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What works in Relationship
Education, London, 8/17/08

Backwards into the Future: Couples Interventions With Individuals





Couples Relationship Education For Individuals

- Structured education to *partners* about relationship skills, knowledge and attitudes
- Goal is to increase chances of *partner* & couple having a healthy relationship and lifetime love and decrease chances of relationship distress and breakup
- Focus is on early intervention and on risk and protective factors



What works in relationships? (Protective Factors)

- Positive connections
- Family ties
- Friendship and Support
- Fun and companionship
- Sacrifice and Commitment
- Forgiveness
- Trust and Safety (Safe at Home)



What Does Not Work in Relationships(Risk Factors)

- Danger Signs
- Escalation
- Invalidation
- Withdrawal
- Negative Interpretations
- Aggression
- Infidelity



Destructive Conflict is a Risk Factor

Widespread Dissemination

- Results are promising ($ES = .53$, communication), similar to couples therapy
- More research needed
- May be best way to reach diverse populations with evidence based interventions



Diverse settings and populations

- Adoptive and foster parent couples
- High Schools
- Teen Pregnancy
- First Offender youths and parents
- Transition to Parenthood
- Work settings
- Prison PREP
- Army Strong Bonds (military ahead of curve)



Getting both partners in room

- Despite the success of reaching out to diverse groups of couples through institutions that serve them, one of the biggest issues heard from service providers is getting couples in the room.
- Results from a U.S. study: Building Strong Families – Low income couples who just had child together



BSF Attendance

- 39% did not attend any sessions (range: 20-57% across 12 sites)
- 16% completed 80-100% of sessions (range: 0-40%)
- Does the “King have no clothes?”
- A ray of hope
- 41% of those that did attend had one partner attending
- Attendance would be higher if interventions flexible enough to train one partner

