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## RECIPROCITY COUNSELING: A RAPID LEARNING-BASED PROCEDURE FOR MARITAL COUNSELING\*

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**Summary**—Existing marital counseling procedures have not been experimentally evaluated or generally have not been based on an experimentally derived theory. The present study formulated a model of marital discord based on reinforcement theory, developed a marital counseling procedure based on that theory and experimentally evaluated its effectiveness. The model viewed marital discord as the resultant of non-reciprocated reinforcement. The counseling procedures attempted to establish general marital reciprocity of reinforcement by teaching reciprocity in several specific areas of marital unhappiness. The reciprocity procedure was conducted for about 3–4 weeks with 12 couples, after first conducting a catharsis-type counseling as a control procedure. The results showed that the reciprocity procedure increased reported marital happiness, whereas the control procedure did not. Once reciprocity was achieved in a specific problem area, the benefits generalized somewhat to other yet-to-be counseled areas. The increase in marital happiness occurred for each of the specific areas of marital interaction, for 96 per cent of the clients, and was maintained and increased during the available follow-up period. These results indicate that the procedure is an effective, rapid and enduring method of producing marital happiness.

MARITAL disharmony is a major social problem. Approximately one out of four married couples are unhappy with their marriage (Burgess and Cottrell, Jr., 1936; Renne, 1970; Landis, 1963). This unhappiness is not a transient state; the longer one is married, the greater is the probability of dissatisfaction (Bernard, 1934). Termination of unhappy marriages by divorce is increasing, as is also the number of children in the disrupted marriages (Plateris, 1970). Crime and delinquency is greater for children who are products of unhappy or broken homes (Monahan, 1957; Silver and Derr, 1966; Siegman, 1966). Alcoholism is more frequent among the separated (Gerard and Saenger, 1966; Cahalan, Cisin and Crossley, 1969). About one-half of first admissions to state mental hospitals result from marital stresses as the single major precipitating condition (Beisser and Glasser, 1968). Since 95 per cent or more of the adult population has at least one marriage in a lifetime (Jacobson, 1959), marital disharmony is a pervasive social problem.

The many theories and approaches which exist regarding marriage counseling are generally not based on experimentally derived principles. Examples are the Rational theory

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(Harper, 1960; Ellis, 1967), Role theory (Kotlar, 1967), Object Relations theory (Dicks, 1963), Family Therapy (Jackson and Weakland, 1961; Fitzgerald, 1969; Carroll *et al.*, 1963), and Psychoanalytic theory (Greene and Solomon, 1963; Miller, 1967). A widespread view is that marital discord is a result of personality disorders and that the elimination of those disorders will also eliminate the associated marital problems (see reviews by Tharp, 1963; Olson, 1970). Communication problems (Navran, 1967) and sexual problems (Levin, 1969a, 1969b) are specific areas of interaction which are commonly considered to be the focal sources of disharmony.

A reinforcement model based on experimentally derived principles has been used increasingly in recent years to treat marital problems. Specific marital problems such as frigidity (Kraft and Al-Issa, 1967; Brady, 1966; Haslam, 1965; Madsen and Ullmann, 1967; Lazarus, 1963), impotence (Cooper, 1968), and premature ejaculation (Kraft and Al-Issa, 1968) have been treated by Pavlovian-type reinforcement procedures. An operant reinforcement approach has been suggested very recently by Goldiamond (1965), Liberman (1970) and Stuart (1969). The present study develops further the operant reinforcement rationale for marital counseling, using the contractual approach of Stuart (1969) as a point of departure.

A critical aspect of the present study is its experimental evaluation. Surprisingly, virtually no study has been conducted that provides a control period or control group that would indicate that benefit that might have been derived from the simple passage of time or from simple conversation (see recent review by Olson, 1970). The notable exception is a study by Stuart (1969). The current status of marital counseling is that theories, methods and case study examples exist in superabundant profusion, but virtually no experimental evidence exists which shows that any procedure is effective. The present study will, therefore, include a control feature that will permit experimental evaluation of the results.

The present view is that two individuals marry when each expects more reinforcement to result from the married than the unmarried state. Examples of the nature of these reinforcers for particular individuals might be sex, status, companionship, children, financial gain and social approval. Once marriage has occurred, several types of interaction and potential reinforcements or annoyances derived from those interactions, become almost certain, whether or not they were anticipated. (1) *Sexual* interaction is usually a legal prerequisite for continuation of the marital status, whether or not the individual had expectations about this source of reinforcement. (2) When *children* result from sexual intercourse, the need arises for a division of responsibility for child care. (3) Cohabitation in a common *household* is, like sex, a virtual requirement for a legal marriage and is, in addition, often required by the presence of children and for reasons of financial economy. A division of labor, with its associated reinforcers and annoyances regarding the household responsibilities, is needed. (4) *Money* must now be allocated to care for these shared responsibilities of the children and household. New complex financial interactions then emerge, especially if only one partner earns the income, since the other partner becomes totally dependent on the other's willingness to distribute the income. (5) Money typically must be obtained by a *vocation* which becomes, therefore, a source of reinforcement or annoyance dependent on the income derived. The need to provide this income may result in the choice of a particular job, whose location, status and working conditions provide further sources of reinforcement or annoyance. Since (6) *social activity* and (7) *communication* seem to be a need for almost all individuals, the couple will continue to desire these activities during marriage. In reality, it is unlikely that all of an individual's social needs can be met by one other individual.

Further, the obligation of children, the household care, earning income, etc. may leave little opportunity for exercise of idiosyncratic desires. Consequently, the opportunities for (8) *personal independence* or (9) *spouse independence* present still other sources of reinforcement or annoyance.

