

Enriching Newlyweds: An Evaluation of Three Enrichment Programs

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Three marital enrichment programs were evaluated to determine their effectiveness with a newlywed population. Seventy-one couples were divided among three groups, and 28 couples were assigned to a control group. Results were mixed when treatment groups were combined and compared to the control group. While t-tests using change scores demonstrated differences on some important variables, analyses using ANCOVA demonstrated no change. Comparisons among the three programs suggested that none was clearly superior. Treatment couples reported very high levels of satisfaction with their participation in the programs, and almost all couples (98%) indicated they would recommend the programs to other newlywed couples.

There is no shortage of indicators suggesting that marriage in our society is a troubled institution. While recent data suggest that divorce rates may have peaked, current projections indicate that four of 10 marriages occurring today will end in divorce (Norton & Miller, 1992). Levels of marital success based on measures of marital quality and stability give evidence of substantial decline during the 1970s and 1980s (Glenn, 1991).

In addition to validating the need for practitioners specializing in marital therapy, this abundance of marital difficulties would seem to underscore the need for preventive interventions that address potential trouble spots in relationships before they reach a point of crisis. One such approach is marriage enrichment, which seeks to address potential issues before they become problems and to equip couples with necessary skills and insights to handle future difficulties. The underlying purpose of many marital enrichment programs is to help stable marriages become even stronger, although evidence exists that a substantial number of troubled couples are attracted to enrichment as a perceived alternative to therapy (Powell & Wampler, 1982). Research on the effectiveness of marital enrichment has been guardedly optimistic. Hof and Miller (1981) and Zimpher (1988), reviewing outcome studies on enrichment, found programs to be generally effective, particularly among those that emphasize communication training and behavioral exchange. Giblin, Sprenkle, and Sheehan (1985), in a meta-analysis of 85 studies on marital enrichment, discovered a moderate overall effect size representing a 17% improvement in marital functioning attributable to participation in an enrichment program. This effect size was not as high as in similar analyses conducted with studies on psychotherapy (Smith et al., 1980). However, in view of the less intensive nature of the psychoeducational approach to begin with, these results are encouraging. In their decade review of marital enrichment, Guerney and Maxson (1990) conclude that "there is

no doubt that, on the whole, enrichment programs work and the field is an entirely legitimate one" (p. 1133).

Despite these positive reviews, a number of concerns exist regarding the utility of enrichment programs. Levant (1986) cautions that enrichment programs are sometimes oversold, noting that claims made about the efficacy outstrip empirical support. Hof and Miller (1981) temper their positive conclusions by noting that much of the outcome research is methodologically flawed. Gurman and Kniskern (1977) raise questions about the long-term effectiveness of enrichment programs, suggesting that change may be illusory. Doherty and colleagues (Doherty & Walker, 1982; Doherty et al., 1986; Lester & Doherty, 1983), in a series of studies evaluating Marriage Encounter, raise concerns over deterioration effects, which are generally not measured in research on marriage enrichment.

From a developmental perspective, newlyweds are often considered to be prime candidates for marital enrichment. The transition to marriage requires accomplishment of a number of developmental tasks, such as the formation of a new marital system, regulating distance with extended families, and developing effective conflict resolution skills. While transitions between stages can add stressors that threaten to derail a family system (Haley, 1973), they may also provide increased opportunity for change as a family seeks to regain its balance. Premarital couples are often viewed as unrealistic in their expectations about marriage and, hence, resistant to change. Newlyweds, on the other hand, are seen as being past these high levels of idealism and as beginning to encounter difficulties common to marriage. At the same time, interaction patterns are still in the process of forming. As such, couples in the early marital stage may be more malleable than at points later in their marriages.

While some newlyweds may seek therapy for marital problems, many early marital couples could benefit from the less threatening intervention offered by enrichment programs. Mace (1982) states, "Working with newlyweds would, in my opinion, be the best way to make the transition from remedial to preventive services for families" (p. 201).

In response to this thinking, several enrichment programs specifically focusing on this stage of the family life cycle have been devised (Bader & Rimmel, 1987; Brussius, 1984; Dyer & Dyer, 1990; Michaels, 1986). Research evaluating their effectiveness, however, has been lacking. While there may be general agreement on the value of using enrichment programs with an early marital population, the need exists for assessing the effectiveness of such programs.

This study was intended to be a beginning step in that direction. Three differing approaches evaluated in terms of their effectiveness with a newlywed population. To discover whether participation in an enrichment program was helpful for couples, the three treatment groups were combined to test the following hypothesis.