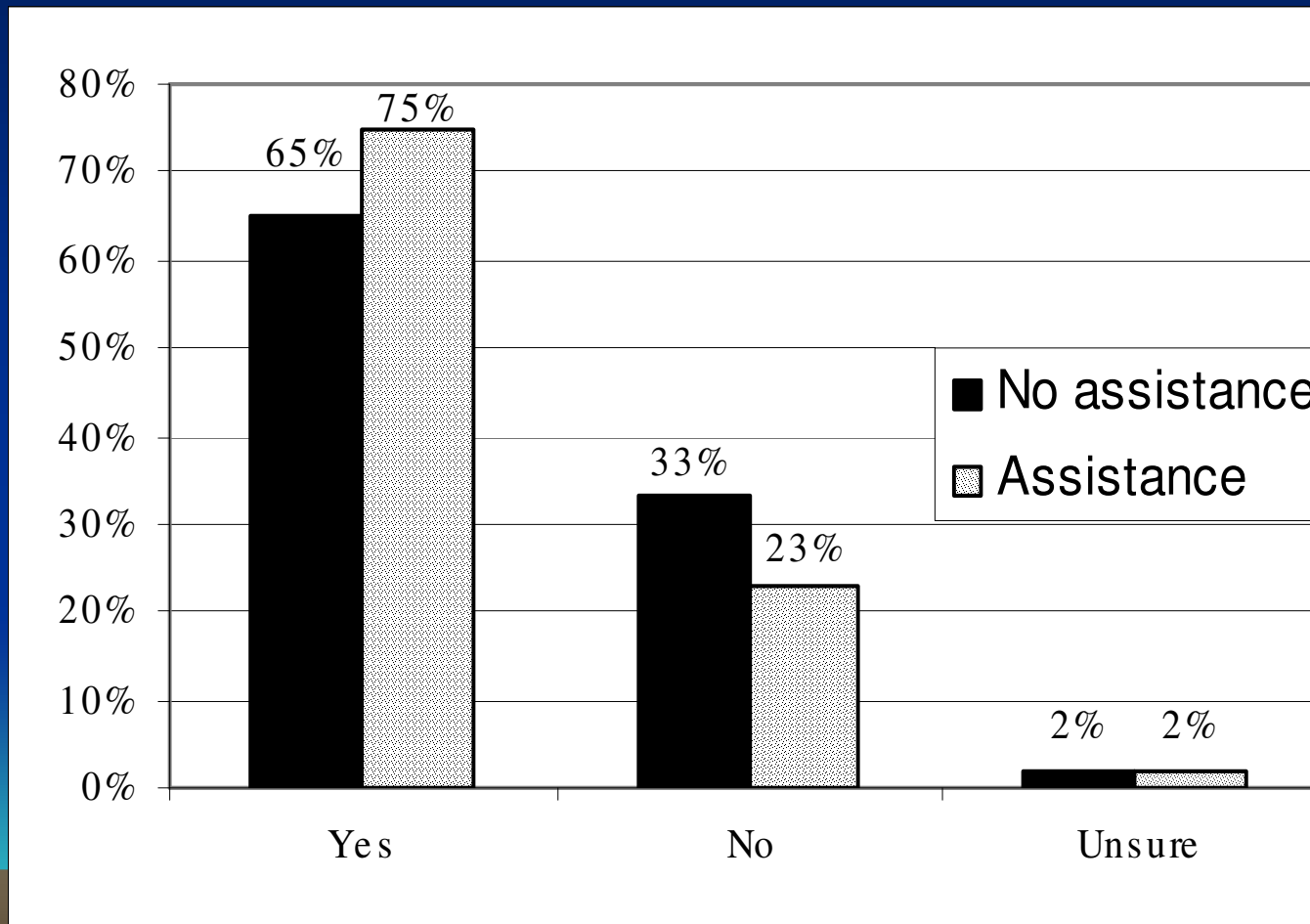


Why?

- This does not seem to be due to lack of interest in marriage education, which is very high



Would you consider using relationship education, such as workshops or classes to strengthen your relationship?



Why?

- This does not seem to be due to lack of interest in marriage education, which is very high
- Instead, it seems related to barriers such as time constraints, child care needs, sudden opportunity for work, conflict, transportation, and coordinating schedules for both partners.
- Lack of interest in participation by men
- More generally, lack of widespread knowledge about availability of programs



Can We Do Systems-Oriented Relationship Education with Individuals?

- Early concerns about individual therapy when there was a relationship issue (Gurman & Kniskern)
- We focused on couples interventions
- PREP is designed for couples
- One of the new PREP oriented curricula developed for Strong & Healthy Families Study (SHM) is Within Our Reach (WOR)



Fatherhood, Relationship, and Marriage Education Project

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Research support

- Administration for Children, Youth and Families (ACYF), Office of Planning, Research & Evaluation (OPRE)
- We are thankful for this support!



Burning Questions: FRAME

- Can we easily modify couples curricula for individuals?
- Are individuals (and partners) satisfied with program and feel program helped?
- Does individual vs. couples intervention make a difference in outcomes?
- Does it matter if father vs. mother receives the intervention?



WOR/FRAME

- Activity based
- Units on stress and coping, relaxation, support, parenting, dealing with financial issues
- Additional videos
- 16 hours (vs. 12, 32, 8)
- Focus on positive connections



Research Design

- Recruitment
- Participants clearly told 25% chance of being randomly assigned to one of 4 groups (male, female, couples, control)
- Have to agree to above, and be free for intervention times (3 Saturdays, 5 weekday evenings)
- Talk to both partners
- Need to be low income and parenting one child together



The Sample

- 104 low income (200%/poverty or below) couples recruited from the community completed pre assessment
- For family of 3 = \$34,000
- Random Assignment
 - 29 Couples Intervention Group
 - 29 Female Intervention Group
 - 23 Male Intervention Group
 - 23 Control Group



Demographics

- Age
 - Mean 34.56, ranging from 18 - 62
- Ethnicity
 - 36.3% African American
 - 40% White
 - 15% Hispanic
 - 6.9% American Indian
 - 1.9% other



Demographics

- Relationship Status
 - 11.3% dating
 - 16.3% engaged
 - 72.5% married
- Relationship Length
 - Mean 7.6 years
- Income
 - \$13,000 – \$17,000 (individual)



Who shows up?

- Overall 18.5% did not show up for any intervention sessions
- Lower than 39% in BSF study
- 7% of females
- 18% of couples
- 35% of males



Who misses sessions?

