The Effects of Homework on the Acquisition and Generalization of Couples Conflict Management Skills

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THE EFFECTS OF HOMEWORK ON THE
ACQUISITION AND GENERALIZATION OF COUPLES'
CONFLICT MANAGEMENT SKILLS

by

Mary Lewis

A Thesis
Submitted to the
Faculty of The Graduate College
in partial fulfillment
of the
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In writing this thesis, I have benefited from the encouragement and advice of Professor R. Wayne Fuqua. As his Graduate Assistant, student, and advisee, I have had the advantage of his expert guidance in my professional and intellectual development. Very special thanks go to my husband, Patrick, for his support and encouragement.

Mary Lewis
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INTRODUCTION

The assignment of homework has become increasingly popular and appears to be a logical adjunct to the traditional therapy hour. It is assumed that clients will more quickly achieve therapy goals if they are actively involved in changing behavior in the natural environment. Maintenance and generalization of therapeutic gains are also assumed to be enhanced if the client engages in new behaviors outside of the clinical setting. The purpose of this research is to provide an initial assessment of these assumptions.

One out of three marriages currently end in divorce in the United States. It is estimated that at least 50% of intact marriages are not considered to be satisfactory by one or both spouses (Shelton and Ackerman, 1976). Thomas (1977) cites communication problems as one of the more frequently mentioned conditions that prompts couples to seek counseling. Brim, Fairchild and Borgatta (1961) report that the same number and types of conflicts plague both happy and unhappy marriages, which leads to the speculation that happy couples are able to successfully resolve the conflicts they do have, while unhappy couples are not able to do so. Weiss, Hops and Patterson (1973) provide evidence that conflict management skills are directly related to marital happiness.

Clearly, then, there is a need to provide systematic and effective training in the areas of communication and conflict resolution. If the use of homework assignments in therapy does produce more
efficient and enduring changes in behavior, then it would be worthwhile to include this technique in the clinician's armamentarium and to devote the time and effort necessary to designing homework assignments, providing incentive systems to facilitate completion of assignments, and to the follow-up and review of assignments. If, on the other hand, the homework strategy is found to be of little therapeutic value and further research replicates this outcome, it is important that both clients and clinicians devote their time to procedures of proven therapeutic value.

Couples who seek marital therapy are rated by their therapists at least "somewhat" improved (a very weak measurement tactic) 66% of the time across a variety of treatment models, therapist orientations, and outcome criteria according to Ciminero, Calhoun and Adams (1977). It is believed that the utilization of appropriate homework activities can improve this rather low outcome ratio. This study is intended to provide empirical evidence to support or refute this belief and is therefore seen as an important addition to current research in the area of marital therapy. Improvement rates for individual therapy are similarly low; future research with varied populations might document the efficacy of homework with a variety of clinical problems.

Shelton and Ackerman (1976) report that as early as 1932 Dunlap was convinced of the efficacy of home assignments in achieving therapeutic goals. Although many therapists are currently using homework, there is little empirical support of its use. In a study done by Azrin, Naster and Jones (1972), for instance, homework was
routinely assigned to couples in conjunction with training in reciprocal reinforcement, but the specific effects of homework were not systematically evaluated. Bach and Wyden (1970); Wolpe and Lazarus (1966); and Storrow (1967) have all alluded to the use of homework assignments, again without empirical documentation of its effectiveness.

Other research [Phillips (1972); Cautella (1966); and Ellis (1962)] has alluded to actual gains achieved by clients who actively work on their problems in their natural environment. However, the effects of therapy were not evaluated apart from the effects of homework.

The use of homework is indirectly supported by research that indicates that gains made within therapy sessions do not necessarily generalize to the client's daily life without systematic programming. Greenspoon (1962) and Kanfer (1961) found only slight evidence for the transfer of interview-produced effects to other behaviors outside the interview setting. Marks and Gelder (1965) reported finding no evidence that improvements in the clinical setting generalized to the real life situation.