Hypothesis 1: Participants in an enrichment group will show significantly greater changes between pretest and posttest on the relationship dimensions measured than members of a control group.

The relative effectiveness of the three programs was also compared in hopes of discovering effective components in the delivery of enrichment to newlywed couples. Because of the limited amount of research in this area, it was difficult to predict the relative effectiveness of these programs, although it was expected they would differ. Accordingly, the following hypothesis was set forth in the null form.

Hypothesis 2: There will be no significant differences among treatment groups in the changes between pretest and posttest for the relationship dimensions measured.

Additionally, participant satisfaction was considered to be a salient factor in evaluating the effectiveness of a program. All participants in a treatment group were assessed concerning their level of satisfaction with their overall experience, group leader, and program materials, as well as their willingness to repeat or recommend the experience to others.

METHODS

Programs

Initially, five programs were considered for inclusion in this research. Four of these were targeted specifically at couples in the transition to marriage, while one was a general marriage enrichment program. A preliminary statistical power analysis indicated that, given sample size estimates, no more than three programs should be considered; hence, two programs were eliminated from consideration. The primary criterion in the selection process was a desire to evaluate programs that were distinctly different in their approach to early marital enrichment. Accordingly, the following three programs were chosen.

Learning to Live Together (Bader & Remmel, 1987). This is an eight-session program specifically designed for couples in the transition to marriage. A revision of a program developed at the University of Toronto in the 1970s, it was originally intended to be conducted in two separate segments, one premaritally and the other several months after marriage. However, it may be used entirely after marriage, as was the case in this study. Longitudinal research on this program (Bader et al., 1980, 1981) has found it to be effective in helping couples to deal with conflict in nondestructive ways and in encouraging them to seek outside assistance in solving problems when needed.

Central to Learning to Live Together (LLT) is the use of videotape. In each session, a videotaped segment pertaining to the topic under consideration for that session is viewed and discussed. Topics center around common sources of conflict in early marriage: communication, family-of-origin, finances, sexuality, conflict resolution, roles, and parenting. Home-work exercises are also included with most sessions.

Growing Together (Dyer & Dyer, 1990). *Growing Together* (GT) was also designed for use with premarital and newlywed couples. This program advocates a growth-oriented philosophy of marriage, encouraging couples to plan for progress in their relationship. A unique feature of *Growing Together* is that it incorporates an assessment instrument. At the beginning of the program, couples complete one of the PREPARE/ENRICH inventories and are provided feedback during the course of the program.

Growing Together relies on three primary methods: brief presentations by the group leader, group discussion, and private couple exercises. There are a total of eight sessions, with topics focusing on areas of concern common to newlywed couples, including family-of-origin, communication, conflict resolution, sexuality/intimacy, financial management, and developing a growth plan. Two sessions the initial session and the session on financial management were not included in this research. The initial session is primarily concerned with completing the PREPARE/ENRICH inventories, a task completed prior to the first session in this study in order to be consistent with the other programs in terms of length between pretest and posttest. The session on financial management was not included because it was not completed at the start of data collection.

Training in Marriage Enrichment, or TIME (Dinkmeyer & Carlson, 1984). *TIME* is a general marriage enrichment program reflecting an Adlerian theoretical perspective. The fact that it does not directly target newlyweds was a key factor in its selection for this study. It was decided to evaluate a general marital enrichment program to determine whether the developmental design of the other programs signified a clear advantage with this population.

TIME consists of 10 sessions that primarily emphasize encouragement, communication, and conflict resolution skills. It is highly skill oriented, using a text, an audiotape, and couple exercises to introduce various skills related to its primary topics. Like *Growing Together*, *TIME* groups utilize facilitator presentations, group discussion, and couple exercises as primary methods.

Sample

Family developmentalists have traditionally identified the early marital stage of the family life cycle as short-lived, extending up to two years (Duvall, 1957; Mattessich & Hill, 1987). Previous research (Bader et al., 1981; Guldner, 1971) has suggested that newlyweds who have been married less than six months are less likely to be receptive than those who have been married for longer amounts of time. Therefore, couples who had been married between six months and two years at the time of pretest were sought for this study.

A sample of 99 couples (198 individuals) were assigned to one of four groups (GT, n = 21; LLT, n = 24; *TIME*, n = 26; Control, n = 28). Couples were recruited in four separate waves. During the first three waves, clergy who were users of the

PREPARE/ENRICH inventories were asked to supply a list of couples they knew who had wedding dates falling in a period of time six months to two years prior to data collection. These couples were then contacted by mail and invited to participate in the study. Nine percent (9%) of invited couples opted to take part in the study. Some couples were also recruited through media efforts and personal sources of the researcher. Couples were assigned to one of the four (three treatment and one control). Initially, random assignment of subjects was attempted. However, geographic and schedule constraints of participants sometimes influenced group assignment, compromising the randomization of the sample.