The marital situation is considered as an emergent one. Individuals marry for the purpose of increasing their overall reinforcement, but the nature of marriage creates new sources of positive and negative reinforcers and rearranges existing sources. Further, these required areas of interaction will change continuously during the marriage since sexual needs change, children grow older, housing requirements change, job opportunities vary, as do also the desires for social interaction, personal independence, etc. The nature and degree of the positive and negative reinforcers for each marital partner will, therefore, be in a constant state of flux. As such, no fixed contract or agreement prior to or during marriage can assure maximum happiness and minimal annoyance in the future. Rather, some system is needed for continuous readjustment of the interactive satisfactions.

As noted above, happiness in marriage is considered to result when the reinforcements (satisfactions) derived from the marriage exceed the reinforcers derived from the nonmarital state. The desired outcome is that one's partner deliver these reinforcers frequently. The general procedure suggested by reinforcement theory for increasing any desired behavior is to reinforce the individual for engaging in that behavior. Consequently, the suggested method of assuring marital reinforcers for oneself is to reinforce the spouse for providing them. The strategy may be summarized as, 'Reinforce the reinforcer (person)' and is depicted in Fig. 1. Since the nature of the reinforcing interactions is changeable, each partner must

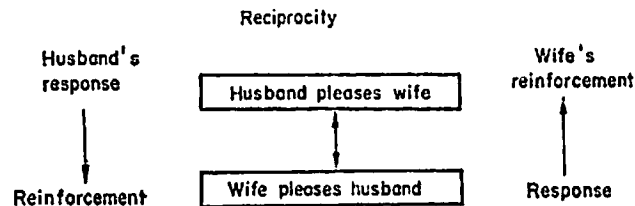


FIG. 1. A schematic representation of the marital reciprocity in terms of the response-reinforcement relation for each spouse.

continuously rediscover the reinforcers. Secondly, the relationship must be contingent: the reinforcers are to be given when, but only when, reinforcers are received. This contingent relation is adequately described by the term 'reciprocity', a concept which was also central in Stuart's (1969) marital counseling procedure. The general objective of the counseling is to maximize the elements of this reinforcement interchange such that the increased reinforcement will create a strong desire to continue the relationship.

The foregoing analysis suggests several sources of marital discord. (1) The reinforcers received from the marriage are too few in number. (2) The reinforcers are only for one or two states of need (i.e. sex or financial). (3) The reinforcers given by one spouse are not recognized as originating with that spouse (taking spouse for granted). (4) Previous reinforcers are no longer satisfying (rigid marital patterns). (5) Newly emergent desires and their associated reinforcers are not recognized (discrimination problem). (6) More satisfactions are given than are received (extinction). (7) Inhibition or inadequacy of communication about a source of satisfaction as in sexual matters. (8) The demands of marriage



interfere greatly with non-marital sources of reinforcement (insufficient personal independence) and (9) aversive control rather than positive reinforcement is used to obtain satisfactions (criticism, nagging).

The specific features of this reinforcement-directed approach were: (1) help marital partners to realize that many reinforcers were currently being given in spite of the problems; (2) to discover and initiate many other interactions that would be reinforcing to each of them, to establish a mutual contingency (reciprocity) relationship in which each partner feels assured that (3) when he makes an effort to reinforce the spouse, the spouse will reciprocate by reinforcing him and; similarly, (4) that when he receives reinforcements from the spouse, the implicit assumption is that he will, in turn, provide reinforcements to his spouse and; conversely, (5) that if he does not give reinforcers to the spouse, reinforcers will not be forthcoming from the spouse; (6) to establish this reciprocity as a general relation; (7) use as many reinforcers as possible from many and different areas of probable marital interaction, such that the marriage can help satisfy virtually all types of needs; and (8) teach the partners how to discover new reinforcers for each other, and how to maintain the reciprocated delivery of these reinforcers. The overall feeling induced in a partner should be that the spouse is continuously striving to please him (her) and he (she) in turn will strive equally to please the spouse to maintain this attitude of 'I will try to please you since you are trying to please me.'

## METHOD

### *Subjects*

Twelve married couples served as Ss. Selection was by special mail solicitation or by referral from a college counseling service. The mail solicitation consisted of a one-page notice sent to those students listed in the college mailing list of married students. Referral was by another counselor or by the receptionist of the counseling service of any student who stated on the admissions form a need for marital counseling. The only reasons for excluding clients were (1) that the client would be continuing to receive counseling from another counselor and (2) that the client stated after referral that he did not wish counseling for marital problems. For 10 of the 12 couples, the husbands were students; for the other two couples, the husbands were white collar workers. The clients' mean age was 31 yr with a range of 23-56 yr. The average duration of marriage was 9 yr (range 8 months-31 yr). One client had a previous marriage. Four couples had children. Half of the wives were employed. The average number of years of education was 15, with a range of 12-17 yr. Four couples spontaneously indicated they had received prior marital counseling.

### *Experimental design*

The experimental design was a within-Ss comparison between the Reciprocity Counseling procedure and an undirected 'catharsis-type' control procedure. The catharsis counseling was conducted for three weeks, followed by four weeks of Reciprocity Counseling. A test of marital adjustment (described below) was given each day during this 7-week period to provide a continuous measure of change in marital adjustment. Since the test was divided into nine specific problem areas, it permitted evaluation of whether specific problem areas were improved. A second feature of the experimental design attempted to determine whether the Reciprocity Counseling improved the specific areas for which the client was being counseled, thereby determining whether the problem-oriented nature of the procedure was essential.

This evaluation was made possible by restricting counseling to only three of the problem areas during the first week, an additional three problem areas during the second week and all nine problem areas during the third and fourth weeks. Improvement in the problem areas for which Reciprocity Counseling was given could then be compared with the areas for which Reciprocity Counseling had not yet been given.