Maultsby (1972) has done the only known empirical study on the therapeutic effects of homework. Rational-emotive therapy was used with 87 subjects, with systematic written homework being the primary psychotherapeutic tool. Subjects evaluated their own performance of homework on a rating form, and the resulting scores were compared with the degree of improvement the client achieved. At the termination of therapy, the therapist defined three categories of treatment
outcome (no improvement, moderate improvement, and much improvement) and subjectively assigned clients to one of the three categories. Assignment to treatment outcome was based on the clients' self-report of improvement, reports by significant others, and the therapist's evaluation of the clients' progress. The mean homework scores (on a scale with "eight" representing maximum completion) were: .833 for No Improvement; 3.78 for Moderate Improvement; and 5.78 for Much Improvement. These scores indicated that there is a correlation between the performance of homework and therapeutic gains; however, since homework was not manipulated as an independent variable, the results do not provide evidence that greater improvement was the result of performing more homework.

The present study eliminated several shortcomings of the Maultsby study. First, the assignment of homework was manipulated as the independent variable in an attempt to demonstrate a functional relationship between the performance of homework and therapeutic gains. Furthermore, it is not clear exactly what occurred during the therapy hour in the Maultsby study, so it is impossible to evaluate possible effects of differential therapy (different clients receiving different treatment) nor was there a "no homework" control group. In the present study, both a homework and a no homework group were formed. These two groups participated in the same therapy sessions to control for therapist effects and possible differential therapy. This study also minimized the possibility of therapist bias by having independent observers rate objective categories of verbal interaction rather than having the therapist make a global judgement about
"improvement." Since subjects were required to produce products of their homework, there was a more objective assessment of homework performance than self-evaluation. Finally, the effects of homework on generalization of therapy gains were systematically measured.

The present study specified 14 categories of verbal interaction that were presented as "fair fight rules." The dependent variable was defined as the rate per minute of broken rules in taped samples of couples' conflict interactions. The independent variable was the assignment of homework. It was expected that couples who received homework assignments would more quickly acquire the conflict management skills as specified by the fair fight rules. It was also hypothesized that this acquisition would generalize to the home environment more quickly for couples who were assigned homework than for those who were not assigned homework.
METHOD

Subjects

Three couples who responded to an advertisement for a couples communication workshop were the subjects in this study. Two couples had been married for five and eight years and one couple had been dating for four and a half years. Two couples were arbitrarily assigned to a homework condition and the other couple was assigned to a no homework condition.

The subjects were told that the purpose of the workshop was to teach them conflict management skills. All subjects signed a consent form that gave their permission to participate in a masters research project. There was a $10.00 fee for participation in the workshop. In addition, each couple paid a $35.00 refundable deposit and signed a contract, a copy of which is included in the appendices.

Procedure

Dependent variables

The main dependent variable was the rate per minute of infractions of the following fair fight rules.

1. Make an appointment to conduct fights: specify the issue to be discussed, the time, and the place.

2. State the problem or request for change as objectively and specifically as possible. Object to behavior rather than provide
a description of traits or label your partner.

3. The initial statement of the problem is paraphrased by the partner before he/she states their own opinion.

4. Partners do not interrupt each other: interruption is defined as one person beginning to speak before the other has finished, except for one or two word indications of agreement or understanding such as "yes" or "I see."

5. Partners do not ignore each other: ignoring is defined as at least a ten second lapse before a reply is given to a partner's statement.

6. Don't threaten your partner: threats are defined as statements that imply or state negative consequences if demanded changes are not made.

7. Don't call your partner names, make disparaging remarks about your partner's traits, personality or character, or label your partner.

8. Don't blame your partner for your difficulties: blame is defined as implying or stating that the problem is the fault of one's partner.

9. Don't place responsibility for your feelings or beliefs outside yourself. This is defined as stating an opinion or feeling and then attributing it to someone else.

10. Don't attribute thoughts, feelings, or intentions to your partner that they have not expressed.

11. Discuss one issue at a time; don't bring up the past or other extraneous issues.
12. Don't bring up trivial points. Trivial points concern some aspect of a partner's statement that is not relevant to resolving the issue.

13. Don't make over-generalizations or exaggerate the problem; over-generalization usually includes either the word "always" or "never."