- Of total possible sessions:
- Females miss 2.3%
- Males miss 5.3%
- Couples miss 11.1%
- While males never show up at higher rates than other groups, once they do they like the intervention and complete the program
- Why couples miss more sessions: More barriers
- Conflicts with work, childcare, illness, transportation issues, busy schedules



Response to Intervention

- Overall Satisfaction with Workshop
 - 5 point scale (5 = Very Satisfied)
 - Couples Group (mean = 4.32)
 - Female Group (mean = 4.46)
 - Male Group (mean = 4.25)
- Overall very high satisfaction with workshop leaders
- Participants most commonly reported finding the speaker listener technique most helpful

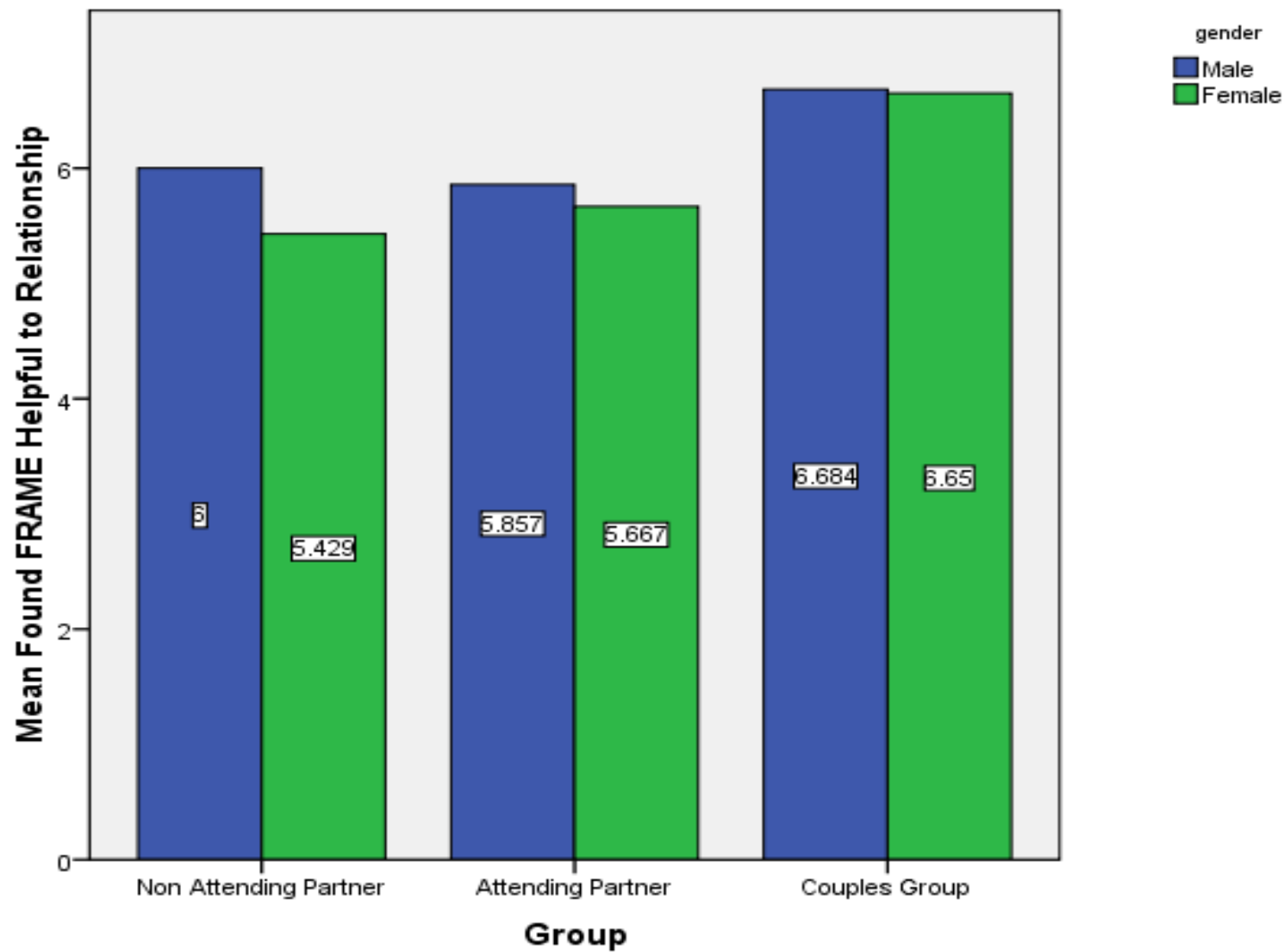


Preliminary Results

- Dimensions assessed include:
- Communication and Conflict management
- Confidence in handling conflict, future of relationship
- Positive bonding
- Parenting
- Child Symptons
- Assessment package at PREPinc.com



How helpful was FRAME?

