

PREMARITAL PREPARATION:
AN EVALUATION OF THE CATHOLIC ENGAGED ENCOUNTER

by
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the present study was to assess the short-term effects of the Catholic Engaged Encounter (EE) on the relationship quality of 27 engaged individuals. Subjects were pre-tested two (2) weeks prior to the EE weekend, and post tested two (2) weeks after the treatment through paper and pencil questionnaires mailed to them. Item analysis indicated a significant gain in relationship quality in areas of communication. Discussion centers on further use of the EE treatment, and implications of the durability of the increased quality of communication.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Marriage is, by far, the most common life style chosen by people; nine of ten Americans over 21 years old, marry. Many also divorce, but of those, 75-80% also remarry (Stahmann, 1980).

In the past 50 years, the institution of marriage has undergone much change. We now expect more from the marital relationship than we have ever before (Rutledge, 1966). Beyond the traditional love, belonging, intimacy, the feeling of being needed, and a desire to live significantly with another person; we now expect satisfaction, emotional security, and personal fulfillment in a creative relationship (Ard and Ard, 1969; Albrecht and Bock, 1972; Mace, 1972).

Georg Karlson, the Swedish expert on marriage, said that marital dissatisfaction is a result of the difference between what you expect and what you get in the relationship (as cited in Mace, 1959). Naturally, the more demanded, the harder it will be to please.

With the change in marriage, has come the idea that preparation for marriage may help in preventing future marriage and family breakdown, by helping build meaningful

relationships, providing an understanding of family influences, values, teaching skills in communication and conflict resolution, and assistance in family and life planning (Mace, 1972; Rutledge, 1966; Cohen, 1980). Up to now, this task of preparation and preventive care has been assumed by churches and ministers, private counselors, state programs, and public educational systems (Bader et al., 1980).

Research in the field has come primarily out of the college and university settings. This leaves some question about the effectiveness of the other programs within the religious sector and state department (Gurman and Kniskern, 1980). This study seeks to evaluate one of the programs in the religious sector, the Catholic Engaged Encounter, of the Catholic Diocese of Tucson.

Need for the Study

The high divorce rates and the level of conflict in marriages that do remain intact, shows evidence of little preparation for marriage, even though premarital preparation programs are on the rise (Rutledge, 1966). Part of the problem may stem from the fact that many premarital programs are being handled by religious and private organizations, led by non-professionals, having no built-in evaluation techniques (Hof and Miller, 1981; Stahmann, 1980; Schumm and Denton, 1979; Bagorozzi and Rauen, 1981). A second part of the problem seems to stem from the present practice of calling a program successful if it leads to discussion among

participants, even when statistical analyses contradict the conclusion by showing no significant change in the relationships it touches (Knox and Patrick, 1971).

A group effort is needed to gain insight from each other's program successes and failures. Evidence of success is needed, and it must be validated by statistical analysis of change in relationships. A question remains unanswered: Do premarital preparation programs actually insure a couple of a better chance for marital success, due to elements of their program? A first step in answering the question is evaluation of new and existing programs.

Statement of the Problem

Researchers agree that preventive mediation in marital preparation is needed (Cohen, 1980; Mace, 1972; Wells and Figurel, 1979; Bienvenu, 1975; Markman and Floyd, 1980). Experts in the field of marriage have come to the conclusion that certain skills are needed for a healthy, satisfying, successful marriage; and have found that many of these skills can be effectively taught (Rollin and Dowd, 1981; Boyd and Roach, 1977).

The problem lies in the fact that programs are being developed regularly without any built-in evaluation, or that the evaluation techniques being used, are faulty in some way. This study seeks to test a program of premarital preparation which is widely used in the religious sector, but

which is rarely included among programs statistically evaluated for effectiveness.

Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1. There will be no significant gain in the relationship quality of persons who participate in the Catholic Engaged Encounter, over a one-month period, and on several demographic variables, as determined by an item analysis of the 26 items on the Guerney Relationship Change Scale.

Hypothesis 2. Male participants in the CEE will not show more significant gain in relationship quality than will female participants over a one-month period, and on several demographic variables, as determined by an item analysis of the 26 items on the Guerney Relationship Change Scale.

Assumptions

In performing the study, the following assumptions have been made:

1. That the Guerney Relationship Change Scale is an accurate measuring instrument of the Engaged Encounter Goals.
2. That there were no significant difference in the leadership styles during the three different weekends tested.
3. That participants have responded truthfully and honestly in answering the GRCS instrument.

4. That the nature of the instrument, the statements and form, did not interfere with the administration of the instrument.

Limitations

Subjects were limited to participants in the Catholic Engaged Encounter. Subject responses to the study were limited due to the use of a paper and pencil, self-reported questionnaire, which subjects completed voluntarily with guaranteed anonymity.

Operational Definitions

For clarity and consistency, the following definitions of terms will be used throughout the study.

Quality of relationship: The degree of excellence; recognizing high levels of satisfaction, communication, intimacy, trust, sensitivity, openness, and understanding as important elements determining the higher levels of relationship success.

Engaged: Couples who have formally stated their intent to marry within the Catholic Church.

Engaged Encounter: also known as the Catholic Engaged Encounter, and E.E. This is a formal program of premarital preparation designed to promote a better understanding of the nature of marriage, and the values and expectations that each person brings into the marital

relationship (Cohen, 1980). The intent is to increase levels of awareness, intimacy, trust, and communication through sharing on the part of team members and participants.