14. Don't over-react to a request for change. Over-reaction goes far beyond the request for change to include changes that were not requested.

Couples were instructed to tape two conflict interactions at home prior to the first workshop, between the fourth and fifth sessions, after the eighth session, and a two month follow-up. Tapes of conflicts were also collected in the clinic. Each couple went into a private room to discuss a relevant conflict issue prior to the first, fifth, and eighth sessions.

Two independent observers scored these tapes by counting the number of rule infractions and dividing by the length of the tape in minutes, thus deriving a rate per minute of rule infractions.

Two self-report measures were also used to assess couples' perceptions of changes in their relationships. Subjects used a checklist to indicate the typical outcomes of their conflicts and also maintained fight journals in which they rated the severity of their conflicts and their satisfaction with the outcomes of their conflicts. Copies of these self-report measures are included in the appendices. The fight outcome checklist was collected at the same time as home tapes, and fight journals were done each week.
Observer training

Two Western Michigan University psychology students served as observers and received academic points in their classes for their observations. The observers were provided with a list of the rules and examples of rule infractions.

After discussing these with the author to clear up any ambiguities, the observers were provided with written scripts of couples' interactions. These were scored by the observers using the score sheet included in the appendices. When the observers disagreed with each other or with the author's pre-scored standard, the text of the script was discussed and the crucial features of the portion under discussion were pointed out.

Finally, the observers scored practice tapes of couples' interactions which had also been pre-scored by the author. Again, all disagreements were discussed with reference to the critical stimuli that defined an example as a rule infraction.

Eight one hour training sessions were required to achieve 80% reliability between the two observers and with the pre-scored standard. Two observer training sessions were conducted during the course of the study to ensure maintenance of observer reliability and adherence to the definitions.

Reliability

Inter-observer agreement was computed on 75% of the taped samples of couples' interactions. Reliability was computed by dividing
the smaller frequency of rule infractions by the larger frequency of infractions in each category and multiplying by 100. The resulting percentage was averaged across all couples for each rule.

Format of the workshop

Eight weekly two hour sessions were conducted by the author at a university affiliated clinic offering psychological services to the general community.

As each couple arrived for the workshop, they met with an assistant for about five minutes to turn in journal forms, written assignments, and tape recordings. At that time, they received their refunds, assignments for the next week, and feedback on their homework. Refunds were given on an escalating schedule and were contingent upon attendance at the workshop, promptness, completion of assignments, and returning borrowed tape recorders. Homework required either written or taped products, and feedback consisted of comments regarding the completeness and correctness of written assignments. Each couple gave their materials to the assistant in a manilla envelope, and new materials were given to couples in manilla envelopes. This was done to ensure the confidentiality of the homework assignments, since the experimental design required that couples be given homework assignments at different times during the eight sessions. Couples were asked not to open the envelopes until they arrive home and not to discuss the contents of their envelopes with other couples. Additionally, couples were asked not to attempt to utilize techniques learned in the workshop until instructed to do so. The rationale given was
that a little bit of knowledge could be misused and that it would be beneficial to properly time practicing techniques learned in the workshop. This was done in an attempt to ensure that the couple for whom homework was not intended until the fifth week did not inadvertently perform homework.

The topics for the eight sessions were: General Introduction to Couples' Communication; Reciprocal Reinforcement; Beginning a Fight (Rules 1-3); Back and Forth Interaction (Rules 4 - 10); Issues (Rules 11 - 14); Preparation for Ending a Fight; Ending a Fight; and Contracting for Change. Many ideas for the content of the workshop sessions were derived from Marital Communication and Decision Making (Thomas, 1977) and The Intimate Enemy (Bach and Wyden, 1970). Each session followed a typical format that included presentation of educational material by the author; group discussion of the material presented; presentation of taped examples and non-examples of rules under discussion and group discussion of the tapes; and practice exercises with feedback from the group.