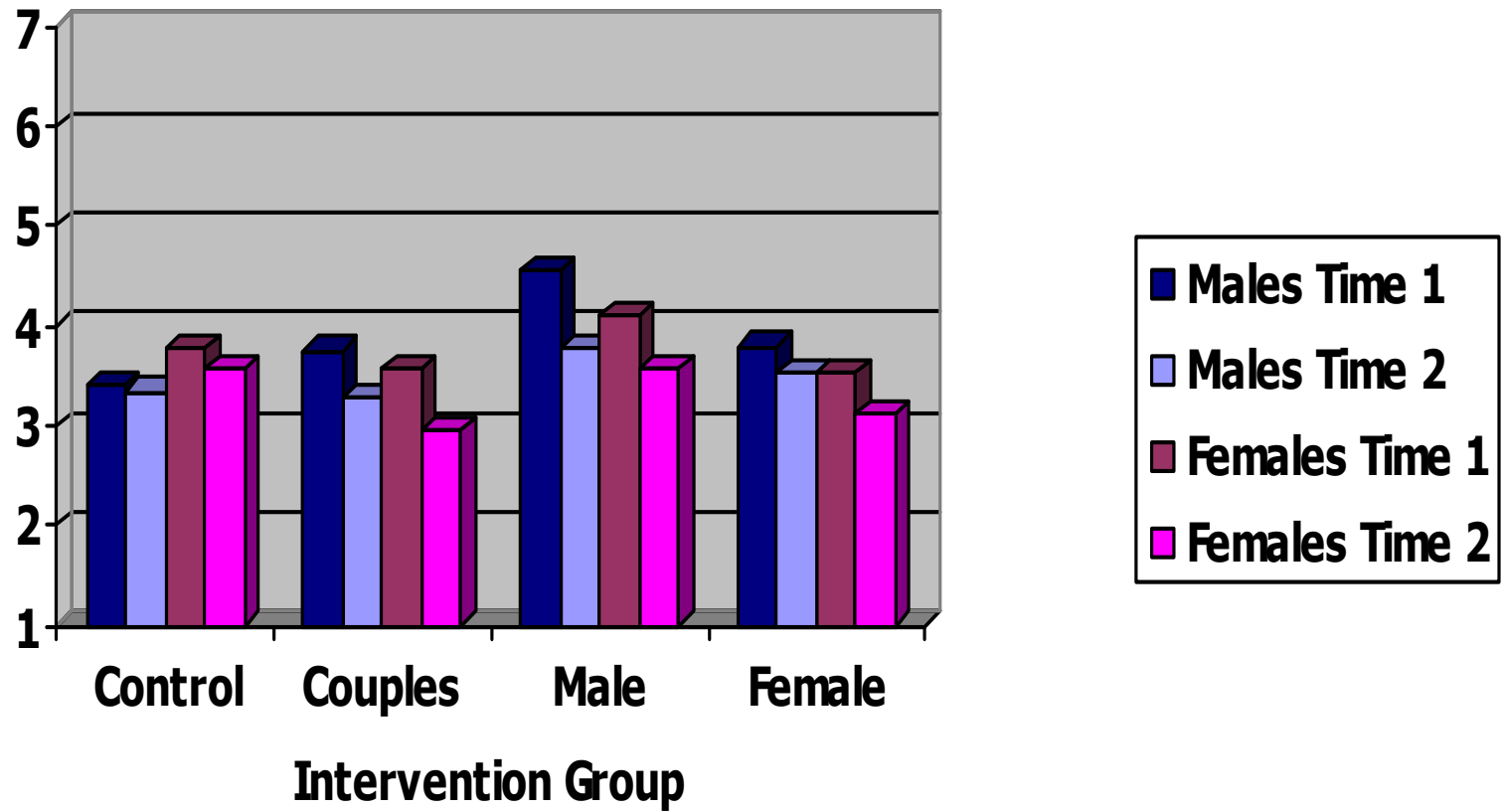


Why male non-attendees more positive than woman?