Premarital preparation: synonymous with premarital counseling and preventive mediation. It is recognized here as, any program which seeks to enhance any element deemed important in the marital relationship. These programs range from simple discussion to extensive skills training.

Guerney Relationship Change Scale: a standardized instrument, designed to measure overall change in the quality of relationship, focusing on elements such as communication, intimacy, satisfaction, and openness.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This section presents a review of selected literature related to the study. The field of premarital preparation and counseling is an active one in research. This is reflected in the variety of approaches found; ranging from programs based on simple discussion, to highly structured programs for building communication and problem solving skills, with full experimental evaluation.

There are two major divisions within this review:

1. Programs including statistical evaluation.
2. Program write-ups, and programs without evaluation.

Programs Including Statistical Evaluation

Communication and problem-solving skills have been identified by researchers, as major components of a healthy relationship (Rutledge, 1966; Bienvenu, 1971; Boyd and Roach, 1977). There are numerous studies and programs which include these elements.

Zoost (1973) conducted a study among university students, testing premarital communication skills education. She evaluated a 5-session group program of six dating or engaged couples, which was designed to teach skills of

communication and self-disclosure. The program utilized videotape feedback, video-modeling, and rehearsal.

Results of a pre-test/post test evaluation showed a significant increase in knowledge about communication and in the amount of self-disclosure to partner. The students also reported the program to have been helpful.

Weissberg et al. (1978) designed and tested an 8-session Relationship Skills Training Program for college students. The program focused on being more comfortable in communicating and using listening skills, paraphrasing, giving feedback, and skills in ending conversations. Eight students were evaluated through pre- and post testing, measuring anxiety levels and use of the skills.

Results of the study showed a significant decline in anxiety in communicating. The use of relationship skills increased, but not significantly. The researchers contend that this program may be an effective treatment for persons trying to build close personal relationships.

Another program developed by Boyd and Roach (1977) sought to identify specific skills in communication that differentiate between satisfied and dissatisfied married couples. This study analyzed 111 married couples' responses to questions on how they usually relate to one another.

Discriminant and content analyses on the survey items resulted in the identification of three major groups of skills:

1. Sending direct messages.
2. Active listening or receiving messages.
3. Verbal expression of respect or esteem for partner.

Boyd and Roach believe that their results lend support to the assumption that marital satisfaction and effective communication are correlated, and that a few specific skills are particularly significant.

Haynes and Avery (1979) designed a study to develop, implement, and evaluate a program of communication skills training. They identified self-disclosure and empathy as the important skills to learn. Under an experimental design, with 48 students, they held a 16-session training program. The goal was to increase the students' knowledge about communication, and to increase their experience with self-disclosure.

Their results showed a significant increase in the students' knowledge, disclosure, and empathy skills levels. The researchers believe that the importance of their findings lies in the evidence that these identifiable skills can be taught at a relatively young age, which may deter future relationship problems.

Another approach to the evaluation of premarital programs can be seen in Cohen's (1980) study comparing a Values Clarification Program to the Catholic Engaged Encounter. He hypothesized that couples who participated in

either of the programs would show a significant increase in the clarity of their marital values perception, which Cohen correlates with marital satisfaction. He also hypothesized that a greater level of perceptual accuracy would be seen in couples participating in the Values Clarification Program.

The results led him to reject both hypotheses. Cohen found that the Engaged Encounter group proved superior in providing perceptual accuracy of marital values over both the treatment group and the control group. Cohen believes that his results show that Engaged Encounter made a strong impact upon the actual values systems of the participants, and brought on a decrease in the partner's self-reported value discrepancies.

Knox and Patrick (1971) studied students enrolled in a marriage course. Using the old adage, that actions speak louder than words, they hypothesized that students who make objective behavioral analyses of themselves and their partners, as opposed to analysis of what people say that they feel or will do, will provide a more realistic picture of themselves and their prospective partners.

The results of the study showed no significant differences between estimated and actual behavior of self or partner. The researchers still deemed the program valuable since the students reported that they found the program helpful.

Wampler and Sprenkle (1980) completed a follow-up evaluation of the Miller Minnesota Couples Communication Program (1976). The researchers sought to find out if the program retained its significant effect on the relationships that had been evident immediately following participation in the program. Miller's program was designed to teach couples new open-style communication techniques, which were expected to enhance their relationships.

Results of the follow-up study 4-6 months after the program, showed a discontinuation of use of the new skills introduced by the M CCP. There was some discussion as to why the skills were no longer used, but researchers still considered the program to be one of the strongest on the market today due to the program design, and leadership training; despite its failure to show long-term results.

Guldner (1971) surveyed 18 couples from a variety of premarital programs, to see what the sessions meant to the individuals and their relationships. In the first section of his study, he interviewed the couples 1-10 months after their weddings. Eleven of the eighteen couples could not recall the nature nor the content of the programs they had attended. Four of the couples reported that the program had been of value, that it had helped in discussing issues that they had been uncomfortable with; such as values, goals after marriage, roles, and ways of handling feelings. The

last three couples reported that the ministers who had led their programs were a source of conflict in the sessions.

Due to his findings, Guldner suggested attaining a commitment for marital counseling prior to the marriage, and not seeing the couple for any extensive work until after the wedding. He found post-wedding couples better prepared to look at their relationships more realistically, and prepared to solve conflicts that had developed. He suggests waiting with counseling until the couple has been married for at least one month, and preferably six months.

Avery et al. (1980) conducted a study to assess the effects of the Guerney Relationship Enhancement Program (REP) on the self-disclosure and empathy skills of pre-marital dating couples. These skills were identified by Guerney (1977) as primary elements of a satisfying, workable relationship.