TABLE 1. METHOD

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### Chronological Sequence

- I. Catharsis counseling—first 3 weeks
    - A. First week: Session 1
      1. Discussion of general information to clients
      2. Discussion of Marital Happiness Scale
    - B. First through third week: Sessions 2-6
      1. Catharsis counseling procedure
  - II. Reciprocity Counseling
    - A. Introduction (Session 6, last 15 min after the last catharsis counseling session)
      1. 'Reciprocity Awareness Procedure' assigned for next session
      2. The 'Perfect Marriage Procedure' assigned for next session
    - B. First week: Session 1
      1. Therapist discusses assigned Reciprocity Awareness procedure
      2. 'Feedback Exchange Procedure' initiated
      3. 'Appreciation Reminder Procedure' initiated
      4. Happiness contract for first three problem areas
        - (a) Fantasy Fulfillment Procedure
        - (b) Frequency Fulfillment Procedure
    - C. First week: Session 2
      1. 'Happiness Contract' reviewed
        - (a) Additional satisfactions suggested for first three problem areas
        - (b) Incorporate additional agreements into Happiness Contract
      2. Assigned as home work the 'Fantasy Fulfillment Procedure—Home Assignment'
    - D. Second week: Session 1
      1. Instruction in 'Positive Statement Procedure'
      2. Instruction in 'Sex Feedback Procedure'
      3. Incorporating agreements regarding second three problem areas into Happiness Contract
        - (a) Fantasy Fulfillment Procedure
        - (b) Frequency Fulfillment Procedure
    - E. Second week: Session 2
      1. Happiness Contract reviewed
        - (a) Additional satisfactions suggested for first six problem areas
        - (b) Incorporate agreements into Happiness Contract
      2. 'Fantasy Fulfillment Procedure: Minimal Counseling' assigned as homework for last three problem areas.
      3. Discuss Sexual Feedback Procedure
    - F. Third week: Session 1
      1. Incorporate agreements for last three problem areas into Happiness Contract
        - (a) Fantasy Fulfillment Procedure
        - (b) Frequency Fulfillment Procedure
    - G. Third week: Session 2
      1. Reviewing all agreements in Happiness Contract
        - (a) Additional satisfaction suggested for all nine problem areas
        - (b) Incorporate agreements into the Happiness Contract
    - H. Fourth week: Session 1
      1. Review outcome on all nine problem areas
      2. Make any new agreements
      3. Told next session will be last one
    - I. Fourth week: Session 2
      1. Review outcome of all problem areas
      2. Told about follow-up
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*Procedure**General information to clients (Table 1: I A 1)*

During the first session, the clients were given the general guidelines regarding the counseling. They were told that both husband and wife should be present (conjoint counseling), that they would have two sessions per week for approximately 7 weeks, that each session would be about one hour and that many of the major problems in their marriage would be discussed. They were not told that the catharsis counseling would occur during the first 3 weeks nor the Reciprocity Counseling during the subsequent 4 weeks. The objective of the counseling was stated as making both of them happy in their marriage.

TABLE 2. MARITAL HAPPINESS SCALE

This scale is intended to estimate your *current* happiness with your marriage on each of the ten dimensions listed. You are to circle one of the numbers (1-10) beside each marriage area. Numbers toward the left end of the ten-unit scale indicate some degree of unhappiness and checks toward the right end of the scale reflect varying degrees of happiness. Ask yourself this question as you rate each marriage area: "If my partner continues to act in the future as he (she) is acting *today* with respect to this marriage area, how happy will I be *with this area of our marriage*?" In other words, state according to the numerical scale (1-10) exactly how you feel today. Try to exclude all feelings of yesterday and concentrate only on the feelings of today in each of the marital areas. Also try not to allow one category to influence the results of the other categories.

	Completely unhappy					Completely happy				
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Household responsibilities	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Rearing of children	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Social activities	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Money	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Communication	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Sex	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Academic (or occupational) progress	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Personal independence	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Spouse independence	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
General happiness	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

*Marital happiness scale (Table 1: I A 2)*

The Marital Happiness Scale shown in Table 2 was specifically designed for this study to provide measures of reported marital happiness in each of the areas of marital interaction that were considered above as inherent in most marriages. Listed in the order in which they were considered, these areas are: (1) Household Responsibilities; (2) Rearing of Children; (3) Social Activities; (4) Money; (5) Communication; (6) Sex; (7) Academic or Occupational Progress; (8) Personal Independence; and (9) Spouse Independence. A tenth category, General Happiness, was a statement of the overall marital happiness. Each of the 10 categories was scored on a point continuum of self-reported happiness. The instructions at the top of the form emphasized the need for the testee to consider each problem area

separately from the others, since a common tendency was to make global negative judgments of the spouse. Secondly, the instructions emphasized the need to evaluate the problem only in terms of the current, and not past satisfactions, since the clients had a general tendency to recall incidents in the distant past. Table 3 is a listing of activities given or described to the clients to provide examples of the specific types of events to be considered within each of the major problem areas. Each client was given a 1-week's supply (seven) of the Marital Happiness Scale form and told to fill one out every evening prior to retiring and to mail it the next morning in the self-addressed envelope provided to him. These tests continued to be mailed in during the entire counseling program and reminders were given if more than 1 day elapsed without receiving a completed form.