In order to expedite data collection procedures, recruitment strategies were altered for the final wave. Potential group leaders were contacted and asked to recruit participants for their own groups. These groups were supplemented with couples who had been unable to participate in previous waves. The final wave yielded enough subjects to complete the number needed for the sample.

The mean length of marriage for the sample was 13 months, with a mean age of 26 years for both males and females. With the exception of two couples (one married for two months, the other for 32 months), all couples fell within the six months to two years parameters. In most cases both partners were in their first marriage (93%) and had no children (79%). The sample was primarily Caucasian (99%) and indicated an affiliation with a Christian church (95%). A majority had completed at least a four-year college degree (males = 59%, females = 62%), had professional occupations (males = 48%, females = 56%), and reported individual incomes of over \$20,000 per year (males = 77%, females = 69%).

To determine if differences existed among the groups for demographic variables, one-way analyses of variance were performed for continuous variables and chi-square analyses were conducted for categorical variables. A significant difference was found for only one of 13 demographic variables, religious preference (males, $X^2 = 43.72$, $df = 21$, $p > .05$; females, $x^2 = 60.61$, $df = 24$, $p > .001$), with the TIME group containing a heavier concentration of Catholic members than the others. Because this was the only variable with a significant difference, the groups were judged to be demographically homogeneous.

Instruments

ENRICH. The primary outcome measure used in this study was ENRICH (Olson et al., 1986), a multifaceted instrument assessing 13 areas of marital functioning: 1) marital satisfaction, 2) personality issues, 3) communication, 4) conflict resolution, 5) financial management, 6) leisure activities, 7) sexual relationship, 8) children and parenting, 9) family and friends, 10) equalitarian roles, 11) religious orientation, 12) marital adaptability, and 13) marital cohesion. The instrument also contains an Idealistic Distortion scale, which is used to correct for social desirability on each of the other scales.

ENRICH generates two types of scores. A percentile-like individual score based on extensive norms is calculated for each partner. These scores are adjusted according to the level of social desirability present in the Idealistic Distortion scale to produce a Revised Score (REV). In addition, a couple score, known as Positive Couple Agreement (PCA), is computed based on the level of partner consensus for each scale. Areas with high PCA scores are viewed as strengths, while low PCA scores are indicative of areas in need of growth for the couple.

Internal consistency estimates range from .68 to .86 for ENRICH scales, while test-retest estimates range from .77 to .92; ENRICH has also been shown to have excellent construct and discriminant validity (Fournier et al., 1983; Fowers & Olson, 1989).

Satisfaction Questionnaire. A questionnaire was constructed to evaluate the level of satisfaction experienced by participants. Four general areas were addressed: 1) participants' satisfaction with their overall experience, 2) their willingness to repeat the experience or to recommend it to a friend, 3) their satisfaction with materials associated with the program, and 4) their satisfaction with the leader. The questionnaire comprised 19 items, including two open-ended items inquiring about program strengths and weaknesses.

Procedure

A pretest/posttest design was utilized with couples in each of the treatment groups completing ENRICH prior to participating in the program and again when the program was completed. Satisfaction questionnaires were completed at the time of posttest. Control couples completed ENRICH twice at a similar time interval to treatment couples (approximately 10 weeks) and were offered the option of taking part in a program after the posttest. A total of 128 couples (treatment group, $n = 89$; control group, $n = 39$) completed the pretest, and 99 couples completed the posttest, resulting in a completion rate of approximately 77% (T = 81%; C = 72%).

Groups were conducted on a weekly basis for between six and 10 weeks, depending on the program being used. Group leaders were volunteers recommended by clergy who were users of PREPARE/ENRICH on the basis of their ability to work with small groups and their interest in marital enrichment. Leaders were screened by the researcher, who was also responsible for assigning them to their respective programs. None of the leaders had previously conducted the program they were facilitating. Although extensive training was not supplied, leaders were provided with an introduction to their program by the researcher. Since none of the programs in this study require or provide for facilitator training prior to conducting a program, it was judged that these conditions would approximate reality. Group leaders were also contacted on a regular basis to ensure they were following the protocol of their program and to address questions that may have arisen.