Over an 8-week period, the 25-couple experimental group participated in the REP, while the 29-couple control group attended a lecture/discussion program which focused on the nature and function of relationships without teaching any skills.

At pre-testing, the two groups showed no significant differences. Using behavioral assessments, at post testing there was evidence of a significant change in the experimental group's levels of empathy and self-disclosure. A

follow-up post test nine months later, showed some decrease in the empathy and disclosure, but they were still evident. The researchers interpreted their results as supportive of the hypothesis that the REP has positive short and long-term effects on relationships.

Markman and Floyd (1980) designed a behavioral marital therapy model. Through an 18-hour program, they taught couples communication skills and problem-solving skills. They utilized lectures, video-feedback and modeling, consultation, and homework assignments.

Evaluation of the program through pre- and post testing, with a waiting-list control group, showed no significant changes in either communication nor problem-solving skills levels. The authors believe that even though no short-term change was measured, there may still be some change over a long period due to the program.

Program Write-ups, and Programs Without Evaluation

There is an abundance of articles published that describe programs of premarital preparation and related subjects (Maxwell, 1971; Gleason and Prescott, 1977; Rollin and Dowd, 1979). Each of these stresses the individual author's idea of the best way to approach the subject. These articles include no program evaluation, but often cite leading researchers in the field who have completed evaluation on their own designs and/or measuring instruments.

One trend in premarital preparation is the use of the group setting. Maxwell (1971) wrote on the rationale for group work. He based his writing on the social nature of man and marriage. He says that group work: 1) gives a couple a way to realize the unrealistic nature of some expectations they may hold; 2) is less threatening than individual counseling; 3) permits voluntary self-exposure; and 4) may be seen as "refined rapping" as opposed to psychotherapy.

Gleason and Prescott (1977) support group-style premarital counseling because a successful group is seen as closely resembling a successful marital relationship; by offering unquestioned membership, free interaction among members, self-disclosure, nonjudgemental acceptance of others, high trust, and the opportunity for feedback and expression of feelings.

Researchers from the National Catholic Engaged Encounter (1980) sent a questionnaire to Diocesan leaders across the country, seeking to investigate which premarital programs were most widely used, and to identify what the most important elements are in a premarital program.

The results were varied, but centered around the weekend group experience (EE included). The researchers identified elements of teaching, directing, support, encouragement, and an orientation of marriage as a Catholic

sacrament of community as some of the more important things sought in a program. The CEE report was incomplete because the implications and recommendations sections were left unfinished.

Another trend in premarital program write-ups, includes communication training and assistance. A number of discussion-starting instruments have been developed, some of which have been published. The Pre-Marital Inventory (PMI) (1976) and the Engaged Couple Inventory (ECI) of the Family Life Services (1976) of the Catholic Diocese of Denver, are just two examples of such instruments. Some are designed to show possible areas of conflict, and some merely to assist in dialogue; but the instruments are not designed to adapt to statistical analyses.

Wells and Figurel (1979) developed a highly structured, systematic communication program. In it, they stressed active-listening skills, clear self-expression, and training in dialogue. The program was not evaluated.

Rollin and Dowd (1979) in their program, seek to train couples as effective communicators in order to restore conflicted relationships and assist couples to be resistant to future disruption. The major elements of the design are attending to the other person, ownership of one's own position, and conflict resolution. The program utilizes video-feedback and intervention in role-playing conflicted situations.

Hinkle and Moore (1971) describe a relationship enrichment workshop that was developed for engaged and married couples. The goal of the workshop was to teach concepts of communication, and to offer direct experiences in constructive fighting, effective expression, and dialogue. This workshop uses open discussion, simplified transactional analysis, feedback, awareness raising exercises, role playing, and relaxation training.

The area of premarital preparation and counseling is an active one in research literature. Many styles and new programs are available each year.

The published articles and research studies vary in approach and depth. It is not uncommon to find a simple program description, with little or no evaluation. There are also published results of strict scientific studies available, which statistically analyze the effectiveness and effects of different programs.

Results of evaluated studies show evidence that communication may be an important element in healthy premarital/marital relationships. Further, there may be identifiable skills involved in healthy communication, and that some of these skills may be effectively taught.

There is some discussion among researchers questioning several issues:

1. Whether or not premarital counseling is effective over a short and long period of time, and whether these effects are lasting.
2. Whether or not statistical evaluation of programs is necessary.
3. Whether statistical evidence showing no significant change is enough to warrant discontinuation of a program.

The conflicting results among studies are an indication that more research is needed in the area, and that programs in existence need to be tested for effectiveness. There is a great potential in this area for direct application of successes and failures (statistically determined) to new programs being planned.

Gurman and Kniskern (1977) support the spirit and aim of premarital programs, believing that even the most innovative and best intended programs should offer empirical evidence of their effectiveness prior to wide dissemination.

In summary, literature in the field of premarital preparation is available in many forms, from simple program write-ups, to statistical evaluation of programs. Results of research testing in the area lend support to the idea that premarital preparation has a positive effect on relationships immediately following some programs. The question of long-term retention of change remains unanswered or in some cases, is negated.

CHAPTER 3

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

This chapter describes the methods and procedures used to test the hypotheses presented in Chapter 1 of the study. The following is discussed: The Sampling Procedure and Sample, the EE Treatment, the Instrument, and the Analysis of Data.

Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1. There will be no significant gain in the quality of relationship of persons who participate in the CEE over a one-month period as determined by an analysis of the 26 items on the Guerney Relationship Change Scale.