TABLE 3. EXAMPLES OF MARRIAGE-RELATED ACTIVITIES GIVEN TO CLIENTS

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*Household Responsibilities*

Yard work; cleaning the house, such as, sweeping, dusting and cleaning the bathroom; grocery shopping; cooking the meals; washing the dishes; doing the laundry; caring for the car

*Rearing of Children*

Feeding the children; bathing the children; disciplining the children; watching the children; playing with the children; helping the children when needed

*Social Activities*

Going to the movies together; going out to dinner together; going to parties together; going to night clubs together; going for walks together; going to participate in a sporting activity together; going to watch a sporting activity together

*Money*

Having an allowance; buying and/or receiving presents; budgeting of money; savings not enough or too much; buying of clothes

*Communication*

Planned discussion periods; frequent discussion periods; frequent arguments; the use of tactful statements; misinterpretation of things said; solving problems through discussion

*Sex*

Frequency; location; type; show of public affection; extramarital relationships; jealousy

*Academic or Occupational Progress*

Spend too much time on it; does not spend enough time on it; meets status expectations; too much procrastination; earn enough money; constant complaining about the job; poor job location

*Personal Independence*

Night out by myself; day off by myself; let me drive the car by myself; let me learn to drive a car; feel free to ask spouse's advice; have money easily available without having to ask the spouse; make household decisions without asking the spouse; able to go to social events without the spouse

*Spouse Independence*

Spouse relies on you for making household decisions; spouse goes out without you, i.e. movies, sporting events, billiards; spouse will not go out without you; spouse makes most of the decisions without consulting you; spouse is possessive; spouse is not possessive enough; spouse has no friends of his/her own; spouse has no personal interests of his/her own; i.e. hobbies, friends, spouse does not know how to drive a car

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*Catharsis counseling procedure (Table 1: I B)*

During the catharsis counseling or control phase of the study, the therapist attempted a 'talking out' of the marital problems, by encouraging and prompting communication of the clients feelings about any area of the marriage to each other and to the therapist. As a means of facilitating discussion, each spouse was asked why he (she) got married, what to him (her) was the problem or problems involved in the marriage, when the problems began, and why the problems arose. The only point at which the therapist interrupted communication was when the clients were becoming physically angry with each other.

*Reciprocity awareness procedure (Table 1: II A 1)*

After the last session of the catharsis counseling, a 'Current Satisfaction Procedure' was employed to make each partner aware of the reciprocity that already existed in the marriage. Each partner, separately, was required to list, as a home assignment, at least 10 satisfactions that he believed he was currently providing to the partner, and, conversely, at least 10 satisfactions that the partner was providing him. Brief practice, by example, was given by the counselor during the session. The clients were also instructed as to how they should describe these satisfactions in terms of specific activities rather than general attitudes in order to assure agreement, i.e. 'I do the laundry twice a week', vs. 'I look after the house', or 'I give advice to her whenever she asks for it', vs. 'I provide moral support to her'. The same activity could be listed as a satisfaction that was both given and received, such as shopping or vacationing together. These lists were read aloud by the counselor at the next session and agreement obtained regarding the specific nature and extent of the reciprocity that already existed.

*Perfect marriage procedure (Table 1: II A 2)*

After the last session of catharsis counseling, the counselor employed a procedure which helped the clients to state what interactions could be reinforcing to them. The clients were required, as a home assignment and independently from each other, to list the type of interactions that would constitute their idea of a perfect marriage for each of the nine problem areas. They were instructed to be as selfish as possible in stating their 'fantasies' since they generally felt that their spouse would consider the desire unreasonable. The desires listed in this home assignment were used in the subsequent sessions to formulate new interaction patterns.

*Feedback exchange procedure (Table 1: II B 2)*

During the first session of the first week of Reciprocity Counseling, a 'Feedback Exchange Procedure' was used as a method of informing each partner as to how the other partner felt about him in regard to each of the nine problem areas during the past day. Each partner was told to exchange the completed Marital Happiness Scale forms each evening and to examine and discuss the ratings on the partner's Marital Happiness Scale. After having done so, they initialled the partner's scale to indicate the exchange had taken place and then mailed or brought the forms to the next counseling session. This procedure was continued as a daily home assignment throughout Reciprocity Counseling and enabled each partner to discover how well he had succeeded in pleasing the spouse and, if not, to discuss the reasons why. During every session, the counselor routinely asked the clients to describe the result of their exchange and discussion.

*Appreciation reminder procedure (Table 1: II B 3)*

During this first session of Reciprocity Counseling, an 'Appreciation Reminder Procedure' was used as a method of assuring that each partner would be aware of, and appreciate, any new satisfactions. The 'Reciprocity Awareness Procedure' initiated on Session 6 had provided this awareness for past and current satisfactions. The Appreciation Reminder Procedure consisted of teaching each partner to mention to the spouse any novel, unusual, unanticipated, or unscheduled satisfactions given to the spouse, such as an unscheduled vacuuming of the house by the husband, or the wife's noting an unusual effort required to prepare a dish specially favored by the husband. Examples were given by the counselor



during the session and each spouse was required to furnish recent examples of interactions which he might have commented on. They were instructed to follow this procedure thereafter at home and to discuss during subsequent sessions any problems encountered in doing so. During every additional session, the counselor routinely asked them in what manner the procedure was being conducted and whether they had encountered any problems.

*Fantasy fulfillment procedure (Table 1: II B 4 a)*

During the first session of Reciprocity Counseling, a 'Fantasy Fulfillment Procedure' was used as a method of discovering, agreeing upon, and listing new satisfactions which would improve the happiness of each spouse. The counselor instructed each spouse to decide, independently, what the other spouse could do to increase his own happiness in each of the first three problem areas. The counselor, by way of examples, assisted the couple in formulating their own suggestions for improvements. The desires listed previously during the Perfect Marriage Procedure were used as an aid at this time. Once again their suggestions were to be as selfish as possible. There was no limit to the number of possible suggestions offered by any one person. After a suggestion was made by one spouse, the other was asked by the counselor if he or she would agree to it. If an immediate agreement was not obtainable, then a compromise was found which both could agree upon.

