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Christopher D. Schmidt^a, Wade Luquet^b & Nathan C. Gehlert^c

^a Counseling and Education Department, Villanova University,
Villanova, Pennsylvania, USA

^b Behavioral and Social Science Division, Gwynedd Mercy University,
Gwynedd Valley, Pennsylvania, USA

^c School of Counseling, John Carroll University, University Heights,
Ohio, USA

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Evaluating the Impact of the “Getting The Love You Want” Couples Workshop on Relational Satisfaction and Communication Patterns

CHRISTOPHER D. SCHMIDT

Counseling and Education Department, Villanova University, Villanova, Pennsylvania, USA

WADE LUQUET

Behavioral and Social Science Division, Gwynedd Mercy University, Gwynedd Valley, Pennsylvania, USA

NATHAN C. GEHLERT

School of Counseling, John Carroll University, University Heights, Ohio, USA

Over the past 20 years, couples around the world have participated in “Getting The Love You Want” workshops in an effort to improve their relationships, yet empirical analysis of relationship improvement from these workshops is limited. The content of the workshops is based on the theory and practice of Imago relationship therapy and participants from three workshops participated in this study. Standard measures were used in preworkshop, post-workshop, and 3-month follow-up assessments to determine if the workshop had a positive impact on relational satisfaction and communication patterns of participants and if the impacts persisted after 3 months. Participant scores on both the Dyadic Adjustment Scale and the Communication Pattern Questionnaire showed significant increases post workshop, indicating the potential impact of these interventions in the short term.

KEYWORDS *couple relationship education, Imago relationship therapy, couples therapy*

INTRODUCTION

Notwithstanding the challenges inherent in long-term relationships and reported levels of divorce, individuals continue to seek close intimate

Address correspondence to Christopher D. Schmidt, Ph.D., Villanova University, 800 E. Lancaster Avenue, Villanova, PA 19085, USA. E-mail: Christopher.schmidt@villanova.edu

relationships (Walsh, 2003), potentially due to the fact that close relationships are the greatest contributing factor to personal happiness (Bookwala, 2005; Devito, 1989; Grewen, Girdler, Amico, & Light, 2005). The manner in which information is shared, received, perceived, and interpreted in a committed relationship influences the quality and sustainability of that relationship (Galvin, Bylund, & Brommel, 2004; Satir, 1972). Research continues to show that effective communication is critical for couple stability (Galvin et al., 2004; Owens, Manthos, & Quirk, 2013). Communication directly relates to marital satisfaction (Acitelli, 1988; Gottman, 1982; Miller, Yorgason, Sandberg, & White, 2003) and is a key element of positive long-term relationships (Robinson & Blanton, 1993). However, communication is also the most commonly reported problem for relationship issues or dissolving relationships (Lavner & Bradbury, 2012; Miller et al., 2003).

Teaching and practicing effective communication remains a central element of couples therapy and couples relationship education (CRE) programs (Galvin et al., 2004; Halford, Markham, Kline, & Stanley, 2003; Halford & Snyder, 2012; Jakubowski, Milne, Brunner, & Miller, 2004). CRE programs can complement the efforts of relationship counselors and assist couples in demonstrating greater positive and less negative communication and conflict management behaviors over a 3- to 4-year period (Markman, Renick, Floyd, Stanley, & Clements, 1993). Methods of CRE and counseling have typically taken four forms: self-directed books and videos, in-office counseling, psychoeducational classes, and weekend workshops (Duncan, Childs, & Larson, 2010). All four forms have been shown to be helpful to participants, but classes and self-directed programs are typically the most efficacious. This is likely due to the length of the intervention and because longer classes and self-directed programs are often taken at the couples' request which indicates an interest in the materials (Duncan et al.).

The present study was focused on the Getting The Love You Want Workshop for couples (GTLYW; Hendrix, 2005). GTLYW is a particular CRE program that was developed from the principles of Imago relationship therapy (Hendrix) and is delivered both in the United States and internationally (about 60,000 couples since the mid 1980s), yet there is limited research on it to date. While the GTLYW couples workshop uses similar interventions of other communications-based CRE programs, the particular dialogue process that is taught and the addition of content exploring childhood relationships make it unique compared with other CREs. This element may limit the dissipation of effects from CRE participation that have been found in the research. Therefore, it is particularly important to begin to understand the impact this particular CRE may have on participating couples. Secondarily, this research is important given the wide participation in GTLYW workshops around the world and the limited research base evaluating them. The purpose of this study was to evaluate the effectiveness of the GTLYW workshop. It was hypothesized that participants would show significant increases in their

relationship satisfaction and their communication skills after completing the workshop. It was also hypothesized that participants would retain these changes through a 3-month follow-up period.