Hypothesis 2. Male participants in the CEE will not show more significant gain in relationship quality than will female participants over a one-month period, and on several demographic variables, as determined by an item analysis of the 26 items the Guerney Relationship Change Scale.

Sampling Procedure and Sample

This study was conducted with the cooperation of the Catholic Engaged Encounter, who provided pre-registration lists for three 3 EE weekends. Eighty-two persons were contacted and asked to voluntarily participate in the study by

returning the pre-test. A cover letter explained the RCS pre-test as the focal point of the study; no mention of the EE was made. (Copy of cover letter can be found in Appendix A) Contacts were made two-weeks before and after the EE weekends. Post tests were mailed to people returning the pre-test, and follow-up letters were sent for the first groups. Time limits prohibited follow-up to the third group. Subjects were asked to complete the questionnaire, and return in an enclosed envelope.

Pre-registration lists provided the study with 82 prospective subjects. No attempt was made to select or limit participants. A total of 27 people (33% of those contacted) voluntarily completed both pre- and post tests. Males made up 37% of the final group, and females 63%. The participants ranged in age from 19-36 (mean = 24.5), and education levels ranged from 12th grade-6 years of college (median = 4.3 years college). Of those participants, 88% were entering a first marriage; the other 22% were preparing for second marriages.

Engaged Encounter Treatment

The Engaged Encounter weekend consists of a series of presentations by a team of two couples and a Priest. The following topics were presented:

1. Encounter with me.
2. Openness and communication

3. Signs of a closed relationship.
4. Marriage as a vocation.
5. Marriage morality.
6. Decisions in marriage.
7. Sex and sexuality.
8. Unity.
9. Betrothal.
10. Wedding--The beginning of our sacrament.
11. Two-by-two.
12. Sharing the vision.
13. Plan of life.
14. Forgiveness in marriage.

Presentations ranged from 10-20 minutes (except for Sex and sexuality, which ran for 40 minutes). Speakers followed a content outline and added comments from their own personal experience.

Following the topic presentation, couples presenting shared their own stories of marriage and their transition from engagement to marriage as a vocation to each other; and the Priest drew parallels from a religious vocation of service in the priesthood, to the marital relationship. Couples were then sent out to discuss questions relevant to the presentation, beginning by writing to, and then talking with their partner.

The focus of the experience was to improve the quality of relationship and commitment to the other. The EE

strives to promote a better understanding of the nature of marriage, and the values and expectations that each person brings into the relationship. The key elements that are apparent are awareness, intimacy, trust, and communication.

Instrument

The Relationship Change Scale (Appendices B & D) is a 26-item, 5 point interval, Likert-type rating scale. In this study, it was used as both a pre- and post test. Schlien and Guerney (1971) developed the RCS as a measure that would be sensitive to change in the quality of relationships. Elements of the instrument range from awareness and understanding partner, to expresion of needs, positive and negative feelings, and handling disagreements.

Reliability and construct validity for the scale have been confirmed by Schlien (1971) and Rappaport (197) (both cited in Guerney, 1977). Concurrent validity was also confirmed through correlation with two other scales, the HPCS (.29 $p < .01$) and SCS (.49 $p < .001$).

The pre-test instrument included a demographics section to acquire additional information. A final question was added to the post test to confirm self-reports of change. Pre-tests and post test were numerically coded. The instrument was scored by assigning numerical values to the items (1 = much less to 5 = much more).

Analysis of Data

Retention of the hypotheses was dependent upon the results of a two-tailed t-test using the formula:

$$T = \frac{10(X-M) + 50}{S.D.} \text{ (Lindquist, 1942).}$$

T-tests were run:

1. Across groups on each of 26 items for significant gain pre- to post test.
2. Across the group of males on the 26 items for significant gain, and
3. Across the female group on the 26 items for significant gain from pre- to post test.

The demographic information, and final question on the post test was analyzed by running frequency statistics.

In summary, subjects participated in the CEE and were pre- and post tested by mail over a one-month period. Twenty-seven persons completed the treatment and both Relationship Change Scales (10 male, 17 female). The instrument measured change in quality of relationship with 26 items, on a Likert-type scale. Data was analyzed with item analysis t-tests across the group, and across male and female scores. Frequencies were used to describe demographic information gathered and the participants' final question of perceived change.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study was to assess and measure the change in relationship quality after participation in the Catholic Engaged Encounter (EE), as measured by the Guerney Relationship Change Scale (RCS). The Analysis of the Results, Discussion of Conclusions, Implications and Recommendations are presented in this chapter.

Analysis of the Results

The following is based on the information supplied by the 27 subjects (10 male, and 17 female) who completed the study. Demographic information showed that no other major marital preparation programs were attended concurrently with EE. Eight subjects (30%) had conferences with a Priest. Only one subject went beyond basic meetings with a Priest, to a college level course on marital readiness.

Hypothesis 1 states that there will be no significant gain in the relationship quality of persons who participate in the Catholic Engaged Encounter, over a one-month period, and on several demographic variables, as determined by an item analysis of the 26 item Guerney Relationship Change Scale. T-test results of group responses from pre- to post testing are presented in Table

1. Significance levels are at the .05 level for all statistics. Item analysis showed a gain in the mean scores on 3 of the 26 items, these are numbers:

- 8) I understand my partner's feelings,
- 18) Ability to constructively handle disagreements,
- 22) Ability to constructively express negative feelings toward partner.

(Further explanation of items can be found in Appendix B.)