*Frequency fulfillment procedure (Table 1: II B 4 b)*

The general objective in reaching a compromise was that every stated desire should be fulfilled at least in part, thereby teaching the client that any desire or fantasy sought from the marriage was capable of fulfillment. Plainly stated, the object was to create the attitude that, 'If you want it, you can get it'. Technically, the object was to use the marital relation as a means of providing every possible type of reinforcement, thereby strengthening the marital bond. The specific compromise technique was to translate the desire into a continuum of possible activities such as a statement of frequency, duration, or situation rather than the all-or-none manner in which the client usually considered the matter. This Frequency Fulfillment technique was used whenever the partner refused to agree to a satisfaction requested by the spouse. For example, a common request by husbands and wives alike was that the other partner should initiate sexual activity. As stated in this all-or-none manner, the invariant reaction of the spouse was a refusal. The counselor then asked the client how often he (she) would like the spouse to initiate sex and then asked the spouse if that frequency was agreeable and if not to suggest an alternative frequency. In every case some frequency was found which was agreeable to both partners. As soon as one spouse had completed making suggestions for a particular problem area and they were agreed upon, the other spouse was then asked for his suggestions which would improve his happiness in that area of the marriage. Once again compromises and agreements for new satisfactions were devised using the Frequency Fulfillment Procedure. All new satisfactions agreed upon were formally written down, and a copy was given to the couple. This procedure was followed during the first session of each new week of Reciprocity Counseling (see Table 1: II D 3 b and II F 1 b).

*Happiness contract (Table 1: II B 4)*

Also during the first session of Reciprocity Counseling, a 'Happiness Contract' was used (see Table 4). The purpose of the Happiness Contract was to obtain formal agreement to the informally agreed upon satisfactions. This Happiness Contract included the current

TABLE 4. HAPPINESS CONTRACT

Attached is a list of activities which I have typically done for my partner on a regular or frequent basis. A similar list of activities which my partner regularly does for me is also included. In addition to these current activities, several requests for improving our marriage, half of them mine and half of them my partner's are also attached.

My signature below indicates that the new behaviors which my partner has requested of me are acceptable to me and that I sincerely intend to comply with each of them as indicated. I further acknowledge that the enforcement procedure described below is acceptable to me and that I expect this procedure to be followed in the event that a request of mine or my partner's is not met.

**AGREEMENT ENFORCEMENT PROCEDURE:** If one partner fails, by oversight or intent, to comply with any of his spouse's new requests on schedule, the offended partner will notify the offending partner of the omission and will make clear his intention to begin a sustained omission of *all* of the offending partner's current activities and new requests on the following morning if the initially omitted request has not been fulfilled by then.

It is my understanding that future new requests or changes in any existing requests by my partner will not be binding on me until I have formally agreed to them.

	_____ Wife
_____ Date	_____ Husband

satisfactions given and received from the Reciprocity Awareness listing, the new satisfactions agreed upon from the Fantasy Fulfillment listing and a statement of what was to be done in the event a spouse did not follow the agreements. The counselor explained the contract to the couple while they read it. Both the husband and wife signed the contract which stated that if one did not meet his agreements then the spouse would discontinue doing all new and old satisfactions for a 24-hr period beginning the next day if satisfaction had not been obtained by that time by some form of satisfaction acceptable to the aggrieved party. As new satisfactions were agreed upon, they were incorporated into the Happiness Contract.

#### *Happiness contract reviewed (Table 1: II C 1)*

Starting on Session 2 of week 1 of Reciprocity Counseling, the 'Happiness Contract' was reviewed. This review allowed the couple an opportunity to reevaluate the satisfactions that were agreed upon as to their effectiveness in the light of several days of actual practice. The counselor read each new satisfaction derived during the Fantasy Fulfillment Procedure and asked each spouse if it was being followed and if not, why not, and finally if they could suggest any changes, additions, or subtractions to the satisfactions listed. All such changes, once agreed to by both partners, were then incorporated into the Happiness Contract.

#### *Fantasy fulfillment procedure: Home assignment (Table 1: II C 2)*

During Session 2 of week 1 of Reciprocity Counseling, a home assignment was given to the couple consisting of discovering new satisfactions which would increase their happiness in each of the next three problem areas. This listing was to be done independently of the spouse, was to be written down and brought into the next session. The counselor again instructed them to be as selfish as possible while devising the new satisfactions. They were also required to list suggested improvements in the previous three problem areas.

*Positive statement procedure (Table 1: II D 1)*

During Session 1 of week 2 of Reciprocity Counseling, the 'Positive Statement Procedure' was started, which was to continue throughout the Reciprocity Counseling. This procedure allowed each spouse to communicate a negative statement in a less aversive manner. Each spouse was instructed by the counselor to add a positive note to any statement whenever he felt obliged to make some negative statement to his spouse. This positive statement was to be closely related to the topic being discussed. The counselor gave the instructions by way of an example and explanation, i.e. "That was a really dumb thing to say", vs. "What you were just saying made good sense, but that last statement was really dumb". The counselor further showed each spouse how the initial statement, "That was a dumb thing to say", could be rephrased into a more positive statement, "That may be true, but did you ever think of it this way". They were also told to stop their spouse whenever a negative statement was made which did not include a positive note, and that they should refrain from responding until it was either restated in a more positive way or that a positive note was added to the original statement. Each spouse was also instructed to stop the counselor or their spouse in the event that one did not use a positive note with the negative statement, and that the counselor would stop them if the same thing occurred with them. This technique was to be followed during all conversation at home and in the counseling sessions.

