have time to think, it should be stated openly. This category was scored if more than 10 seconds elapsed between one person's statement and a response by the partner.

6. Refrain from the use of threats: Threats are likely to incite more anger and escalate the conflict. A threat was defined as either an explicit or implied warning to the other person that something more aversive would follow. Phrases like "you're going to do that once too often..." or "you'd better stop or else..." were scored as threats.

7. Avoid name-calling or slandering the other person's character or personality: This behavior amounts to an attack and may inspire counter-attack. This may involve the use of an obviously negative label or negative comparison to another person (e.g., "You're just like your father - he was a drunk too"). Any negative reference to the other person's personality or character was recorded by the observer as an infraction of this rule.

8. Refrain from placing blame or fault on the other person: The
person being blamed is likely to respond defensively as opposed to contributing to the solution of the problem. Observers were instructed to attend to the word 'fault' and conditional statements such as "If you didn't nag so much I would stay home more" when scoring this category.

9. Avoid placing responsibility for feelings or beliefs outside of self: By doing this, the person sets himself up for denial or an irrelevant argument about the other person. In this category, observers were instructed to attend to statements beginning with the phrase "You make me feel..." or "You make me think..." This was also scored if the speaker used other people as an explanation for his/her own beliefs (e.g., "My mother always said you...").

10. Avoid attributing thoughts, feelings, or intentions to the other person that have not been openly expressed: This rule helps prevent mindreading. These statements usually aren't accurate and tend to incite denial and more anger. This category was scored if either partner used phrases such as "You think...", "You feel...", or "You want to say...". The observers were trained to distinguish between this infraction and paraphrasing, where the listener rephrases the speaker's statements and therefore might begin with "You think..." or "You feel...".

11. Work on one issue at a time: Avoid bringing up past issues or other extraneous disputes. Using this rule helps insure that a solution to the current problem will be reached. Observers scored this category if a topic was raised that was unrelated to the issue stated at the beginning of the interaction.
12. Avoid commenting on irrelevant details of the speaker's statements: This can be frustrating to the speaker and often serves to sidetrack the main issue. Examples of this category would include statements like "Maybe I did overspend, but it was a robe, not a dress".

13. Avoid making over-generalizations or exaggerating the problem: Exaggeration usually lacks the specificity required to negotiate change and may lead to denial by the partner. Observers were instructed to attend to the use of superlatives such as 'always' or 'never' when scoring this category.

14. Refrain from over-reacting to the request for change: This usually indicates that the request is not being taken seriously and diverts attention from reaching a mutually agreeable compromise. This is usually a sarcastic, all or none type of statement such as "Alright, I'll just stop talking for good then".
APPENDIX B

Relationship Satisfaction Scale

Please rate the following areas of your relationship by circling the number that best describes your feelings. A rating of 1 indicates completely unsatisfactory; a rating of 10 indicates completely satisfactory.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Unsatisfactory</th>
<th>Satisfactory</th>
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<tbody>
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<tr>
<td>Personal independence</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Spouse independence</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Money</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</td>
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<td>Social activities</td>
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<td>Academic or occupational progress</td>
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<tr>
<td>General happiness</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Name: ____________________________

Date: ____________________________
APPENDIX C

Conflict Outcome Measure

Please check the items that you feel apply to your relationship. Check more than one if applicable.

The outcome of our conflicts often include:

_____ I win
_____ My spouse wins
_____ A mutually agreeable compromise
_____ We make up right away
_____ I walk out
_____ My spouse walks out
_____ We don’t speak for awhile
_____ We don’t settle the issue
_____ I give in and apologize
_____ My spouse gives in and apologizes

Name: _________________________________________
Date: _________________________________
APPENDIX D

Fair Fight Scoring Sheet

Observer: ___________________  Client: ___________________

Date: ___________________  Length of Tape: ____________

1. Was an appointment made for this fight? Yes ____ No ____

2. Did the partner state the problem in clear, specific language? Yes ____ No ____

3. Did the other partner paraphrase the problem? Yes ____ No ____

Husband  Wife

4. Interruption

5. Ignoring (more than 10 sec. lapse before responding)

6. Used threats to obtain change from partner

7. Name-calling or attacking partner's character

8. Placed blame or fault on partner

9. Placed responsibility for feelings outside of self

10. Attributed feelings, beliefs, or intentions to partner which were not expressed

11. Brought up past issues
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th>Wife</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>Commented on irrelevant details of partner's statements</td>
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<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>Over-generalized or exaggerated (words like 'never' or 'always')</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>Over-reacted to partner's request for change</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX E

Fair Fight Journal

Date: ___________ Time: ___________ Topic: ___________

Ground Rules: __________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________

Outcome of this fight (decision reached, future appointment, tasks to be completed before the next appointment, etc.):

_________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________

If you reached a decision, when will you evaluate it? ___________

_________________________________________________________________

What did you do after this fight? ______________________________

_________________________________________________________________

Evaluation of this fight:

Wife: How satisfied are you with the outcome?

1 2 3 4 5
Not at all Very satisfied

How hurtful was this fight?

1 2 3 4 5
Very hurtful Didn't hurt at all

Husband: How satisfied are you with this fight?

1 2 3 4 5
Not at all Very satisfied

How hurtful was this fight?

1 2 3 4 5
Very hurtful Didn't hurt at all

Name: ______________________________

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APPENDIX F

Spontaneous Fight Journal

Day and time fight occurred: ______________________________________

Events immediately preceeding the fight: ______________________________________

Topic of fight: ______________________________________

Outcome of fight: ______________________________________

What did you do after this fight? ______________________________________

Evaluation of this fight:

Wife: How satisfied are you with the outcome?

1 2 3 4 5
Not at all Very satisfied

How hurtful was this fight?

1 2 3 4 5
Very hurtful Didn't hurt at all

Husband: How satisfied are you with the outcome?

1 2 3 4 5
Not at all Very satisfied

How hurtful was this fight?

1 2 3 4 5
Very hurtful Didn't hurt at all

Name: ______________________________________

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