TABLE 1
GROUP RESULTS

ITEM	N	MEAN	STANDARD DEVIATION	T-VALUE	df	2-TAIL PROBABILITY
8	27	3.888	.641	-1.99	26	.05*
18	27	3.4815	.802	-2.36	26	.02*
22	27	3.3704	.792	-1.99	26	.05*

* Significant at least at the .05 level of confidence

As can be seen in Table 1, t-test across the group results showed a significant gain in the three items of understanding partner's feelings, handling disagreements constructively, and ability to constructively express negative feelings toward partner. Since significance was found on 3 of 26 items, Hypothesis 1, that there would be no significant gain in the relationship quality of persons who participate in the CEE, as measured by item analysis of the Relationship Change Scale, is rejected for those three items. Analysis of the final question on the post test, asking for perceived change from the participant, showed 63% of the participants also recognized change as a result of the treatment.

Hypothesis 2 states that male participants in the Catholic Engaged Encounter will not show more significant gain in relationship quality than will female participants, as determined by an item analysis of the 26 items on the Guerney Relationship Change Scale. T-test results of male group responses from pre- to post testing are presented in Table 2. Item analysis focused on the 2 highest of 26 items of the RCS, these are:

- 8) I understand my partner's feelings,
- 25) My capacity to deal constructively with negative feelings my partner expresses toward me.

(Further explanation of items can be found in Appendix B.)

TABLE 2
MALE GROUP RESULTS

ITEM	N	MEAN	STANDARD DEVIATION	T- VALUE	df	2-TAIL PROBABILITY
8 pre-	10	4.100	.568	-1.96	9	.08
post		4.400	.516			
25 pre-	10	3.600	.516	-1.95	9	.08
post		3.900	.568			

* Significant at the .05 level of confidence

As indicated in Table 2, the t-values did not reach significance at conventional levels, but do show a tendency toward improvement. Analysis of the final question on the post test, asking for perceived change from the participant, showed 70% of the male participants recognized change after the weekend.

Female group results are shown in Table 3. Many more items reached significance at conventional levels.

These are:

- 1) My satisfaction with myself as a person,
- 6) I am clearly aware of my partner's needs and desires,
- 15) My trust in my partner

18) Our ability to handle disagreements constructively,

22) My ability to constructively express negative feelings toward my partner.

(Further explanation of items can be found in Appendix B.)

TABLE 3
FEMALE GROUP RESULTS

ITEM	N	MEAN	STANDARD DEVIATION	T-VALUE	df	2-TAIL PROBABILITY
1 pre-	17	3.9412	.659	2.38	16	.03**
1 post		3.5294	.717			
6 pre-	17	3.5882	.712	-2.07	16	.05*
6 post		3.9412	.748			
15 pre-	17	3.6417	.702	-1.95	16	.05*
15 post		4.0588	.827			
18 pre-	17	3.5294	.874	-1.85	16	.08
18 post		3.8824	.600			
22 pre-	17	3.2941	.920	-1.85	16	.08
22 post		3.6471	.702			

* Significant at the .05 level of confidence

** Significant decrease at the .05 level of confidence

As can be seen in Table 3, one of 26 items showed a significant gain for the female group. That item is regarding the women's awareness of their partner's needs and desires. Three other items, trust in partner handling disagreements constructively, and constructively expressing negative feelings showed no significant gain at conventional levels, but do show a trend toward improvement.

Analysis of the final question on the post test, asking for perceived change from the participant, showed 59% of the female participants recognized change after the EE weekend.

Since the male group showed only a tendency toward improvement on two items, and the female group did show a significant gain on one item, plus a tendency toward improvement on three others, comparing these results leads to a rejection of hypothesis 2, that no difference would be seen between male and female results.

On an interesting note, Table 3 does show one item for the females that significantly decreased; that is satisfaction with self as a person. Further discussion of this can be found in the discussion section.

Discussion of Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to investigate and measure change in relationship quality among people who participated in the CEE, using an item analysis of the Relationship Change Scale (RCS). An analysis of means of the

groups from pre- to post testing, should significant change on 3 of the 26 items of the RCS.

The group as a whole showed an increase in:

1. ability to understand partner's feelings ($p < .05$)
2. ability to handle disagreements constructively ($p < .02$)
3. ability to express negative feelings toward partner ($p < .05$).

This shows a strong focus on communication skills. This significant change was substantiated by results of the final question on the post test which asked specifically for areas of change the participants perceived for themselves. 63% of the participants reported change, specifics included the areas of openness to communicate with partner, ability to handle disagreements, and expression of feelings, especially the negative.

In looking at the EE experience, it can be seen that an atmosphere of trust and acceptance is being modeled and encouraged by team members and encouraged. This is different from the atmosphere most commonly found in the "outside" world. This might lead to the change found in participants ability to share feelings and have them understood by their partners. It also might explain the change in expression of negative feelings. The environment is created as a safe place, where there are leaders to help in case a couple experienced difficulties.

The EE also sets up discussion of difficult areas, which up to now, may have been avoided. Couples are put into a "no avoidance" state and they may find that areas which had been considered frightening or taboo are actually within the reach of discussion and/or resolution. This might explain the gain in ability to deal constructively with disagreements.

Analysis of the women's group means showed a significant gain on one item of the RCS from pre- to post testing. This was in the women's awareness of their partner's needs and desires ($p < .05$). Again, it might be seen as a function of the atmosphere of safety and acceptance demonstrated, which would encourage the men to share feelings more openly than usual. During the weekend, the couples are surrounded by open, communicating and trusting role models.