A total of 14 groups ranging in size from five to nine couples were conducted for the three programs: five groups each for Learning to Live Together ($X = 5.4$) and TIME ($X = 6.8$) and four groups for Growing Together ($X = 7.0$). Learning to Live Together had the smallest percentage of dropouts, with a completion rate of 89%. TIME and Growing Together had similar proportions of dropouts, with completion rates of 76% and 75%, respectively. There were a total of 17 group leaders, including three couples who served cofacilitators. Twelve leaders were male and five were female.

RESULTS

Hypothesis 1

In order to assess the overall effect of participation in an enrichment program, all three treatment groups were combined and compared with the control group. One-way analyses of variance were conducted for each variable on pretest scores, and significant differences were found between treatment and control groups on six individual and three couple variables. To adjust for these differences, two separate methods of analysis were used. First, change or difference scores were calculated by subtracting the mean of the pretest from the mean of the posttest. T-tests were then conducted using these scores as the unit of analysis. Second, analysis covariance was utilized. ANCOVA estimates what the posttest scores would have been if the treatments had been equal at pretest by partialling out the effects of a covariate. In this case, the pretest scores were used as a covariate. An adjusted mean score of the posttest functioned as the unit of analysis.

Results are reported in Tables 1 and 2. No significant differences were discovered for either individual or couple variables when ANCOVA was used to analyze the data. However, the t-tests of change scores revealed significant differences for six individual variables (communication, personality issues, marital satisfaction, conflict resolution, family/friends, and financial management) and three couple variables (personality issues, family/friends, and financial management).

Hypothesis 2

The same methods of analysis were used to assess differences among the three programs. Results are reported in Table 3. Significant differences were found using ANCOVA for two individual variables: conflict resolution and adaptability. Post hoc analyses using Tukey's HSD revealed that scores from the TIME group were found for significantly higher than those of the Growing Together group on conflict resolution and that both the TIME and Growing Together groups were significantly higher than the Learning to Live Together group on adaptability. No differences were discovered for any of the couple variables.

Change scores among the groups were analyzed through one-way analyses of variance. Significant differences were found for conflict resolution and communication among the individual variables. Post hoc procedures revealed the TIME and Learning to Live Together groups to be significantly higher than the Growing Together group on

communication and TIME to be significantly higher than Growing Together on conflict resolution. As with the previous procedure, no differences were couple variables.

In addition to the comparison of group means detailed above, differences among the programs were also assessed using the Reliable Change Index, or RC (Jacobson et al., 1984), an index measuring magnitude of change. Jacobson et al. have proposed a formula using pre/ posttest scores and the standard error of the difference between the measures for determining whether the degree of change for a given case is sufficiently large to be considered clinically relevant. Cases exceeding a cutoff point of 1.96 on the RC (equivalent to two standard deviations) are judged to have made changes large enough to ensure that they are beyond measurement error. Results are reported in Table 4. Over 10% of the cases exceeded the RC on six variables for = (personality issues, communication, conflict resolution, financial management, sexual relationship, and adaptability), on two variables for Growing Together (financial management and adaptability), and on four variables for Learning to Live Together (communication, conflict resolution, sexual relationship, and cohesion).

TABLE 1
Treatment vs. Control Group Individual Scores:
ANCOVA and t-Tests of Change Scores

Variable	Treatment t (n=142) Pre	Post	Pre	Control (n=56) Post	ANCOVA F	Change scores t-value
Personality Issues						
Mean	34.3	35.0	37.4	36.7	2.25	-2.71**
S.D.	6.7	6.5	6.1	5.8		
Marital Satisfaction						
Mean	35.5	36.4	37.6	37.2	1.45	-2.32*
S.D.	6.0	5.4	4.6	4.7		
Equalitarian Roles						
Mean	40.0	39.6	38.1	37.9	.06	.27
S.D.	5.1	5.3	5.2	5.8		
Communication						
Mean	33.0	34.3	36.0	35.0	2.04	-3.14**
S.D.	6.8	6.1	5.7	5.5		
Conflict Resolution						
Mean	34.2	35.2	35.8	35.3	2.01	-2.30*
S.D.	6.0	5.3	5.9	5.6		

Variable	Treatment (n=142) Pre	Post	Pre	Control (n=56) Post	ANCOVA F	Change scores t-value
Financial Management						
Mean	35.1	36.1	36.8	36.7	1.93	-1.90*
S.D.	6.3	6.5	6.0	6.5		
Leisure Activities						
Mean	35.1	35.3	34.2	34.0	1.79	-.85*
S.D.	5.4	5.1	5.1	4.8		
Sexual Relationship						
Mean	38.5	38.8	39.2	38.9	.57	-1.31
S.D.	6.1	5.7	5.6	5.5		
Family/Friends						
Mean	35.6	35.9	36.5	35.9	2.73	-2.13*
S.D.	5.3	5.3	5.5	5.4		
Religious Orientation						
Mean	36.0	36.4	39.6	39.2	.07	-1.05
S.D.	7.2	7.2	6.9	6.7		
Adaptability						
Mean	15.1	15.2	14.9	15.6	1.07	.92
S.D.	3.2	3.0	3.4	3.2		
Cohesion						
Mean	20.07	20.9	21.1	21.1	.04	-.02
S.D.	3.4	3.3	3.4	2.5		