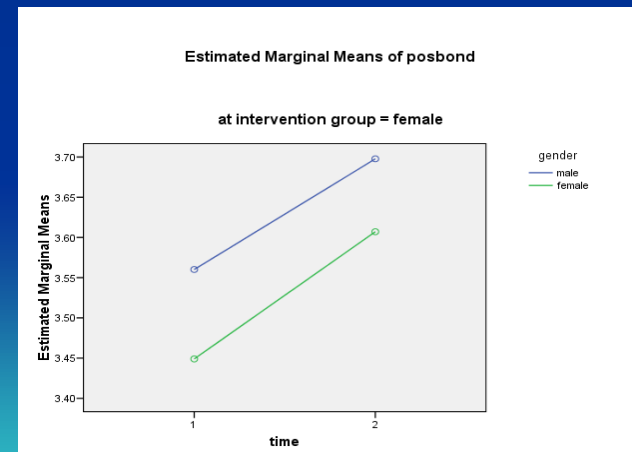
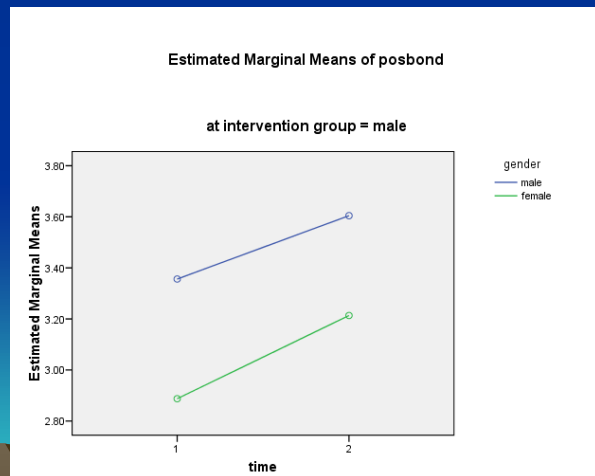
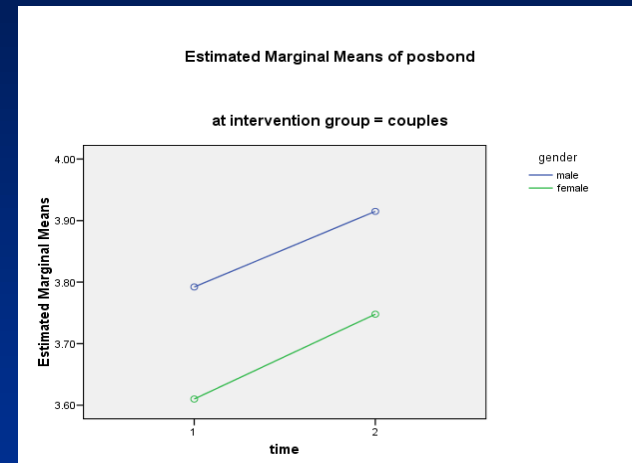
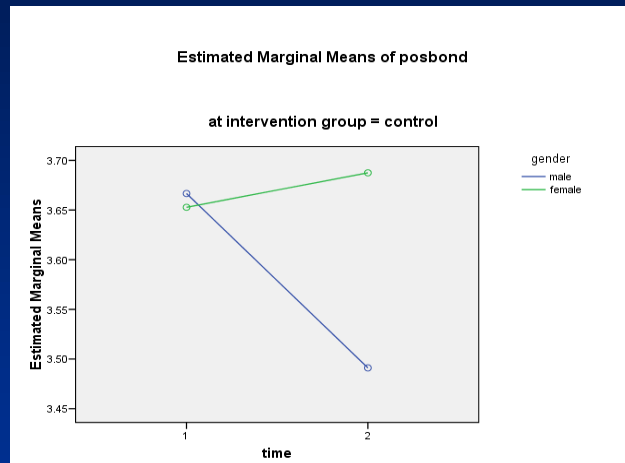
- Perhaps men are reacting more to lower negativity than woman are to higher positivity



Negative Communication



Positive Bond



Preliminary parenting and child findings

- Intervention groups show significant increases in positive parenting and decreases in negative parenting
- Changes in parenting associated with changes in child behavior symptoms