Larson (2004) reported that 80% to 90% of divorcing couples never seek therapy; of those who do, about two-thirds reported improvement in their relationship. Several versions of couples therapy, including cognitive (Datillio & Padesky, 1990), emotionally focused (Johnson, 1996), and insight oriented (Snyder, Castellani, & Whisman, 2006), have been shown to produce clinically significant reductions in relationship distress. In a review of six separate meta-analyses of couples therapy, Shadish and Baldwin (2003) found that couples receiving treatment were better off following treatment than 80% of couples who were in no-treatment control groups. However, it is typical that 20% of couples do not respond to counseling and show no measurable improvement (Snyder et al., 2006). Also, it is notable that a significant number of couples experience a loss of treatment effect over time with many returning to distressed levels within a year (Jacobson, Schmaling, & Holtzworth-Munroe, 1987; Snyder, Mangrum, & Wills, 1993). In a 5-year study by Christensen, Atkins, Baucom, and Yi (2010), couples who participated in integrative behavioral couples therapy (IBCT) fared significantly better for 2 years following treatment compared with couples in traditional behavioral couples therapy (BCT). However, without follow-up interventions, the effect sizes began to diminish over the longer follow-up period. For those choosing not to attend couples therapy (80% to 90% of divorcing couples, as well as others who may be experiencing challenges in their relationships), some form of CRE might become a viable option. While such programs do not offer the individualized focus a therapist provides or the continuity of weekly meetings over time, many benefits have been found.

COUPLES RELATIONSHIP EDUCATION

CRE programs can be traced to the work of David Mace in the early 1960s with The Association for Couples in Marriage Enrichment (ACME) and, later, Bernard and Louise Guerney in the 1970s with the Relationship Enhancement program (Guerney, 1977; Mace, 1985). While findings concerning the effectiveness of CRE programs are mixed, most research indicates that they can be successful at teaching couples communication skills needed to create satisfying relationships (Blanchard, Hawkins, Baldwin, & Fawcett, 2009). They are structured learning experiences that assist couples in developing skills, attitudes, and knowledge of healthy relationships and tend to focus on enhancement in these areas rather than on remediation of existing problems (Jakubowski, et al, 2004; Larson, 2004). This might lead to the conclusion that CRE workshops and classes will only attract moderately distressed or happy couples; however, research by DeMaria (2005) suggested that a substantial

number of distressed couples, 93% in her sample of couples attending a PAIRS (Practical Application of Intimate Relationship Skills) CRE program, attend workshops to improve failing or unhappy relationships.

Jakubowski et al. (2004) reviewed 13 CRE programs and found that only four were empirically supported by two or more randomly controlled studies, three were “possibly” supported with only one randomly controlled study, and six were empirically untested. Empirically supported (i.e., efficacious) programs included PREP (Stanley, Blumberg, & Markman, 1999), relationship enhancement (Guerney, 1977), The Couples Communication Program (Miller, Miller, Nunnally & Wackman, 1992), and Strategic Hope-Focused Enrichment (Worthington et al., 1997). The common finding in the four efficacious programs was that couples in the program reported increases in positive communication and relationship satisfaction compared with the no-treatment control groups. In their meta-analysis of relationship interventions, Giblin et al. (1985) found that programs that focused on practicing skills and behaviors, such as those taught in efficacious CRE programs, were more effective than other types of programs. In a long-term study, Markman and colleagues (1993) found that couples who were taught these skills demonstrated less negative communication and more positive conflict management behaviors over a 3- to 5-year period. Hawkins, Stanley, Blanchard, and Albright (2012) found that CRE programs with moderate dosage (9 to 12 contact hours) had a significantly greater positive effect than those with lower dosage (1 to 8 contact hours). GTLYW workshops run 15 to 20 hours and focus heavily on communication skills, increasing positive behaviors, decreasing negative behaviors, and increasing empathy—all factors found to have significant effects in similar CRE programs.