* significant at the 0.05 level

** significant at the 0.01 level

TABLE 2
Treatment vs. Control Group Couple Scores:
ANCOVA and t-Tests of Change Scores

Variable	Treatment (n=71) Pre	Post	Pre	Control (n=28) Post	ANCOVA F	Change scores t-value
Personality Issues						
Mean	3.90	4.34	5.32	5.04	1.75	2.16
S.D.	2.43	2.46	2.94	2.91		
Marital Satisfaction						
Mean	4.93	5.39	5.79	5.64	.95	1.64
S.D.	2.60	2.69	2.59	2.48		
Equalitarian Roles						
Mean	6.86	6.75	6.14	6.29	.09	-.80
S.D.	.16	2.22	2.19	2.23		
Communication						
Mean	3.79	4.17	5.07	4.89	.29	1.55
S.D.	2.63	2.67	2.71	2.54		
Conflict Resolution						
Mean	4.41	4.68	5.11	5.07	.10	1.55
S.D.	2.51	2.66	3.10	2.99		
Financial Management						
Mean	4.75	5.65	5.64	5.71	2.28	1.79*
S.D.	2.65	2.85	2.68	3.23		
Leisure Activities						
Mean	4.89	5.14	4.64	4.61	.13	.96
S.D.	2.30	2.46	2.42	2.23		
Sexual Relationship						
Mean	6.18	6.42	6.79	6.68	1.05	.91
S.D.	2.77	2.58	2.81	2.55		
Family/Friends						
Mean	5.18	5.59	5.71	5.39	2.70	2.13*
S.D.	2.17	2.41	2.37	2.62		
Religious Orientation						
Mean	4.62	4.76	6.64	6.46	.20	1.11
S.D.	3.34	3.49	2.93	2.90		
Adaptability						
Mean	1.48	1.35	1.86	1.89	1.95	-.46
S.D.	1.05	1.22	1.18	1.57		
Cohesion						
Mean	3.55	3.58	3.82	3.46	.35	.83
S.D.	1.66	1.65	1.54	1.75		

* significant at the 0.05 level

TABLE 3
Comparison of Treatment Programs (Individual Scores):
ANCOVA and ANOVA of Change Scores

Variable	GT(n=42)		TIME (n=52)		LLT(n=48)		ANCOVA		
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	F	Post Hoc	F
Personality Issues									
Mean	35.80	36.14	34.39	35.75	32.79	33.28	1.33		.95
S.D.	5.82	5.86	7.11	6.37	7.03	7.06			
Marital Satisfaction									
Mean	36.87	37.23	36.04	37.31	33.69	34.67	1.14		.60
S.D.	5.61	4.42	6.08	5.66	6.15	5.43			
Equalitarian Roles									
Mean	40.12	40.17	40.69	40.31	39.15	38.49	.86		.49
S.D.	4.94	4.80	5.57	5.35	4.70	5.64			
Communication									
Mean	35.31	34.82	32.61	34.73	31.56	33.60	1.61		3.95*
S.D.	6.87	6.02	6.91	6.07	6.53	6.34			
Conflict Resolution									
Mean	35.45	34.82	33.73	35.90	33.47	34.63	3.17*	T>GT	4.13*
S.D.	6.52	5.33	6.25	5.17	5.35	5.56			
Financial Management									
Mean	35.25	36.73	36.52	37.51	33.35	34.11	.96		.28
S.D.	6.79	6.68	5.78	5.49	6.29	6.98			
Leisure Activities									
Mean	36.60	36.24	35.35	35.57	33.85	34.27	.08		.54
S.D.	4.38	4.33	5.72	5.38	5.47	5.34			
Sexual Relationship									
Mean	38.95	39.00	38.87	39.90	37.65	37.35	2.26		1.01
S.D.	5.93	5.43	6.56	5.85	5.94	5.55			
Family/Friends									
Mean	36.29	36.39	35.75	35.67	34.92	35.73	.52		.79
S.D.	4.38	5.34	6.07	6.22	5.16	4.95			
Religious Orientation									
Mean	35.57	35.36	36.76	37.37	35.38	36.19	1.35		1.18
S.D.	5.58	5.91	8.82	8.57	6.82	6.83			
Adaptability									
Mean	15.3	15.65	15.27	15.77	14.60	14.07	3.96*	T,GT>LLT	1.43
S.D.	3.46	20.88	3.19	2.89	3.08	2.96			
Cohesion									
Mean	21.20	20.88	21.13	21.40	20.33	20.49	.50		.23
S.D.	3.70	2.81	2.87	3.29	3.66	3.95			