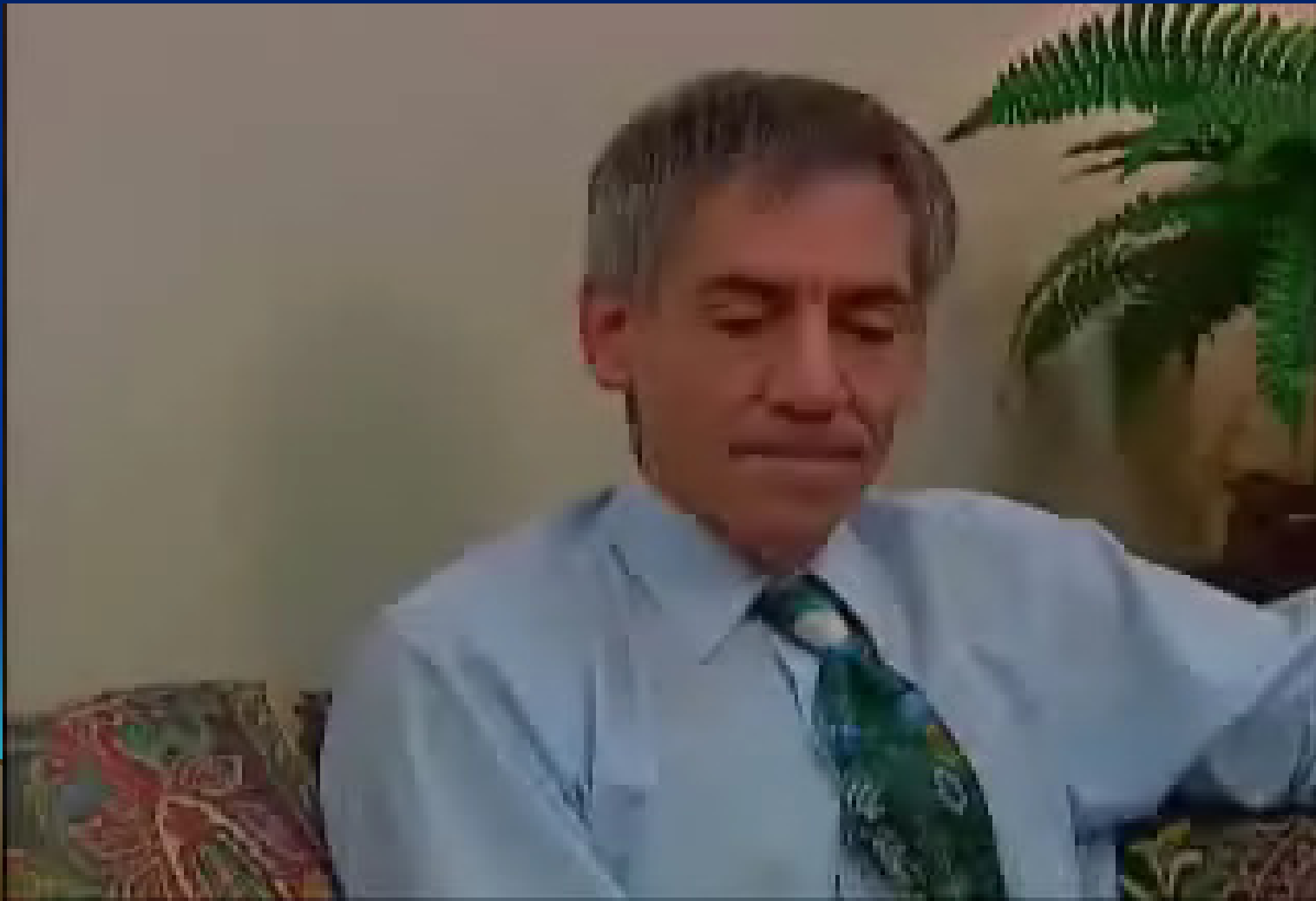


Examples of Fathers Talking

- What could be going on in father's group at home
- They learn to express feelings, practice with other men, teach tools (see data on non-attending wives)



Cell Phone Couple: Speaker Listener Tool



When I hear music...



Answers to Burning Questions

- We can easily modify couples curricula for individuals
- Individuals (and partners) are satisfied with program and feel program helped
- Couples generally do better than individuals, both better than controls
- Fathers changing a bit more than mothers on negative communication



Future Directions & Concerns

- We need to work on getting men in the room, but when they come to program, they tend to stay the course. Need to educate men about relationship interventions, maybe name like “winning at relationships”
- Use of internet and other newer technology (see fosterparentcollege.com)