The women's results also showed a tendency toward improvement on three other items, without reaching statistical significance.

These are:

- 15) trust in partner ($p < .06$)
- 18) ability to handle disagreements constructively ($p < .08$)
- 22) ability to constructively express negative feelings toward partner ($p < .08$).

In substantiation of the results, 59% of the women did perceive change in their relationships in the areas mentioned above.

The tendency toward improvement without significant change might be a result of the newness and required depth, of the communication patterns. Coupled with a significant decrease in the women's satisfaction with self ($p < .03$), it might be explained that as the women experienced the EE treatment, they became more aware of the nature of a working relationship, and saw how much work they needed to do, leading to anxiety about personal growth and change.

Analysis of the mean scores on the group of males from pre- to post tests showed no significant gain on any of the 26 items of the RCS. Two items did show a tendency toward improvement:

- 8) understanding partner's feelings ($p < .08$)
- 25) capacity to deal constructively with negative feelings expressed toward me ($p < .08$).

The tendency toward improvement may be seen in a positive light as the beginning of movement within new patterns of behavior, which society has not generally taught men in their younger years. The "newness" may explain the lack of significant gain.

The lack of further evidence of significant change as a whole may be an indication of either methodological or

theoretical error in the study or measuring instrument. While the study found significant results for the group on 3 items, there were 23 others without significant movement. It is possible that a larger sample would have shown more significant results.

There is a possibility of a methodological error in the use of the RCS instrument, since 70% of the males reported perceived change on the final question on the post test, but the instrument recorded no significant change, yet only 59% of the females reported perceived change and the instrument did measure significant gain on one item. It is possible that the instrument as it was used, had a sex bias, or was not sensitive enough to measure the items that had realized change. There is also the possibility that the self reports of perceived change were not accurate, or were results of perceived change in thought but not yet behavior.

Confounding variables may also be responsible for influencing the results. The nature of the sampling procedure and sample made it difficult to control subjects for variable such as age and educational level spread; either or both of which might have influenced the results. Other variables not controlled were religious preference and level of participation, maturation of subjects, and differences in presentation of material in the EE treatment.

Other explanations for the lack of further statistical evidence of change include the possibility of a theoretical error. It could be that the significant change documented was a result of the attention given by the EE team, perhaps leading to an "emotional high" effect. If this is true, then follow-up study would probably not show a retention of the significant change in quality. Another possibility is that there truly was change in quality because the participants were ready for change and wanted it, but that the EE treatment had little actual influence.

In summary, there was evidence of movement and some significant gain in the relationship quality of participants after the EE. The results point to areas of communication which may have been influenced by the EE atmosphere and/or content. The subjective nature of the results show the necessity of further research to substantiate this claim.

Implications and Recommendations

Premarital preparation is a growing idea and practice in many areas, from the educational system to the religious sector. Actual evaluation of programs, however, is sparse, with the exception of the college and university setting. This study is one of few, which has attempted to fill the void.

The results of this study showed a pattern of movement and some significant change on 7 of 26 items, 3 of

which showed significant change. These focused around communication issues which may have been influenced by the atmosphere and/or content of the EE.

The implications of these findings are that:

1. the program may be useful when a couple demonstrates communication difficulties,
2. when people are placed in a safe environment, they take risks with new behavior,
3. the beginnings of change seen in the results may lead to further significant change in the other 23 items at a point in the future when the behaviors are not as new and frightening.

The results of this study are consistent with the findings of other researchers who investigated programs centering around communication skills. They found some significant change in decreased anxiety levels with communicating, in the use of new communication skills, and increase of self-disclosure (Zoost, 1973; Wampler and Sprenkle, 1980; and Haynes and Avery, 1979). The difficulty now lies in the other trend seen in research which is a lack of retention of significant change over time (Guldner, 1971, Wampler and Sprenkle, 1980). This leads to the necessity of further research and especially follow-up study.

Duplication of this study using a control group would lend further evidence in questioning the EE program's

influence on relationships. Long term follow-up is of the essence if the question from Chapter 1 asking, if premarital preparation programs give a couple a better chance at marital success, is to be answered.

The present study was limited to self reports from subjects. Behavioral analysis of change would be a valuable alternative. Other instruments might also be used, especially in testing specific elements of the Engaged Encounter. The present study was also limited to individual responses due to the small number of subjects (27). Measurement of couple responses is seen as a possible direction to take.

Two final recommendations center around the EE treatment itself. Comparison of the EE to other existing programs might be valuable, and/or in-depth analysis of only one EE weekend.

APPENDIX A
Relationship Change Scale



DIOCESE OF TUCSON

FAMILY LIFE CENTER

8800 E. 22ND ST. TUCSON, AZ 85710

You have been selected to participate in a study of premarital couples. The success of our Thesis depends upon your participation. The Relationship Change Scale, enclosed, is the focal point of the study.

Catholic Dioceses across the country are developing and using many forms of marital preparation. The Diocese of Tucson is aware that evaluation of such programs is often lacking. The Family Life Ministry is now in the process of revision, and your input and cooperation is essential to our success.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. The completion of this questionnaire will require approximately 20 minutes of your time. There will be no costs or risks to you from your participation in this study. You, of course are free to disregard any or all items on the enclosed questionnaire without incurring any ill will. Return of the questionnaire indicates your consent to contribute to the pool of information which our study will use. Be assured that all questions are anonymous, and all information will be kept confidential.

Your input is invaluable and greatly appreciated. Please fill out the questionnaire in the evening (6-9 PM), and return in the enclosed envelope no later than February 24, 1983. We thank you for your help. A summary of the results of the study will be provided upon request. Thank you again for your cooperation.