* significant at the .05 level

TABLE 4
Reliable Change Index Percentages*

Variable	GT	Time	LLT
Personality Issues	0	5.8	0
Marital Satisfaction	5.1	8.3	8.9
Equalitarian Roles	4.9	3.8	6.4
Communication	7.1	19.2	17.8
Conflict Resolution	7.5	21.6	12.8
Financial Management	17.5	13.5	8.7
Leisure Activities	2.4	5.8	8.3
Sexual Relationships	9.5	13.5	10.9
Family/Friends	2.4	5.8	6.2
Religious Orientation	2.4	7.8	8.3
Adaptability	15.0	15.4	8.9
Cohesion	4.9	9.6	11.1

*All numbers represent percentage of cases exceeding the RC cutoff point of 1.96

Participant Satisfaction

Results of the satisfaction questionnaire revealed that the programs were well received by most participants (see Table 5). Over 70% indicated their overall experience was "excellent" or "very good," 81% found the topics "extremely" or "very" relevant, and 51% reported they had learned an exceptional amount" or "very much" from their program. In addition, 96% indicated they would repeat the experience if they had it to do over, while 98% reported they would recommend it to a friend.

Group leaders were well received by the respondents, with 77% rating their overall effectiveness as "excellent" or "very good." Participants also reported benefiting from group discussion, with 69% rating it as "excellent" or "very good." Materials associated with the programs (written materials audio/videotapes, etc.) received somewhat lower ratings. This was especially true for the video and audiotapes, which only 20% of the participants in programs using these materials rated as "excellent" or very good."

Paired t-tests on scores created by combining related items in each of the four general areas evaluated were used to assess differences between males and females. In general, both males and females described their experience as a positive one, although females did report a significantly higher level of general satisfaction than did males. No significant differences were found for the other assessed areas. Both husbands and wives found the programs to be satisfactory, reported high levels of satisfaction with their group leaders, and overwhelmingly indicated they would be willing to repeat the experience or recommend it to a friend.

Differences among the programs were assessed by conducting one-way ANOVAs on the same scores created for assessing male and female differences. Significant differences were found in three of the four areas: general satisfaction, recommendation response, and program satisfaction. Post hoc analyses found participants in TIME to be more generally satisfied than those in Learning to Live Together. Additionally, participants in both TIME and Growing Together were found to be more satisfied with specific aspects of the programs and to be more willing to repeat the experience and recommend it to others than those in Learning to Live Together. No significant differences were discovered among the groups concerning satisfaction with group leaders.

DISCUSSION

The notion that marital enrichment has a significant positive effect on newlywed couples received mixed support in the research. No significant differences were found for either individual or couple scores when treatment groups were compared with the control group using ANCOVA. However, results based on t-tests of change scores did reveal positive results. These mixed findings suggest that caution is in order when asserting that these programs have an impact on newlywed couples.

There is evidence in this research to support the value of enrichment with newlyweds. The t-tests of change scores revealed significant differences in six key areas of marital functioning, including marital satisfaction, communication, and conflict resolution. While this method of analysis is generally considered less stringent than ANCOVA, it does reflect some positive differences between treatment and control groups. It is worth noting that, although positive changes for the treatment groups were modest, change scores for the control group generally showed a decline between pretest and posttest.

Changes in functioning produced by enrichment programs also tend to be moderate in size when compared to the effects of therapy (Giblin et al., 1985). Consequently, large changes would not be expected from this type of program. This may be due in part to the preventive goal of enrichment, which is to equip couples with relationship skills in order to avert or lessen difficulties at a later point in time. In a review of recent research in marital enrichment, Zimpher (1988) found a delayed increase in results at follow-up among a number of outcome studies. It may be that the skills and levels of awareness gained during the programs will have benefit these couples at later, more stressful points in their relationships (i.e., transitions between developmental stages).

Additionally, couples in this study reported very high levels of satisfaction with their experience. One of the greatest struggles faced by enrichment providers is that of drawing a distinction between the proactive nature of enrichment and the reactive approach of therapy. Providing a successful enrichment experience early on in a relationship may open the door to future preventive interventions. That the respondents

almost unanimously indicated that they would repeat the experience and would recommend it to a friend indicates that the time invested was perceived as well spent.