Research on CREs has also observed a dissipation of positive effects over time. Butler and Wampler’s (1999) meta-analysis of 36 studies of the CRE program Couples Communication showed a consistent deterioration of effect across all studies. Christensen and Heavey (1999) found a similar deterioration in multiple programs and suggested the development and inclusion of booster programs for CREs that would reiterate knowledge gained and encourage continued practice with acquired skills. In a review of the couple relationship education literature, Halford and Snyder (2012) concluded that CRE programs are effective in the short term for enhancing relationship satisfaction and couple communication. Long-term benefits were primarily seen in couples who were at relatively higher risk of future relationship problems (Halford & Snyder; Halford, Sanders, & Behrens, 2001).

GETTING THE LOVE YOU WANT COUPLES WORKSHOPS

Imago relationship therapy (IRT; Hendrix, 2005) is used on a self-directed level (e.g., books, workbooks, and DVDs), a therapeutic counseling level

(e.g., therapy sessions with a certified Imago therapist), and a workshop level (e.g., the GTLYW workshop). Based on the principles of IRT, the GTLYW workshop is conducted worldwide by hundreds of certified presenters who are licensed in their respective professions (e.g., counseling, psychology, social work). These individuals gain their certification as a GTLYW presenter after 12 days of extensive training that consists of a review of the principles of IRT and the content and organization of the workshop itself. The content is standardized through the use of a common presenter manual as well as a workbook used by the participating couples. From 2011 through 2013, the workshop was offered 1186 times in 15 different countries. There are currently 336 certified workshop presenters in 18 different countries.

The workshop is psychoeducational and includes discussion, practice, and didactic presentations. Over 3 days, couples are taught and practice a particular communication skill called the Couples Dialogue, which entails listening intently and mirroring the partner's words, validating what the partner says through the partner's point of view, and empathizing with what the partner might be experiencing emotionally. The intention of the Couples Dialogue is to increase positive relational patterns while decreasing negative interactions.

Couples are also taught skills to help them remain calm and avoid negative interactions that can cause overwhelming emotions as well as learning skills to increase empathic levels between them during emotional conversations. Couples learn skills to request behavior changes from each other in a way that minimizes resistance to the requested change and decreases coercion. Finally, a considerable amount of time is spent showing couples how to decrease negative interactions and the importance of increasing positive behaviors for each other in order to enhance levels of relationship satisfaction.

Some of these communication skills taught in the GTLYW workshop parallel those taught in other CRE programs. However, an important distinction is that in the Imago model, there is an emphasis placed on how childhood development affects mate selection and may fuel present frustrations and arguments. The model emphasizes how childhood wounding is a driver toward mate selection and can become the basis of a couple's recurrent relational challenges. During the workshop, the couples are given a self-directed written exercise called The Imago Workup that has them write down the positive and negative traits of their early childhood caretakers as well as some of the behaviors they engaged in when they became frustrated as a child. They then move those traits into a series of sentence stems about their partner that helps the couple understand that their partner possesses both positive and negative traits of their early childhood caretaker. Couples learn that their frustrations are often related to unmet needs of childhood and therefore can begin to understand their own behavior as well as their

partner's and a deeper empathic connection develops (Hendrix, 2005; Hendrix & Hunt, 2013; Luquet, 2007).

Due to this added dimension, the workshops can become quite emotional as couples discuss often-hurtful memories in the presences of their partner, triggering an empathic response that creates a palpable connection between the couple. Neuroscience research indicates that recalling emotional memories can lower negative affect if done in a way that allows the story to reconsolidate by having a positive experience during the retelling (Nadir & Hardt, 2009). The question arises whether this empathic connection creates a positive change in relational satisfaction and communication patterns and if such changes can be sustained.