Sincerely yours,

Sharon M. Fritts
Researcher

Michael Berger
Family Life Director

APPENDIX B

Relationship Change Scale

* Guerney, Bernard Jr. Relationship Change Scale.
Published Test 1971
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APPENDIX B

University of Arizona

Graduate Research

THE RELATIONSHIP CHANGE SCALE

Instructions

Thank you for participating in this study. Please fill out the first section, and then go on to complete the statements. Complete the statements by underlining the phrase that most accurately finishes that sentence for you. Your answers will be held in the strictest confidence. Please give as accurate and honest an answer as possible.

Please fill out the following:

Age___

Sex___

Education level completed: (circle one) 12 /College 1 2 3 4 5 6

How long have you known your partner?

1-6 mo. ___ 6 mo.-1 yr ___ 1-3 yrs ___ 3 or more yrs ___

How long have you dated your partner?

1-6 mo. ___ 6 mo.-1 yr ___ 1-3 yrs ___ 3 or more yrs ___

Is the upcoming marriage your: First ___ Second ___ Third or more ___

How long is it until your upcoming wedding?

1-2 mos. ___ 3-6 mos. ___ 7 months or longer ___

Are you and your partner participating in any premarital preparation programs?

Yes ___ No ___ Program _____

Have you ever participated in an Engaged Encounter before?

Yes ___ No ___ IF YES, When _____

Have you ever been in for counseling?

Yes ___ No ___ IF YES, When _____ What kind _____

PLEASE GO ON NOW TO COMPLETE THESE STATEMENTS BY UNDERLINING THE MOST ACCURATE ANSWER FOR YOU.

1. Within the last month, my satisfaction with myself as a person has become: (a) much less; (b) less; (c) unchanged; (d) greater; (e) much greater
2. Within the last month, my satisfaction with my partner as a person has become: (a) much less; (b) less; (c) unchanged; (d) greater; (e) much greater
3. Within the last month, I feel my mate views me as a satisfactory partner: (a) much less; (b) less; (c) unchanged; (d) more; (e) much more
4. Within the last month, my mate views himself (herself) with satisfaction as a person: (a) much less; (b) less; (c) unchanged; (d) more; (e) much more
5. Within the last month, our relationship with each other has become: (a) much less; (b) less; (c) unchanged; (d) better; (e) much better
6. In comparison with one month ago, I am clearly aware of my partner's needs and desires: (a) much less; (b) less; (c) no changed; (d) more; (e) much more
7. In comparison with one month ago, I understand my own feelings: (a) much less; (b) less; (c) no differently; (d) more; (e) much more
8. In comparison with one month ago, I understand my partner's feelings: (a) much less; (b) less; (c) no differently; (d) more; (e) much more
9. In comparison with one month ago, I understand my partner's feelings: (a) much worse; (b) worse; (c) unchanged; (d) better; (e) much better
10. In comparison with one month ago, my sensitivity towards my partner as a person is: (a) much less; (b) less; (c) unchanged; (d) more; (e) much more
11. In comparison with one month ago, my concern and warmth toward my partner has become: (a) much less; (b) less; (c) unchanged; (d) more; (e) much more
12. In comparison with one month ago, my self-expression and openness in relation to my partner is: (a) much less; (b) less; (c) unchanged; (d) more; (e) much more
13. In comparison with one month ago, my ability to understand my partner's feelings is: (a) much less; (b) less; (c) unchanged; (d) more; (e) much more

14. In comparison with one month ago, my trust in my partner is:
(a) much worse; (b) worse; (c) unchanged; (d) better;
(e) much better
15. IN comparison with one month ago, my trust in my partner is:
(a) much less; (b) less; (c) unchanged; (d) more;
(e) much more
16. In comparison with one month ago, my feelings of intimacy with my partner are: (a) much less; (b) less; (c) unchanged;
(d) more; (e) much more
17. In comparison with one month ago, my confidence in our relationship is: (a) much less; (b) less; (c) no different;
(d) greater; (e) much greater
18. In comparison with one month ago, our ability to handle disagreements constructively is: (a) much less; (b) less;
(c) no different; (d) greater; (e) much greater
19. In comparison with one month ago, our satisfaction with our sexual relationship is: (a) much less; (b) less;
(c) unchanged; (d) more; (e) much more
20. In comparison with one month ago, my difficulty in talking with my partner is: (a) much more; (b) more; (c) unchanged;
(d) greater; (e) much greater
21. In comparison with one month ago, my ability to express positive feelings toward my partner is: (a) much less; (b) less;
(c) unchanged; (d) greater; (e) much greater
22. In comparison with one month ago, my willingness to share my personal concerns with my partner is: (a) much less; (b) less;
(c) unchanged; (d) greater; (e) much greater
23. In comparison with one month ago, my willingness to share my personal concerns with my partner is: (a) much less; (b) less;
(c) unchanged; (d) greater; (e) much greater
24. In comparison with one month ago, my capacity to believe and accept positive feelings my partner expresses toward me is:
(a) much less; (b) less; (c) unchanged; (d) more;
(e) much more
25. In comparison with one month ago, my capacity to deal constructively with negative feelings my partner expresses toward me is:
(a) much less; (b) less; (c) unchanged; (d) more;
(e) much more
26. In comparison with one month ago, my understanding of the kind of relationship I want to have in the future with my partner is:
(a) much less; (b) less; (c) unchanged; (d) greater;
(e) much more

APPENDIX C

Relationship Change Scale



DIOCESE OF TUCSON

FAMILY LIFE CENTER

8800 E. 22ND ST. TUCSON, AZ 85710

Dear Research Participant,

Thank you for your cooperation of one month ago. As you recall, you are involved in a research study of premarital couples, which is taking place within the Catholic Diocese of Tucson. Enclosed is the second part of the study. Your continued participation is especially important at this time.