**Independent variable: Homework assignments**

Homework assignments were designed to correspond to each workshop session and required 30 to 60 minutes per week to complete. Assignments generally included both written exercises for each subject to complete individually and oral exercises for subjects to complete as a couple. Oral exercises required some type of product such as a tape recording, a written evaluation of the exercise, or journal sheets.
Each homework assignment pertained to the subject of that week's workshop session. For instance, for the session on opening a fight, couples were given two written exercises: one defined a conflict situation and required them to write an opening statement that adhered to the rules for beginning a fight; the other provided an opening statement that did not adhere to the rules and required them to provide a reply that adhered to the rules. Oral homework required that each member of the pair choose an issue that they wanted to resolve and to make an appointment to discuss that issue. Five minutes were allotted for each issue, and the couple practiced making opening statements and paraphrasing. Journal pages were filled out for these two interactions. It was stressed that they were not to attempt to resolve the issue at that point but would have the opportunity to do so at a later date. Future assignments expanded upon this one until the couples were able to resolve the issue.

At the fifth session the control couple was first assigned homework. Their homework was a synthesis of all previous assignments that related specifically to the rules, but thereafter homework assignments were identical for all three couples. All homework assignments were completed by all subjects.

Experimental design

A multiple baseline design was employed, with two couples assigned homework beginning at session one and the other couple assigned homework beginning at session five.
Follow-up

Two months after the final workshop session, each subject provided self-report data, and each couple taped two conflict interactions in their homes.
RESULTS

Rule Infractions

The data on rule infractions is presented in Figure 1. As can be seen from the figure, there was a generally decreasing trend in the rate of rule infractions over the course of the study.

Verbal infractions taped at the clinic yielded rates of rule infractions that generally decreased over the course of the workshop. It should be pointed out that Sample 1 for Couples 1 and 2 was considered invalid because the couples weren't discussing an issue upon which they disagreed.

Verbal interactions sampled in the natural environment also yielded generally decreasing rates of rule infractions over the length of the study. Couple 1 went from highs of 16.2 infractions per minute during baseline to 1.53 during intervention, and 1.5 at follow-up. Couple 2 went from a high of 4.7 infractions per minute during baseline to 2.3 during intervention and .5 at follow-up. Couple 3, the control couple, had a high of 2.5 infractions per minute during baseline. Their high during intervention was .25 and at follow-up there were no rule infractions in either of the samples. As can be seen from Figure 1, there was not much change in the rate of rule infractions for Couple 3 until homework was introduced.

Reliability

Reliability data are summarized in Table I. Reliability figures

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Figure 1. Rate of breaking fair fight rules.
FIGURE 1

Rate of Breaking Fair Fight Rules

Consecutive Data Collection Sessions

Rate Per Minute of Rule Infraction

Couple 1

Couple 2

Couple 3

Baseline  Sessions + Homework  Follow-up

Home Data

Clinic Data

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Table I. Average reliability for each category of coded behavior across couples.
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<thead>
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<th>Rule</th>
<th>Baseline</th>
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<tr>
<td>Made appointment</td>
<td>98%</td>
<td>100%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stated problem objectively</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>92%</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>90%</td>
<td>89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name-calling</td>
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<td>90%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Placed blame</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Placed responsibility outside self</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attributes beliefs to partner</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brings up past</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>85%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Comments on irrelevant details</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>77%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Over-generalizes</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over-reaction</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>87%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
range from a low of 75% to a high of 100%.

**Fight Outcomes**

Of the several outcomes included in this self-report measure, "mutually agreeable compromise" was considered to be the most desirable. Neither partner of Couple 1 nor 2 checked this at baseline, but all four subjects checked it at intervention and follow-up. Both partners of Couple 3 checked this at all three phases. However, they also checked six undesirable outcomes ("I walk out;" "My partner walks out;" "We don't speak for a while;" "We don't resolve the issue;" "I give in;" and "My spouse gives in") at baseline but not at intervention and follow-up.

