A Comparison of the Generalization of Behavioral Marital Therapy and Enhanced Behavioral Marital Therapy

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1.1 Aim
In this study, we sought to extend the literature on marital therapy by comparing the effects of BMT and an enhanced BMT (EBMT) on behavior and cognitions in clinic and home settings and by relating the extent of generalized change to clinical outcome. The BMT approach focused on the traditional components of behavior exchange and communication skills training. The EBMT approach added cognitive and affective change strategies and generalization enhancement procedures to the BMT.

2.1 Hypotheses
We hypothesized that couples receiving EBMT would generalize behavioral and cognitive changes across settings more than couples receiving BMT. Furthermore, on the basis of the assumption that generalized change would be crucial to clinical improvement, we predicted that the extent of generalized change would predict improvement on marital satisfaction.

3.1 Results
Both therapies produced significant reductions in levels of communication negativity, reported negative cognitions, and reported negative affect across clinic and home settings. Significantly reduced numbers of stressful marital interactions were reported at home after both treatments. Contrary to predictions, there was no evidence to support the superiority of EBMT in enhancing generalization effects across settings or response modalities. Indeed, the pattern of results of the two interventions was very similar. When the pre- to posttreatment changes are considered, the major conclusion from the study is that both forms of treatment resulted in impressive generalization across settings for the behavioral, cognitive, and affective domains.

4.1 Findings
It is concluded that BMT results in impressive generalization of communication and cognitive change, but it remains to be demonstrated that these changes are crucial to improvements in marital satisfaction.

5.1 Implications
Given the considerable overlap between most marital therapy approaches, direct observational assessment of treatment integrity is desirable in future comparative marital therapy outcome research. Although new concepts may be needed, it is important to note that BMT is still the best replicated effective marital therapy (Hahlweg & Markman, 1988). Two major contributions of BMT have been the emphasis on empirical evaluation of outcome and assessing change in couples by observation. The current study builds on that tradition by assessing the generalization of therapeutic change to home settings. Future research needs to evaluate the impact of new suggestions to improve marital therapy on the actions, thinking, and feeling of distressed couples in their daily marital interactions. A potentially effective focus for marital interventions involves greater emphasis on individual partners’ skills, responsibilities, and choices through the systematic application of self-management procedures. Partners could be taught to take concurrent individual responsibility for their relationship difficulties by acquiring skills such as self-selection of relationship goals, self-monitoring, self-determination of performance standards, self-evaluation, and self-reinforcement, which focus on self-change as a complement to the commonly advocated dyadic focus in the delivery of BMT. Although most BMT manuals include mention of individual self-management, greater emphasis on this may foster more balanced attention to both self- and partner-change by those entering marital therapy.

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