METHOD

Procedures

As stated previously, GTLYW workshops are delivered throughout the world by individuals who have been trained and certified by IRT faculty. This research study evaluates three separate workshops, given at different times, by the same two workshop presenters. The presenters were the founders of IRT, developed the GTLYW workshop, and have been delivering these workshops for over 20 years. The information shared in the workshops and the activities participants were asked to engage in were representative of the standardized protocol for the workshop (Hendrix & Hunt, 2013). Considering the lack of research on GTLYW, the researchers felt it important to first study the impact of the workshop as delivered by the founders; future studies will evaluate the workshop when delivered by other trained presenters. Participants were made aware prior to the workshop that a research study would be taking place. After agreeing to participate in the study, those individuals who elected to participate completed the demographic form, the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS; Spainer, 1976) and the Communication Patterns Questionnaire (CPQ; Christensen & Sullaway, 1984) on paper; participants completed these two measures again at the end of the workshop. All participants were asked to complete the assessments one additional time 3 months after the workshop had ended; these assessments were completed online. They were sent three reminders through the online assessment site in order to encourage participation.

Participants

The three workshops were held in three different northeast U.S. locations. Two hundred seventy-eight individuals self-selected to attend the 3-day-long workshops. Of these attendees, 14 did not submit their informed consent

and/or their first assessments and therefore declined to participate in the present study. Thus, the preworkshop sample included 266 individuals; the postworkshop sample included 252 individuals who fully completed the assessments at the end of the workshop. The 3-month follow-up assessments were completed on the participants' own time electronically and included usable data from 72 (27%) of the preworkshop participants. Of the 252 who completed the assessments at the end of the workshop, 228 chose to note their partner's name on their assessments and therefore the researchers were able to match them into couple dyads. These 114 couples completed assessments at the beginning and end of the workshop; however, the number of couples who also completed the 3-month follow-up assessments greatly decreased (11 couples). It should be considered that the mean scores for the 11 couples who completed the 3-month follow-up assessments were significantly higher than the mean scores for those couples who did not complete them. Because it is common for participant dropoff to occur in longitudinal studies, the researchers did make efforts to minimize the attrition rate by informing the participants of the importance of the follow-up assessments and sending multiple reminders requesting their participation. The description of the sample is broken into two sections due to the fact that analyses were completed on both individual and dyad levels. The first describes all those individuals who participated at all three time points; the second describes the couple dyads that completed the pre and post assessments.

The sample of individuals ($N = 72$) included 34 men and 38 women who ranged in age from 25 to 76; 33.3% were between the ages of 41 and 50 and 29.2% were between 51 and 60. One same-sex couple was included in this sample. In addition, 83.3% of the participants were Caucasian, 2.8% were African American, 2.8% were Asian, 2.8% were Indian, and 1.4% were Hispanic or Latino. In addition, one respondent (1.4%) wrote in "White/Jewish", one respondent (1.4%) selected mixed, and 3 (4.1%) did not respond to the question. Participating couples who were married and living together composed 58.3% of the sample. One respondent (1.4%) did not answer the question. Other relationship status categories were as follows: not married and living together, 18.1%; not married and living apart, 13.9%; and married but currently separated, 8.3%. The length of the relationships ranged from 1 to 50 years; most participating couples fell into the following groups: 1 to 5 years (27.8%), 6 to 10 years (15.3%), 11–15 years (12.5%), 16–20 years (12.5%), 21–25 years (11.1%), and the remaining groups made up the outstanding 8.4%. In terms of educational level, 95% of the participants had attended college.

The sample of couples ($N = 114$ couple dyads) with completed assessments at both pre and post workshop included 113 men and 115 women (one same-sex couple) who ranged in age from 25 to 80. Most of the participants were 41 to 50 (women: 37%, men: 38%) or 51 to 60 (women: 26%, men: 25%). Over 80% of the couples were Caucasian, 5% were African American,

2.6% were Asian, 2.6% were Indian, and 1.7% were Hispanic or Latino. In addition, 66% of the couples were married and living together, 14% were not married and living together, 10% were not married and living apart, and 9% were married but currently separated. Most of the couples had been together for 1 to 5 years (24%) or 6 to 10 years (16%). Also, 95% of the participants had attended college.

Measures

The demographic questionnaire was used to gather general demographic data and data regarding the status of the relationship. Additionally, the DAS and CPQ were administered to participants.