**Fight Journals**

The data from the fight journals is presented in Figure 2. Couples rated their satisfaction with the conclusion of fights with 1 being least satisfied and 5 being most satisfied. They also rated "hurtfulness" of each fight with 1 being most hurtful and 5 being least hurtful. These figures were averaged across male and female partners and across fights for each phase of the study. Satisfaction generally increased while hurtfulness generally decreased from baseline to follow-up, and the point at which this occurred was after homework was introduced.
Figure 2. Self-report scores averaged across conditions.
FIGURE 2

Self-Report Scores Averaged Across Conditions

Satisfaction

Hurtfulness

Couple 1

Couple 2

Couple 3

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DISCUSSION

The results of this study indicate that homework assignments may be effective in increasing the acquisition and generalization of couples' conflict management skills. The samples of verbal interactions collected in the clinic yielded inconclusive data because of invalid tapes for Couples 1 and 2 and because Couple 3 showed a decrease in the rate of rule infractions between the two baseline samples. The samples collected in the home, however, show a clear decline in the rate of rule violations at the point where homework is introduced. The self-report data also show the expected changes after homework is introduced and further support the hypothesis that homework is an important adjunct to therapy.

Self-report data are not necessarily valid or sensitive measures of change. However, they are easily obtainable, and there are two important reasons for collecting self-report data. First, they can serve to further substantiate change that is measured by more objective criteria. Second, they provide the clinician with answers to two important questions: Are the changes measured by objective data having the intended impact? Does the couple perceive the changes as benefiting their relationship? If self-report data lead the clinician to conclude that the answer to these questions is "no," then regardless of how successful treatment has been according to objective measures, the clinician must re-evaluate the problem, the measures of progress, and the treatment.
Maintenance and generalization of change are two additional measures of the success of therapy. If changes are not evident in the client's home environment and if changes do not persist, therapy has not been successful. Although design of the present study does not account for maintenance, generalization does appear to be enhanced by the assignment of homework. The rate of rule infractions in home samples declined at the point homework was introduced for each couple. This was especially evident with Couple 3, whose rate of rule infractions in clinic samples declined before homework was introduced, while the rate of rule infractions in home samples declined only after homework was introduced. This indicates that practicing new skills in the natural environment via homework assignments increases the probability that the skills will be used on appropriate occasions in that environment.

This study suffers from several defects that could be corrected in future research. First of all, tapes should be reviewed immediately to prevent the problem of invalid samples. If a tape was found to be invalid, the couple could be contacted immediately; instructions could be clarified and a new tape could be made. Furthermore, it is recommended that more sample conflict interactions be collected for each couple. It is probably unlikely that data would ever stabilize, since verbal interactions are so variable. However, if many more samples were collected, means for each condition could be reported, and they might more accurately reflect a couple's typical pattern of interaction. Finally, a control group could be formed to assess the effects of the passage of time. This group could be
offered the same treatments after the initial groups in a replication of the study.

Homework, obviously, is no panacea for clinical problems. Homework that requires permanent products, as in the present study, enables the clinician to check on the completion and accuracy of homework and may better serve clients in clarifying and impacting their problems. But homework cannot compensate for inaccurate assessment, poor treatment techniques, or inadequate objective measures of behavior change. There must be a logical relationship between the goals of therapy, what occurs during the therapeutic hour, and homework assignments. Further, clients must understand this relationship if they are to be expected to complete assignments. Based on the results of this study, appropriate homework appears to be a useful adjunct to therapy.
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APPENDIX A

Fair Fight Rules I: Beginning the Fight

1. Make an appointment to conduct your fight: specify the issue to be discussed, the time and the place. This appointment might be a regularly scheduled time or made whenever an issue arises. Choose a time when you aren't likely to be interrupted, tired, hungry, etc.

   Rationale: a. Encourages couples to deal with conflicts openly, as they occur.

   b. Prevents adverse events such as anger, fatigue or anxiety from interfering in the process and possibly escalating the conflict.

   c. Provides a setting that may help foster reaching a solution rather than merely talking about problems, as might happen when other events (such as meals, watching TV or traveling) compete with talking.

   d. Allows time for each person to think about the issue, weigh its importance to him/herself, write down important considerations, devise possible solutions, etc.

2. State the problem or request for change as objectively and specifically as possible. Object to behavior rather than provide
a description of traits or label your partner.

**Rationale:**

a. Provides a specific request for change so your partner doesn't have to guess what you want.

b. Focuses on the possibility of change rather than on the "unlovable" characteristics of your partner.