On the other hand, results of this study suggest that the effects of enrichment on newlywed couples may not be as great as has been previously supposed. The fact that the results did not show stronger effects may be attributable to several factors. First, it is possible that the programs were able to generate only moderate effects. While the programs addressed areas that are developmentally significant for newlyweds, they may have lacked the depth, coverage, or methodology needed to produce more significant changes. Further investigation is needed to determine specific ways in which these programs might be strengthened to match this population.

TABLE 5
Satisfaction Responses on Selected Items

	Males (%) (n=99)	Females (%) (n=99)	Total (%) (n=198)
Satisfaction with overall experience			
Excellent	23*	31	24
Very Good	46	41	44
Good	24	21	23
Fair	6	4	5
Poor	1	1	1
Topics relevant?			
Extremely	23	33	28
Very	54	52	53
Somewhat	19	13	16
Occasionally	4	1	3
Not at all	0	0	0
Amount learned			
Exceptional amount	9	13	11
Very much	40	41	41
Much	27	19	23
Some	23	23	23
Very little	1	4	3
Satisfaction w/program materials			
Excellent	9	14	12
Very Good	46	41	44
Good	35	34	34
Fair	10	7	9
Poor	0	3	1
Overall satisfaction w/group leader			
Excellent	36	43	39
Very Good	41	34	38
Good	14	14	14
Fair	7	7	7
Poor	1	1	1
Willingness to repeat experience?			
Yes	96	96	96
No	4	4	4
Willingness to recommend?			
Yes	99	98	98
No	1	3	2

* Percentages may not total 100 due to rounding.

Second, group leader effects may have limited the usefulness of the programs. Group leaders had no prior experience in using their programs, and it is reasonable to expect that subsequent uses could produce more positive results. Also, in spite of high ratings on rapport and overall effectiveness for this group of facilitators, groups conducted by experienced professionals or individuals with in-depth training in the specific programs may have helped to produce more dramatic results. Given the lack of training requirements for these programs, there is no reason to assume that they would be led by such facilitators under normal conditions.

However, comparisons with effect sizes found in leader-trained marital enrichment programs suggest that the differences may be more limited than they appear. In their meta-analysis, Giblin, Sprenkle, and Sheehan (1985) provide effect sizes for a number of enrichment programs that require leader training, including Relationship Enhancement (.96) and Couples Communication (.44). These well-established programs tend to be more limited in their scope of variables than the programs in this study, focusing on communication and conflict resolution skills. While the total effect size for this sample is a .21, effect sizes for communication (.42) and conflict resolution (.33) approach those of Couples Communication. Thus, while these results underscore the value of a formal training process for leaders of these and other marriage enrichment programs, other factors may carry more weight in evaluating the effectiveness of treatment outcomes.

Third, it is possible that significant changes in marital functioning are less likely to occur at the newlywed stage than at later stages in the family life cycle because couples are more satisfied with their relationship. Research on marital satisfaction over the life cycle has consistently found the highest levels at the early marital stage (Anderson et al., 1983; Olson et al., 1989; Rollins & Feldman, 1970). Consequently, less evidence of positive change might be expected to occur at this stage than at subsequent stages in the life cycle due to a ceiling effect.

Very few differences were found among the programs when their relative effectiveness was compared. TIME appeared to be more effective than Growing Together in strengthening conflict resolution skills. Significant differences were found using both ANCOVA and ANOVA of change scores, and the percentage of cases surpassing the RC cutoff point was almost three times greater for TIME than for Growing Together (21.6% vs. 7.5%). One reason for this difference may be the relative emphasis given to conflict resolution by these programs. TIME devotes fully half of its sessions to conflict resolution and the related area of communication skills, while Growing Together gives one session apiece to each of these areas.

Both TIME and Growing Together appeared more effective at increasing adaptability among participants than Learning to Live Together, a finding supported by ANCOVA and the RC index (TIME = 15.4%; Growing Together = 15.0%; Learning to Live Together = 8.9%). This may be partially due to the direct emphasis placed on intentionality (or the notion of choosing growth-producing behaviors) found in the more

effective programs, which is concerned with the capacity of a couple to make appropriate adaptations when needed in their relationship.

In spite of the fact that conflict resolution and adaptability are important areas of marital functioning, there is little evidence to suggest that any of these programs is clearly superior to the others regarding changes in the dynamic variables. With each method of analysis, significant differences were found for only two of 12 individual variables. Moreover, none of the couple variables, which assess the degree of consensus between partners, showed significant changes. While the programs differed considerably in approach, differences in their impact were small.

