1. Introduction

"Self-help" behavior therapies that are totally self-administered and require at most a minimal amount of professional time are currently quite popular. The advantages of such an approach in terms of cost effectiveness and self-control are inestimable. However, Rosen (1976, 1977a, 1978b) has emphasized the importance of adequate empirical validation of these self-help programs if they are to be of true value to either the behavior therapist or the client. Psychology as a profession is also becoming more cognizant of such a need, as indicated by the recent formation of an APA Task Force on Self-Help Psychotherapies to provide an overview of the current status of this area, delineate possible ethical concerns, and tentatively explore possible action in these areas (Rosen, 1978a). In a review of the several areas in which behavioral written materials have been employed as self-help aides, Glasgow and Rosen (1978) concluded that the empirical status of these self-help therapies was extremely variable.

Clarke-Stewart (1978) has recently reported that, although the use of "how to parent" books is rapidly increasing, there is a lack of empiri-
cal evidence offered to support the recommendations made in the manuals. In their review of the behavioral literature on written materials, Glasgow and Rosen (1978) cited the parental management of child-behavior problems as an area in which empirical studies were lacking. Because of the broadness of their review, and the recent surge of evaluative research in this particular area, the current literature on self-administered behavior therapies employed in parent training has not been adequately assessed.

The purpose of this review is to provide a systematic and critical evaluation of the various written self-help behavior therapy programs which have directly dealt with training parents to manage their children's behavior problems. Parameters of interest include: the targeted behavior(s); therapeutic procedures described by the written instructions; whether the written instructions are, in fact, totally self-administered; the outcome of the treatment; and whether cost-effectiveness data are presented. In line with Rosen's (1976, 1977a) warning, particular attention will be paid to the adequacy of the empirical evaluation of these programs. The review will determine if the following parameters were delineated and/or employed: subject characteristics and selection; appropriate experimental and (where applicable) control and comparison groups; dependent measures; and the presence of follow-up data. Generalizations and conclusions will be offered in the final portion of the review.

Individual studies will be grouped into one of two categories for evaluation: a broad-focus and a narrow-focus approach. The former approach, which is the older and by far the more popular, consists of commercially available books and manuals that present parents with a general theoretical approach to child management and a wide variety of behavioral techniques to deal with numerous types of behavior problems. A more recent approach to the utilization of written advice packages is characterized by a focus on just one or perhaps several related specific target behaviors and therapeutic procedures. There is considerably less emphasis on the presentation of the theoretical underpinnings of behavior modification in this narrow-focus approach. Perhaps because of their relatively recent development, most of these packages are not currently available to the general public.

2. Review Of Experimental Studies

2.1. Broad-Focus Manuals

There is a plethora of manuals available to the public that present general behavioral principles for child rearing and/or the management of