**Examples:**

a. "I really get upset when you tell the kids they can do something after I've already told them no. Once I've said no, I'd like for you to support that." (Rather than: "You're always trying to undermine my authority with the kids.")

b. "I really get worried when you're so late. I'd like you to call if you're going to be more than a half hour late." (Not: "You're so inconsiderate!")

3. The partner paraphrases the problem or request for change. Be careful to paraphrase as accurately as possible. An otherwise acceptable paraphrase can be used to attack your partner by some slight addition to what he/she really said (see Example b). For now, simply state the issue as your partner sees it -- you will have time to express your views later.

**Rationale:**

a. Insures that both are discussing the same issue.

b. Reinforces the initial focus on behavior and problem-solving.

**Examples:**

a. "You would be happier if I would enforce your rules instead of letting the kids do things you have forbidden."
b. "I see. It would ease your mind if I called when I'm going to be very late." (Not: "You'd like to be called when I'm late so you can keep tabs on me.")

Fair Fight Rules II: Back and Forth Interaction

4. Don't interrupt your partner.
   Rationale: a. Interruption indicates that you are not really listening to your partner, but are concentrating on your own position and perhaps on "winning" the argument.

5. Don't give your partner the silent treatment. If you want to think over what your partner has just said, say so.
   Rationale: a. Silence indicates that you are more interested in "getting" your partner than in resolving the issue.
   Example: a. "Give me a few moments to think about that, will you?"

6. Don't threaten your partner. Threats may be obvious or implied and may involve other people.
   Rationale: a. Threats are likely to incite more anger and escalate the conflict. They aren't useful in solving the problem or improving your relationship.
   Examples: a. "If you don't stop counteracting what I tell the kids, I just may leave you!"

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b. "You'd better stop it or else..."

c. "You're gonna do that once too often."

d. "Wouldn't your mother like to know what a spineless wonder you are!"

7. Don't call your partner names, make disparaging remarks about your partner's traits, personality, or character, or label your partner. This may be obvious or subtle and may involve comparisons to someone else.

Rationale: a. These amount to an attack upon the person and are likely to inspire counter-attack.

b. The point of the fight is not to inflict hurt, but to solve the problem.

Examples: a. "You're just a doormat, you let those kids walk all over you."

b. "You're just like your father. He was nothing but a drunk too."

c. "You're so incompetent!"

8. Don't blame your partner. Again, blaming your partner may be stated openly or indirectly.

Rationale: a. Chances are, both of you are contributing to the problem.

b. The person being blamed is likely to respond defensively rather than by offering constructive information or solutions.

c. Even if you've managed to fix the blame, the problem hasn't been solved.
Examples: a. This may be openly stated as: "It's all your fault for imposing unreasonable demands on the kids."

b. Or it may be couched in terms like: "If only you didn't come down so hard on them, there wouldn't be any problem."

c. "I wouldn't have to act like a bitch, if you weren't so selfish!"

9. Don't place responsibility for your feelings and beliefs outside yourself.

Rationale: a. You set yourself up for denial if you do this, or for an irrelevant argument about the other person. If it is your belief or feeling, say so.

b. This tactic is often used as a subtle form of attack.

Examples: a. "You make me feel like an ogre just because I expect our kids to behave!" (Denial by partner, "I do not!")

b. "Dr. Lewis says that kids need discipline." (Irrelevant argument by partner: "That's not what she said at all.")

c. Subtle attack: "My mother always said you were a hard-nose."

10. Don't mind read or put words in your partner's mouth by attributing thoughts, feelings, or intentions to them that they haven't
expressed.

Rationale: a. These statements usually aren't accurate and tend to incite a denial or more anger.

Examples: a. "You're doing your best to see that I look like the bad guy to the kids."

b. "You think you're an expert just because you had a class in child psychology."

c. "You feel rejected by the kids and you're trying to blame me."

Fair Fight Rules III: Issues

11. Work on one issue at a time. Don't bring up the past or other extraneous issues.

Rationale: a. By working on one problem at a time, you're more likely to reach a solution.

b. Bringing up other issues is often used to score points in a fight or hurt one's partner; it rarely leads to a resolution of the problem.