Unlike the assessment of change in marital functioning, substantial differences in satisfaction levels did exist among the programs. Learning to Live Together was clearly the least well received, with significantly lower ratings than the other programs in willingness to repeat or recommend to others and in specific program components. It was also significantly lower than TIME in general satisfaction. Curiously, Learning to Live Together had the highest completion rate of the three programs. It is possible that dissatisfied participants were more likely to drop out of the other programs than couples in Learning to Live Together, resulting in lower satisfaction scores.

The two most obvious differences between Learning to Live Together and the other programs are in the degree of structure and the variety of activities. Both TIME and Growing Together have fairly high levels of structure (clearly set agendas, suggested time limits, etc.) and a wider variety of activities than Learning to Live Together, which relies primarily on video presentations to spur group discussion and provides comparatively little structure to which group leaders can adhere. These differences may suggest that greater structure and variety contribute to higher levels of satisfaction among newlyweds in enrichment groups.

Implications for Further Research

A limitation in this study was the lack of a follow-up assessment conducted several weeks after the posttest. Previous research (Giblin, 1986; Giblin et al., 1985) has suggested that scores in follow-up assessments with enrichment tend to drop from posttest scores. However, Bader, Riddle, and Sinclair (1981) and Zimpher (1988) found increases from posttest scores at follow-up points as much as five years later. A follow-up assessment would have been useful in determining whether positive changes had continuing effects.

Another limitation in interpreting the results of this research concerns the makeup of the sample. Demographically the couples participating in this study do not appear to be representative of the newlywed population as a whole. Educational, income, and occupational level than the norm, nearly all couples identify some sort of religious affiliation, and ethnic minorities were severely underrepresented. Some of the lack of cultural diversity may have been due to the fact that the primary recruitment source for couples was clergy (religious affiliation). However, the low response rate implies that

only a select minority of newlyweds chooses to participate in marriage enrichment. While this sample is not representative of the newlywed population as a whole, it may be representative of the population of couples electing to participate in marriage enrichment.

Several factors may be influential in identifying newlyweds who are most likely to participate in enrichment. First, the notion that newlywed couples have more discretionary time than other couples appears to be largely a myth. A number of couples who declined to participate in the study cited lack of time as a primary reason. The concern over time constraints was echoed among couples who elected to participate, many of whom indicated that a strength of their experience was the opportunity to spend time with their spouse that they otherwise might not have had. Hence, like other couples, newlyweds most likely to participate in enrichment seem to be those who have given it a high priority amidst competing time demands.

Second, enrichment among newlyweds appears to have its greatest appeal to well-educated couples. The high educational levels of couples in this sample are similar to those found by Giblin, Sprenkle, and Sheehan (1985), in whose study couples had a mean educational level of 15 years, a compared to a national average of 12.5 years. Reasons for this apparent relationship are unclear, but at least two possibilities merit further investigation: 1) highly educated couples are more comfortable with the notion of preventive intervention in marriage than are couples with lower levels of education; and 2) the present educational approaches adopted by these and other enrichment programs are best utilized by couples with advanced levels of education. In either case, it raises a concern regarding how to increase accessibility of enrichment programs to diverse populations.

Third, there may be a perception that enrichment is a form of therapy intended for troubled couples rather than a preventive approach designed to strengthen relationships. Mace (1982) indicates that couples are often resistant to enrichment because they are not currently experiencing pain in their relationship. Intervention, from this perspective, is not required until problems occur. The preventive approach offered by enrichment is not perceived as holding value for these couples. Early marital couples who participate in enrichment may tend to be those who are able to make a distinction between therapy and enrichment. To this end, Guerney and Maxson (1990) call for increased research in the area of marketing enrichment.

CONCLUSION

This research focused on the effects of marital enrichment on newlywed couples. While t-tests of change scores suggested some improvements had occurred for several variables, no significant differences were discovered for any of the assessed relationship variables when treatment groups were compared with a control group using ANCOVA. Little difference was found between the three enrichment programs in terms of their relative effectiveness, with significant differences found for only two individual variables and no couple variables. In spite of relatively small changes in relationship functioning,

participants found the programs to be highly satisfactory, and almost all indicated they would recommend them to other couples.

The lack of strong positive findings in this research may be due to methodology or to programmatic features. These results suggest that, while many newlyweds find enrichment to be a satisfying experience, immediate positive changes in relationship patterns may be limited. Longitudinal research is needed to ascertain whether there are any long-term effects of marital enrichment with newlywed couples.

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