*Sex feedback procedure (Table 1: II D 2)*

Also during Session 1 of week 2 of Reciprocity Counseling, a 'Sex Feedback Procedure' was used in order to enable each client to communicate, indirectly, as many of his sexual desires as possible to the spouse. Each spouse was given a copy of a marriage manual (Ellis, 1966). The counselor had underscored certain phrases, sentences, and passages, each of which the clients were to rate (on a scale of -5 to +5) as a home assignment, regarding the degree of desire for the activity described by each underscored item. Each spouse was further instructed to complete the ratings without consulting the spouse. During the next session (second week, Session 2), the couple exchanged copies and read how the spouse had rated each of the sexual activities and were told to try to discuss those ratings. This Sex Feedback Procedure bypassed the frequent, and often extreme, reluctance of partners to communicate the details of their sexual desires to each other.

*Fantasy fulfillment: Minimal counseling (Table 1: II E 2)*

During the second session of week 2, the couple was instructed to devise new satisfactions for the last three problem areas. The couple conducted this listing with minimal counselor assistance as part of a deliberate fading out process. For the first three problem areas (week 1, Session 1), the counselor had actively assisted the couple in his office in drawing up a list of desired satisfactions and reaching a compromise. For the second three problem areas (week 1, Session 2), the couple was assigned the list as a home assignment which was discussed with the counselor during the next session to reach a compromise agreement. For the final three problem areas, the couple now drew up their list themselves, reached their own compromise agreements at home, and presented them to the counselor at the next session (week 3, Session 1). This fading out was designed to prepare the couple to function independently of the counselor in achieving reciprocity. During this first session of week 3, the listings for the first six problem areas were discussed and revised if necessary.



*Follow-up (Table 1: II I 2)*

During Session 2 of week 4 of Reciprocity Counseling, the 'Follow-Up Procedure' was explained. The counselor told each spouse that once a month a Marital Happiness Scale would be sent to them, via the mail, with a stamped, self-addressed envelope. They were to complete the scale and return it, by way of the mail, to the counselor's office. In addition to the long term follow-up, each couple was instructed to call the counselor at any time if they felt there was any need of the counselor's assistance (very few ever did).

*Specification of behaviors*

In specifying the manner in which a given satisfaction was to be given (such as doing the dishes or having a 'talk period' each day), the details of the behavior were specified in the initial agreement as much as each spouse thought necessary. For example, washing and drying and putting dishes away or a 30-min duration for the 'talk period' might be stated as details of the behavioral episode. The counselor urged this specification initially as a means of avoiding any misunderstanding. The primary definition was, however, in terms of satisfaction to the recipients of the interaction. The dishes should be done and the talk period conducted in such a manner as to be pleasing to the spouse. Thus, complaining while doing the dishes, and yawning or reading while listening to the spouse would constitute non-fulfillment of the agreement. This centrality of satisfactions, rather than behavioral detail, meant that each spouse was allowed and even encouraged to delay or to vary the activity and even substitute some other activity so long as prior agreement was obtained from the spouse that the change was satisfactory and pleasing. This strategy eliminated the need for infinitely detailed specification of each activity, and permitted easy substitutions or changes necessitated by the inevitable changes in mood, scheduling and circumstances in the unique life style of each couple.

## RESULTS

*Overall*

Figure 2 shows the changes in reported overall marital happiness (see Item 10 of the Marital Happiness Scale, Table 2) averaged for the 24 clients. Little change in happiness resulted during the 3 weeks of catharsis-type counseling, the average rating for the 3 weeks being about five out of the 10 point maximum. Reported happiness remained at that level through the first day of Reciprocity Counseling but increased to about 6.5 by the end of 1 week and reached a level of approximately seven during the third and fourth week of Reciprocity Counseling. One month later, the follow-up test showed a further increase in overall happiness to a level greater than 7.5. All of the data points of marital happiness shown in Fig. 2 within the Reciprocity Counseling period (except for the first and second days) were significantly greater than the average happiness reported during the undirected catharsis counseling ( $p < 0.025$  for the third day and  $p < 0.005$  on the fourth day and thereafter) by the nonparametric Wilcoxon's  $t$  test for correlated means (Siegal, 1956). The happiness reports, during the 1 month follow-up were also significantly greater ( $p < 0.005$ ) than during the catharsis counseling or during the Reciprocity Counseling.

*Individual changes*

Analysis of the scores of the individual clients showed that 96 per cent of the clients (23 of the 24) reported a higher level of overall marital happiness during the last week of



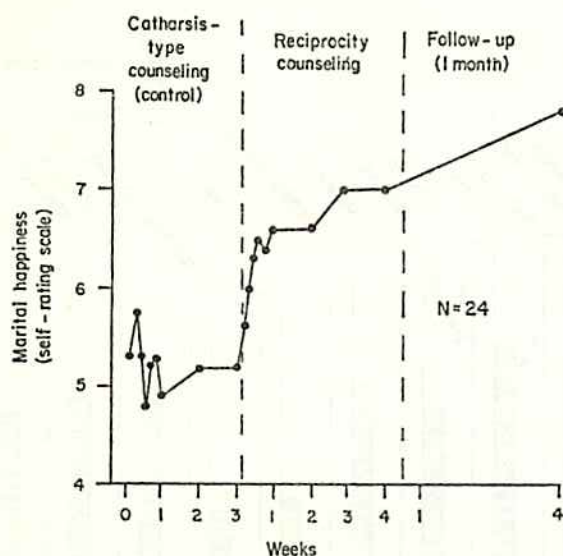


FIG. 2. Marital happiness during reciprocity counseling and a control counseling procedure. Each data point is a weekly average except for the first seven days of the control counseling and the reciprocity counseling and the 1-month follow-up which are daily averages. 'Marital Happiness' was reported by each of the 24 clients (12 couples) on a 1-10 rating scale of marital happiness.

the Reciprocity Counseling period than on the day before Reciprocity Counseling. Similarly, for 88 per cent of the clients (21 of the 24), the reported marital happiness was greater on the 1-month follow-up date than on the day prior to Reciprocity Counseling. The reported happiness did not generally increase during the undirected catharsis-type counseling for most clients. Reported happiness on the last week of catharsis counseling was greater than on the first day for 33 per cent of the clients, actually less for 47 per cent of the clients, and unchanged for 20 per cent of the clients.