DYADIC ADJUSTMENT SCALE

The DAS (Spainer, 1976) is a global assessment of marital satisfaction. The DAS is a 32-item self-report measure of overall marital adjustment that has been widely used in the marital literature and has been shown to have high reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha = .96$; L'Abate & Bagarozzi, 1993; Spainer, 1976). On the scale, each partner completes an assessment and most items are rated on a 5- or 6-point Likert scale to measure level of agreement with the statement. Total scores range from 0 to 151, and higher scores indicate greater relationship satisfaction. The normative mean of married couples on the DAS is 114.8 ($SD = 17.8$). Couples who score below 97 (i.e., 1 SD below the mean) are considered to be distressed. Four subscales assess different aspects of the relationship: dyadic satisfaction, dyadic cohesion, dyadic consensus, and affectational expression. The DAS has robust internal consistency and is strongly correlated with other measures of relationship satisfaction such as the Locke-Wallace Marital Adjustment Test (Carey, Spector, Lantinga, & Krauss, 1993; Locke & Wallace, 1959). The DAS has been shown to successfully differentiate married and divorced couples, distressed and nondistressed couples, and clinic and nonclinic samples (Lawson, 2008).

COMMUNICATION PATTERNS QUESTIONNAIRE

The CPQ-Short Form (CPQ-SF; Christianson & Heavey, 1990) is a brief version of the CPQ (Christensen, 1987, 1988; Christensen & Sullway, 1984). It assesses spouse perceptions of dyadic communication about relationship problems. Each partner reviews 11 items and indicates on a 9-point Likert scale the likelihood that the couple will interact in a specified manner when discussing a problem. This measure contains four theoretically derived subscales: three asymmetrical communication subscales and one symmetrical

positive communication subscale. The first two asymmetrical subscales focus on demand/withdraw interactions in which the spouses take opposite roles in the discussion. The symmetrical overall positive communication subscale consists of three items assessing mutual discussion, mutual expression, and mutual negotiation. Previous research has demonstrated acceptable reliability and validity of the CPQ-SF (Christensen, 1987, 1988; Christensen & Heavey, 1993). Futris, Campbell, Nielsen, and Burwell's (2010) review of the CPQ and CPQ-SF found inconsistencies in the factor structure and psychometric properties of the CPQ-SF in particular. While CPQ-SF researchers have traditionally conceptualized the scale in terms of two factors (demand/withdraw and positive interactions), the results of this research support an alternative three-factor solution that includes a distinct criticize/defend factor. Results provided additional evidence for the positive communication subscale. In consideration of Futris and colleagues' findings, this study uses this alternative three-factor scoring method (demand/withdraw, criticize/defend, and positive interactions). Higher scores on the demand/withdraw and criticize/defend subscales indicate that certain types of negative communication patterns are in use, whereas higher scores on the positive interaction subscale indicate that certain types of positive communication patterns are being used.

RESULTS

Considering the hypotheses and the unexpected attrition of couples at the follow-up, analyses were performed first on individuals and then for couples. First, RMANOVAs were performed for individuals who completed assessments at all three time points. Each measure and each measure's subscales were examined for changes over time. Second, due to the attrition of couple dyads at the follow-up, *t*-tests were performed for couples on all subscales based on their completion of only the pre and post assessments. Additionally, comparisons have been made between the "distressed" and "nondistressed" couples in order to understand if this workshop impacts one group to a greater degree than the other. While the second set of analyses cannot speak to whether couples are able to retain changes made after 3 months, it can address the question of whether the program meets the immediate goal of enhancing communication skills and relational satisfaction.

Analysis of Individuals

Table 1 shows the individual mean scores on each subscale across assessment intervals. The DAS total score consisted of 32 items ($\alpha = .93$). Analyses of participant scores on the DAS indicated a statistically significant effect for

TABLE 1 Mean and *SD* Values Preworkshop Through 3-Month Follow-up

	<i>N</i>	Preworkshop		Postworkshop		3-Month follow-up	
		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
DAS							
Consensus	72	46.54	7.67	48.21	7.55	45.54	9.88
Satisfaction	72	34.43	7.77	36.86	7.49	31.64	8.76
Cohesion	72	14.51	4.33	15.15	4.47	14.39	4.97
Affect/Expression	72	7.49	2.06	8.10	2.05	7.59	2.02
DAS total	72	102.97	18.65	108.33	18.89	99.16	20.22
CPQ							
Demand/Withdraw	72	27.67	11.67	24.92	11.13	21.12	10.87
Criticize/Defend	72	15.19	7.56	13.42	6.95	11.44	6.77
Positive Interaction	72	21.00	5.64	22.78	5.38	21.22	6.41

time on the DAS total score [$F(2,70) = 11.147, p = .0010$] as well as three of the subscales [Consensus: $F(2,70) = 5.574, p = .006$; Satisfaction: $F(2,70) = 13.572, p = .001$; Affectational Expression: $F(2,70) = 6.944, p = .002$]. The mean Cohesion scores did not significantly differ between time points [$F(2,70) = 1.759, p = .192$].