Once again, your participation in this study is completely voluntary. The completion of the questionnaire will require approximately 20 minutes of your time. There will be no costs or risks to you from your participation in this study. You, of course, are free to disregard any or all items on the enclosed questionnaire without incurring any ill will. Return of the questionnaire indicates your consent to contribute to the pool of information which our study will use. Be assured that all questions are anonymous, and all information will be kept confidential.

Your continued participation is vital to the completion of the study, and will be greatly appreciated. We ask also, that you encourage your partner to complete his/her questionnaire. Please complete them in the evening (6-9 PM), and return in the enclosed envelope no later than Feb. 12. We thank you for your help. A summary of the results of the study will be provided upon request. Thank you again for your cooperation.

Sincerely yours,

Sharon M. Fritts
Researcher

Michael Berger
Family Life Director

APPENDIX D

Relationship Change Scale

* Guerney, Bernard Jr. Relationship Change Scale.
Published Test 1971
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APPENDIX D

University of Arizona

Graduate Research

THE RELATIONSHIP CHANGE SCALE

Instructions

Thank you for participating in this study. Please complete the following statements by underlining the phrase that most accurately finishes that sentence for you. Your answers will be held in the strictest confidence. Please give as accurate and honest an answer as possible.

1. Within the last month, my satisfaction with myself as a person has become: (a) much less; (b) less; (c) unchanged; (d) greater; (e) much greater
2. Within the last month, my satisfaction with my partner as a person has become: (a) much less; (b) less; (c) unchanged; (d) greater; (e) much greater
3. Within the last month, I feel my mate views me as a satisfactory partner: (a) much less; (b) less; (c) unchanged; (d) more; (e) much more
4. Within the last month, my mate views himself (herself) with satisfaction as a person: (a) much less; (b) less; (c) unchanged; (d) more; (e) much more
5. Within the last month, our relationship with each other has become: (a) much less; (b) less; (c) unchanged; (d) better; (e) much better
6. In comparison with one month ago, I am clearly aware of my partner's needs and desires: (a) much less; (b) less; (c) no changed; (d) more; (e) much more
7. In comparison with one month ago, I understand my own feelings: (a) much less; (b) less; (c) no differently; (d) more; (e) much more
8. In comparison with one month ago, I understand my partner's feelings: (a) much less; (b) less; (c) no differently; (d) more; (e) much more
9. In comparison with one month ago, I understand my partner's feelings: (a) much worse; (b) worse; (c) unchanged; (d) better; (e) much better

10. In comparison with one month ago, my sensitivity towards my partner as a person is: (a) much less; (b) less; (c) unchanged; (d) more; (e) much more
11. In comparison with one month ago, my concern and warmth toward my partner has become: (a) much less; (b) less; (c) unchanged; (d) more; (e) much more
12. In comparison with one month ago, my self-expression and openness in relation to my partner is: (a) much less; (b) less; (c) unchanged; (d) more; (e) much more
13. In comparison with one month ago, my ability to understand my partner's feelings is: (a) much less; (b) less; (c) unchanged; (d) more; (e) much more
14. In comparison with one month ago, my trust in my partner is: (a) much worse; (b) worse; (c) unchanged; (d) better; (e) much better
15. In comparison with one month ago, my trust in my partner is: (a) much less; (b) less; (c) unchanged; (d) more; (e) much more
16. In comparison with one month ago, my feelings of intimacy with my partner are: (a) much less; (b) less; (c) unchanged; (d) more; (e) much more
17. In comparison with one month ago, my confidence in our relationship is: (a) much less; (b) less; (c) no different; (d) greater; (e) much greater
18. In comparison with one month ago, our ability to handle disagreements constructively is: (a) much less; (b) less; (c) no different; (d) greater; (e) much greater
19. In comparison with one month ago, our satisfaction with our sexual relationship is: (a) much less; (b) less; (c) unchanged; (d) more; (e) much more
20. In comparison with one month ago, my difficulty in talking with my partner is: (a) much more; (b) more; (c) unchanged; (d) greater; (e) much greater
21. In comparison with one month ago, my ability to express positive feelings toward my partner is: (a) much less; (b) less; (c) unchanged; (d) greater; (e) much greater
22. In comparison with one month ago, my willingness to share my personal concerns with my partner is: (a) much less; (b) less; (c) unchanged; (d) greater; (e) much greater

23. In comparison with one month ago, my willingness to share my personal concerns with my partner is: (a) much less; (b) less; (c) unchanged; (d) greater; (e) much greater
24. In comparison with one month ago, my capacity to believe and accept positive feelings my partner expresses toward me is: (a) much less; (b) less; (c) unchanged; (d) more; (e) much more
25. In comparison with one month ago, my capacity to deal constructively with negative feelings my partner expresses toward me is: (a) much less; (b) less; (c) unchanged; (d) more; (e) much more
26. In comparison with one month ago, my understanding of the kind of relationship I want to have in the future with my partner is: (a) much less; (b) less; (c) unchanged; (d) greater; (e) much more

Has the Engaged Encounter been a vehicle for change in your relationship with your partner? YES___ NO___

If yes, please be specific in explaining the change...

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