#### *Specific problem areas*

Figure 3 examines the changes in happiness reported for each of the nine areas of marital interaction (problem areas). For each of these problem areas, the average score for the 3 weeks of catharsis counseling are presented alongside the averaged score for the last week of Reciprocity Counseling. The analysis shows that Communication and Sex were the two major problem areas, both having a happiness rating of about 4.2 prior to the Reciprocity Counseling. All of the other areas of interaction were reported to be less of a problem and were not too dissimilar in their ratings, all having an averaged happiness rating between 5.5 and 6.5 prior to Reciprocity Counseling. For each of the nine interaction areas, happiness increased during the Reciprocity Counseling ( $p < 0.005$ ). The increase in happiness was greatest for Communication (+ 2.9 units) and Sex (+ 2.6 units). For each of the other areas, the happiness scores increased by about 1.5-2.0 units.

Not all 12 couples received Reciprocity Counseling in all nine problem areas. As a result there were no data collected or used in the computations shown, for those areas. Five couples were not counseled in the area 'Rearing of Children' since they had no children

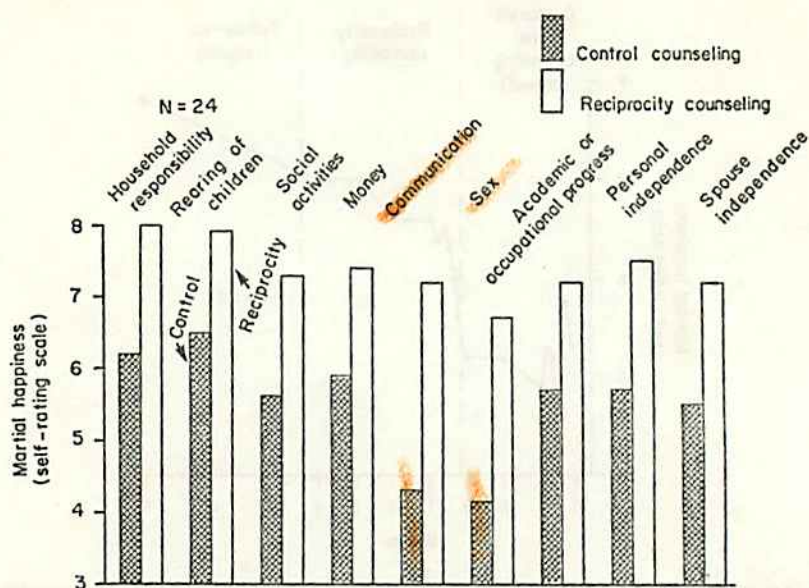


FIG. 3. Marital happiness in each of nine specific problem areas of marital interaction. Marital happiness was measured by the self-report of each of the 24 clients on a 1-10 scale of marital happiness. The dark columns are the average scores for the last week of the Control Counseling procedure; the light columns are the average scores for the last week of Reciprocity Counseling. The designation above each pair of columns is for a specific problem area of marital interaction, each area having been scored by the clients daily as to their marital happiness.

residing with them. 'Academic or Occupational Progress' was not a problem for one couple and 'Money' was not considered a problem for one other couple. All of the other couples were counseled in all of the problem areas.

### Generalization

Figure 4 examines the extent to which the benefits of the Reciprocity Counseling generalized from the problem areas in which counseling was given to the other problem areas in which counseling had not yet been given. The score for the problem areas in which Reciprocity Counseling was not yet given was obtained by averaging the scores for the last six problem areas during the first and second week of Reciprocity Counseling when counseling had not yet been given for these six areas. The average scores for these same six areas during the fourth week of Reciprocity Counseling provided the measure of happiness in these areas when counseling was given directly in those areas. For comparison with the period prior to Reciprocity Counseling, the average happiness score was calculated for these same six areas for the last week of the catharsis counseling period. The happiness scores were higher ( $p < 0.005$ ) when the six problem areas were being directly counseled (score of 7.0) than when counseling was being given in other areas (score of 6.2). The noncounseled areas were also higher ( $p < 0.005$ ) in happiness than during the catharsis counseling procedure, having increased from about 5.2 to 6.2 units, a statistically significant ( $p < 0.005$ ) increase.