The first hypothesis regarding the DAS was supported in that post hoc tests using the Bonferroni correction revealed that the workshop elicited an increase in individual participant's DAS total scores from pretest to posttest ($p = .001$). There was no significant difference between participant total DAS scores from the pretest to the follow-up ($p = .177$) and analyses from the posttest to the follow-up revealed a statistically significant decrease in scores ($p = .001$). These results did not support the second hypothesis regarding the DAS in that changes made in relational satisfaction were not retained from the end of the workshop until 3 months later. The subscales of the DAS showed similar results.

The CPQ consisted of 12 items assigned into three subscales. The Demand/Withdraw subscale consists of six items ($\alpha = .65$); the Criticize/Defend subscale consists of three items ($\alpha = .76$); the Positive Interactions subscale consists of three items ($\alpha = .79$). The analyses of participant communication patterns determined that there were significant effects for time on each of the CPQ subscales [Demand/Withdraw: $F(2,70) = 10.493, p = .001$; Criticize/Defend: $F(2,70) = 11.792, p = .001$; Positive Interactions: $F(2,70) = 10.313, p = .001$]. Post hoc tests using the Bonferroni correction show that the workshop positively and significantly impacted participant communication patterns from pretest to posttest as measured by all three subscales. For the Demand/Withdraw and Criticize/Defend subscales, additional comparisons showed statistically significant decreases in these behaviors from pretest to follow-up as well as posttest to follow-up. Participant scores on the Positive Interactions subscale revealed a statistically significant increase from pretest

TABLE 2 Couple Dyad Mean and *SD* Preworkshop and Postworkshop Values

	<i>N</i>	Preworkshop		Postworkshop	
		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
DAS					
Consensus	114	44.75	6.55	46.64	6.61
Satisfaction	114	33.18	7.00	35.85	6.38
Cohesion	114	13.72	3.78	14.65	3.80
Affect/Expression	114	7.05	1.20	7.63	1.87
DAS total	114	98.70	17.16	104.78	16.41
CPQ					
Demand/Withdraw	114	30.70	9.17	28.11	9.77
Criticize/Defend	114	17.03	6.19	15.26	6.17
Positive Interactions	114	19.43	5.31	21.54	4.54

to posttest ($p = .005$), but no significant differences were found from pretest to follow-up or posttest to follow-up. Therefore, the first hypothesis for the CPQ was supported for all three subscales. The second hypothesis was supported for the positive interactions subscale (i.e., changes were retained). Interestingly, participants continued to decrease negative behaviors (e.g., demand/withdraw; criticize; defend) at the follow-up testing; results did not show similar movement for the DAS subscales.

We found gender differences across time on the DAS and CPQ. From pretest to posttest, post hoc tests of the DAS total scores showed a significant increase for females [$F(2,32) = 6.255, p = .007$] but not males [$F(2,32) = 7.498, p = .084$]. Additionally, male scores decreased significantly from posttest to follow-up ($p = .001$). CPQ analyses revealed that mean scores for both males and females differed significantly between time points on all subscales. Post hoc tests revealed differences across time. From pretest to posttest, males showed a significant decrease in criticize/defend behaviors ($p = .029$) and females showed a significant increase in positive interaction patterns ($p = .001$). From posttest to follow-up, females continued to significantly decrease negative behaviors [Demand/Withdraw ($p = .029$); Criticize/Defend ($p = .025$)], while males significantly decreased their use of positive interactions ($p = .024$). From pretest to follow-up, both males and females showed continued significant decreases in negative interaction patterns.