Examples: a. "Well, maybe I do let the kids get away with too much, but you're not perfect either you know. I'm tired of picking up after you."

b. "Maybe I should call when I'm late, but you're inconsiderate too. Like, why can't you clean the tub out when you're through?"

12. Don't raise trivial points.
Rationale: a. This can be really frustrating to your partner and sidetrack the main issue.

Examples: a. "You're wrong. It wasn't a movie I let them go to, it was a slide show."
   b. "Dinner was a little overdone last night -- but it was roast pork, not roast beef."

13. Don't make over-generalizations or exaggerate the problem.

Rationale: a. Exaggeration usually, but not always, includes the words "always" or "never" and is likely to lead to a quick denial by your partner. Your request for change is more likely to be taken seriously if you present your complaint accurately.
   b. Exaggeration lacks the specificity required to negotiate change.

Examples: a. "But you're always too rough with the kids."
   b. "You act just like a drill sargeant with them."
   c. "You never relax for a moment."

14. Don't over-react to your partner's request for change. Over-reaction is usually a sarcastic, all or none type of statement.

Rationale: a. This diverts attention from the purpose of the fight: reaching a mutually agreeable solution.
   b. It indicates that you don't take your partner's request seriously.

Examples: a. "All right. If you don't like the way I treat the kids, I won't have anything more to do with them. You can just raise them yourself!"
b. "If you want to keep tabs on me, I'll cooperate. I'll call you every 10 minutes all day long so you'll have no need to worry."
APPENDIX B

Score Sheet

Observer: _________________________ Identifying Information: ____________
Date: ___________________________ Length of Tape: ____________

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

2. Did one partner state the problem in clear, specific language? Yes _____ No _____
   That is, if the desired change were made, would it be observable?

3. Did the spouse paraphrase the problem? Yes _____ No _____

4. Interruption

5. Ignoring

6. Uses Threats

7. Name-calling

8. Places Blame

9. Places responsibility for feelings or beliefs outside self

10. Attribution

11. Brought up past

12. Comments on irrelevant details

Husband  Wife
13. Over-generalization

14. Over-reaction
APPENDIX C

Contract for Conflict Management Skills Class

We __________________________ and __________________________ on this ________ day of __________, 1978, contract with Laurie Assadi and Mary Lewis to attend eight (8) conflict skills management classes designed to help us learn better ways of negotiating change in our relationship. We understand that our active and continued participation in this class is essential to our achieving this goal. We will receive careful instructions in ways to improve our marital interactions, professional supervision of outside projects, and individual consultations with the therapists.

In order to facilitate my class participation for the entire eight weeks, I agree to make a refundable cash deposit of $35.00 on or before the first class meeting on ________, 1978. This deposit may be earned back according to the following schedule provided we meet these conditions: 1) We attend the class; 2) We return borrowed equipment or materials; and 3) We provide the therapists with necessary records of our interactions on conflict issues.

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Signed: __________________________________________

Signed: __________________________________________

Laurie Assadi

Mary Lewis

Total $35.00

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APPENDIX D

Fight Outcome Checklist

Name: _____________________________ Date: __________

Please check the items that apply: check more than one if applicable.

The outcome of our fights often includes:

_____ 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
APPENDIX E

Spontaneous Fights

Name: ____________________________________

Day and time fight occurred: ________________________________

Events immediately preceding the fight: ________________________________

What did you fight about? ___________________________________________

What was the outcome? _____________________________________________

What did you do after the fight?

Husband: ________________________________________________

Wife: _______________________________________________________

Wife: How satisfied are you with the outcome? 1 2 3 4 5

1 2 3 4 5

Not at all Very Satisfied

How hurtful was this fight? 1 2 3 4 5

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

1 2 3 4 5

Not at all Very Satisfied

How hurtful was this fight? 1 2 3 4 5

1 2 3 4 5

Very Hurtful Didn't hurt at all
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?

Husband: ____________________________________________________________

Wife: ________________________________________________________________

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: ____________________________