### Variations

All 12 couples completed the 3 weeks of catharsis counseling and the 4 weeks of Reciprocity Counseling. Two other couples (not included in the data), left the geographical area



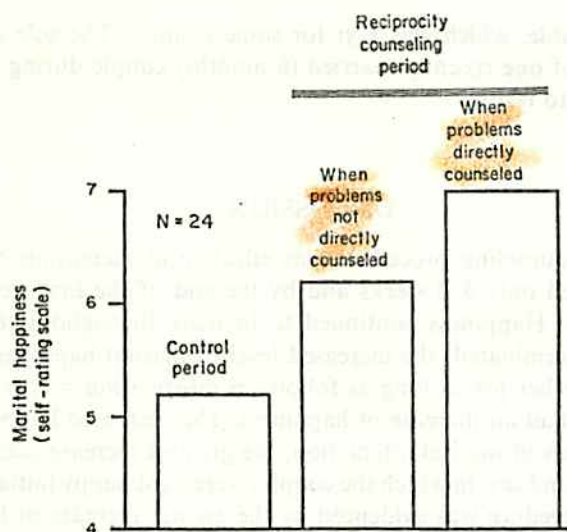


FIG. 4. Generalization and specificity of reciprocity counseling. Nine specific problem areas had been counseled, the first three during the first week and an additional three during each of the succeeding 2 weeks. All columns are for the last six problem areas. The control 'period' score is for the last week of control counseling which immediately preceded the period of Reciprocity Counseling. The 'Problems not directly counseled' score is taken from the Reciprocity Counseling period for the last day preceding Reciprocity Counseling for each of the six problem areas. The score for 'Problems directly counseled' is for the same six areas but during the last week of direct counseling for each of these areas.

during a school vacation period and did not return to school or to the area. The duration of the Reciprocity Counseling period had been originally scheduled for 3 weeks. The fourth week was added as a desirable period for teaching the clients to formulate solutions to new problems and as a period of adjustment to the new patterns of conduct established in the previous 3 weeks. For two couples, an interruption of a week or more occurred because of a holiday or vacation; their next two counseling sessions were used as refamiliarization periods to review and reestablish the previous progress, and were not included in the data presentation. One of the 12 couples was given continuous counseling for about 16 weeks since many of the problems had not been fully resolved at the end of the 4-week period. Only their first 4 weeks are included in the data although improvement continued thereafter.

#### Follow-up

All couples returned the questionnaire the first month and the date for that period is shown in Fig. 2, but, thereafter, the returns were too variable in occurrence to be included in the group data of Fig. 2. For the questionnaires that were returned, all follow-up data points up to 12 months showed an average happiness rating of 8 or more for as long as the questionnaires were returned. None of the 12 couples separated or divorced during the counseling. After counseling, every attempt was made to discover whether separation or divorce had occurred. Telephone calls, letters, interviews and reports from friends were used. The Marital Happiness Scale was mailed to every couple at monthly intervals following the termination of counseling. These follow-up inquiries showed that all but one of the couples remained married and together for at least 4 months and for as long as the follow-up

information was available, which was 1 yr for some couples. The sole exception was the departure of the wife of one recently married (8 months) couple during a school vacation period and her failure to return.

## DISCUSSION

The Reciprocity Counseling procedure was effective in increasing marital happiness. The counseling required only 3-4 weeks and by the end of the first week happiness had increased substantially. Happiness continued to increase throughout the 4-week period. After counseling was terminated, the increased level of marital happiness was maintained and increased even further for as long as follow-up information was possible. Ninety-six per cent of the clients had an increase of happiness. The increased happiness occurred for each of nine major areas of marital interaction, the greatest increase occurring for the two areas, communication and sex, in which the couples were least happy initially. The specificity of the effect of the procedure was evidenced by the greater increase of happiness in those areas that had been counseled than in the areas for which counseling had not yet been given. Yet, some generalization was evident in that (1) problem areas that had not yet been counseled also did increase and (2) happiness continued to increase during follow-up when presumably new problems were emerging. The evidence showed that the improvement during Reciprocity Counseling was caused by the specific nature of the procedure since a catharsis-type counseling of roughly comparable duration did not increase happiness and that at the same period in counseling, improvement was substantially greater for the specific interaction areas for which counseling was given than for the other areas for which direct counseling had not yet been given. As noted previously (Olsen, 1970) virtually no other method of marital counseling has received even minimal experimental evaluation. The present results appear to recommend Reciprocity Counseling as a marital counseling procedure of demonstrated effectiveness.

### *General characterizations*

The present approach has several distinctive characteristics. The approach is based on the principle of operant reinforcement as illustrated by the central role of the reciprocity feature in which each spouse is reinforced for reinforcing the partner. However, the reinforcement contingencies are not stated in terms of specific response-reinforcement relationships as in the Token Economy procedure (Ayllon and Azrin, 1968), but rather as a global 'package' of responses that produce a similarly global package of reinforcers. The approach does not attempt to teach the clients principles of reinforcement. Indeed, the instructions to the clients scrupulously avoided technical terms such as reinforcement, extinction, time-out and instead used more common lay terms, such as happiness, satisfaction, frustration, motivation, desire and appreciation. The approach is oriented toward specific behaviors as seen in its delineation of nine specific areas of behavioral interaction and the listing of specific behaviors within each area. Yet, the approach is non-behavioral in its reliance on 'happiness' as the focal attribute of the clients that was to be changed. The approach is quantitative, as are most behavioral approaches, but minimizes the need for the clients to keep records of their behavior. The rapidity of treatment was noteworthy. Rather than scheduling counseling once or twice per week for months, the method required only 3 weeks plus 1 week for the transition to no treatment. The method is non-esoteric in that no deep meaning,

strategy, technical sophistication, or interpretation is needed other than the easily understood and non-controversial objective of "making your wife (husband) as happy as you can because she (he) is trying hard to make you happy". The method is based conceptually on a general theory (reinforcement) and more specifically on the similarly derived reinforcement approach of Stuart (1969) but differs from the general reinforcement approach and Stuart's strategy in the above-noted characteristics of subjectivity, behavioral specification, non-technical vocabulary, large response classes, the absence of extensive self-recording, 'package' responses and 'package' reinforcers, the nature of the outcome measure, etc. The approach does not deny the central roles of such factors as personality, attitudes, expectation, role factors, communication, sex or social custom in determining marital happiness but rather provides a concrete method for changing personality, communication patterns, attitudes, etc.

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