Analysis of Couple Dyads

As mentioned previously, due to the weak response rate from both members of the couple dyad at the 3-month follow-up, the sample size (11 couples) was not large enough to perform a meaningful RMANOVA at the dyad level. However, in order to understand the impact of the workshop on participating

TABLE 3 *t*-Test Pre-Post Values for Couple Dyads

	<i>M diff</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>Df</i>
DAS			
Consensus	-1.89	-.430 [†]	113
Satisfaction	-2.67	-6.16 [†]	113
Cohesion	-.932	-2.99 [†]	113
Affect/Expression	-.586	-5.21 [†]	113
DAS total	-6.07	-5.54 [†]	113
CPQ			
Demand/Withdraw	2.59	3.72 [†]	113
Criticize/Defend	1.77	3.80 [†]	113
Positive Interactions	-2.11	-5.60 [†]	113

Note. [†]Significant at .01.

couples from pre to post workshop, paired sample *t*-tests were performed for the couple dyads ($N = 114$). The subscale mean scores for the couples can be found in Table 2. Couple dyads showed changes in the expected direction on all of the subscales of the two assessments and Table 3 presents the *t*-values showing that all of these changes were significant at the .01 level.

Halford et al. (2003) recognized that CRE provided to low-risk couples might have little impact, whereas high-risk couples are more likely to benefit. Therefore, additional analyses were completed on couples based on whether they would be considered by the DAS to be “distressed” (< 97 on DAS Total Score); partner scores were averaged together. About 45% of the couples ($N = 51$) qualified as distressed and the other 45% ($N = 63$ couples) had an average score above 97 and were therefore considered “nondistressed.” It was hypothesized that those who were distressed at the beginning of the workshop would show greater improvements in their scores on the assessments. Table 4 shows the mean scores for these groups, and Table 5 shows the comparison of these groups from pre to post workshop. Table 5 highlights that the distressed couples achieved positive significant changes on all subscale scores over the course of the workshop, while the nondistressed couples achieved positive significant changes in just three of the subscales.

DISCUSSION

The results showed that over the course of the GTLYW workshops, participants significantly increased their levels of relational satisfaction to their partner, decreased the use of negative communication patterns, and increased the use of communication patterns involving positive interactions. These findings indicate that couples attending a GTLYW workshop who learn and practice particular skills as well as learn about the nature of couple

TABLE 4 Mean and *SD* Values for Nondistressed and Distressed Couples

	Nondistressed preworkshop			Nondistressed postworkshop		
	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
DAS						
Consensus	63	49.29	4.07	63	48.78	5.49
Satisfaction	63	38.03	4.01	63	39.23	4.33
Cohesion	63	15.95	3.02	63	16.25	3.12
Affect/Expression	63	8.16	1.65	63	8.54	1.63
DAS total	63	111.43	9.50	63	113.80	11.77
CPQ						
Demand/Withdraw	63	20.06	6.82	63	19.12	7.06
Criticize/Defend	63	13.72	6.02	63	13.25	5.74
Positive Interactions	63	22.16	4.68	63	23.48	3.94
	Distressed preworkshop			Distressed postworkshop		
	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
DAS						
Consensus	51	39.15	4.31	51	42.75	5.79
Satisfaction	51	27.19	4.95	51	31.67	6.04
Cohesion	51	10.97	2.62	51	12.69	3.65
Affect/Expression	51	5.68	1.47	51	6.51	1.53
DAS total	51	82.98	9.85	51	93.63	14.38
CPQ						
Demand/Withdraw	51	29.38	4.41	51	25.69	7.03
Criticize/Defend	51	21.12	3.29	51	17.75	5.83
Positive Interactions	51	16.06	3.95	51	19.16	4.11

relationships within a psychoeducational environment can successfully incorporate what they have learned into their relationship. Additionally, our results highlight that distressed couples may achieve more immediate gain from this workshop than non-distressed ones.

In the secondary hypotheses, we sought to understand whether participants retained the changes made on each assessment over the course

TABLE 5 Nondistressed and Distressed Couples Pre-Post Workshop Values

	Nondistressed			Distressed		
	<i>M diff</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>M diff</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>
DAS						
Consensus	-0.49	-0.94	62	-3.60	-5.44 [†]	50
Satisfaction	-1.20	-3.97 [†]	62	-4.49	-5.41 [†]	50
Cohesion	-0.29	-0.84	62	-1.72	-3.24 [†]	50
Affect/Expression	-0.39	-2.93 [†]	62	-0.83	-4.45 [†]	50
DAS total	-2.37	-2.44*	62	-10.65	-5.41 [†]	50
CPQ						
Demand/Withdraw	0.94	1.52	62	3.70	3.83 [†]	50
Criticize/Defend	0.47	0.94	62	3.37	4.29 [†]	50
Positive Interactions	-1.31	-3.07 [†]	62	-3.09	-4.88 [†]	50

Note. *Significant at .05, [†]significant at .01.

of the workshop or if they reverted back toward their original modes of functioning. While these results showed that participants benefitted from the workshop in terms of relational consensus, satisfaction, and affectational expression (DAS), these benefits were not retained 3 months after the workshop completed. At the same time, results showed that the workshop not only had an impact on individuals' patterns of communication at the posttest, but negative communication patterns continued to decrease 3 months later. These decreases in negative communication patterns evidenced through the CPQ subscales are noteworthy and should be considered for future study.

The results on the DAS supported the findings of several meta-analysis of CREs, which have demonstrated an overall slight improvement in couples relationships and some deterioration of positive results in follow-up testing (Baucom, Hahlweg, Atkins, Engl, & Thurmaier, 2006; Blanchard et al., 2009). Hence, the durability of positive changes made on the DAS from GTLYW workshop participation is currently questionable. These results indicate that follow-up or "booster" programs may be necessary to help couples maintain gains made over the course of the workshop.

A major emphasis in the IRT approach is for couples to decrease negative behaviors and negative interactions with each other. In the workshop, couples are taught to approach each other in a less threatening way, refrain from using accusatory statements, and to look each other in the eye and use the Imago dialogue process, which includes reflective listening, validating the others point of view, and empathizing with the other. The 3-month follow-up scores suggest that these are indeed robust skills that significantly decrease the amount of negative communication behaviors. Future research could confirm whether the GTLYW workshop in particular functions to limit these types of negative patterns.

LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The importance of this study lies in the fact that this was the first large-scale evaluation of the GTLYW workshops. Considering the extensive geographic reach of this program and the vast number of couples who participate, it is critical that the workshop is further investigated.

There are a number of clear limitations to this study that should be addressed in future studies. First, the lack of a control group limits the applicability and generalizability of the results. While a control group would likely not significantly change over a 3-day period, the ability to compare changes after 3 months would help determine whether changes made were greater than no treatment whatsoever. Second, it is difficult to generalize our findings to diverse populations because the sample was primarily Caucasian. This is especially limiting because the workshop is frequently delivered in international settings. Third, this study purposefully analyzed three workshops

that were presented by the same individuals in order to limit differences due to presentation style; however, as more research on these workshops is completed, a larger sample of presenters should be included so that researchers may ascertain whether presentation style or connection to the audience influences participant changes.

Finally, the most significant limitation of this research was the attrition rate in the 3-month follow-up assessments. Not only was the total sample size significantly decreased, but of those who did respond, very few of their partners did so; hence, this limited the ability to evaluate changes at the couple dyad in particular. Incentive programs for participation may help increase the follow-up sample size in future studies and continue to follow-up participants at even later time points.

GTLYW workshop presenters should also consider email reminders, practice sessions, or group booster sessions after the close of the workshop. Group or couple sessions should include practicing dialogue, sharing stories of success, increasing positive behaviors, learning additional skills, and answering questions. Couples with more intense relationship problems may also use these sessions to deal with problems requiring more intense therapy than provided by the workshop. The positive part is the couple will have the basic skills used in Imago therapy, thus saving time in the therapy sessions. This type of integration may enhance the durability of skills gained at the workshop as well as encourage participants to remain connected to the information gained and therefore increase the likelihood of continued practice.

The findings of this study are encouraging for those who participate in the GTLYW workshops. They provide initial support for the presentation of Imago relationship therapy principles in a CRE format and show that participation can have a positive effect on relationship satisfaction and communication patterns. While more research is needed and there are limitations to this study, this research is an important building block toward further investigation of this particular CRE. Considering the extent to which it is offered and participated, it is critical that studies like this are replicated.

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