Rational Restructuring for Anger Control: 
A Quasi-Experimental Case Study

Kevin Hamberger and Jeffrey M. Lohr
University of Arkansas

Ellis (1962) is one of the earliest proponents of language-mediated cognitive therapy procedures. Ellis emphasizes the importance of logically "dissecting" maladaptive self-statements believed to be the cause of the client's emotional distress. A major criticism of the Ellis formulation concerns an absence of specific procedures for the implementation of RET (Goldfried & Davison, 1976). Goldfried and Davison (1976) describe rational, or cognitive, restructuring therapy, which systematizes the cognitive intervention procedure. Rational restructuring has been effective in the modification of speech anxiety (Glogower, Fremouw, & McCroskey, 1978), test anxiety (Goldfried, Linehan, & Smith, 1978), and assertiveness (Linehan, Goldfried, & Goldfried, 1979). A related technique, stress inoculation, has been applied to the modification of extreme levels of anger (Novaco, 1977). However, no published reports are found to support the efficacy of RET or rational restructuring in anger control. The present paper is presented as an experimental case study of the application of rational restructuring for the control of anger.

METHOD

Client

The client was a 27-year-old student who was referred to the Psychological Clinic for individual therapy following unsuccessful marital therapy.

1The second author supervised the therapy conducted by the first author.

2Address all correspondence to Jeffrey M. Lohr, Department of Psychology, University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, Arkansas 72701.
He reported an extreme degree of emotional distress in the context of his wife seeking a divorce. The client presented a history of verbal and physical aggression toward his wife and angry outbursts toward others when frustrated or thwarted. In addition to the interview assessment data, a measure of Ellis's irrational beliefs (Jones, 1969) was administered. The scoring procedure was modified to better conform to norms of the local population (Lohr & Bonge, Note 1). Analysis of questionnaire data revealed T scores greater than 70 on High Self-Expectations (Ellis belief 2), Blame Proneness (belief 3), Frustration Reactivity (belief 4), and Anxious Overconcern (belief 6).

Procedure

Therapy consisted of 13 weekly sessions of 50 minutes each. The first 3 sessions represented a baseline condition of supportive therapy. Rational restructuring of Blame Proneness took place during sessions 4 through 6, Emotional Irresponsibility during sessions 7 through 9, and Frustration Reactivity during sessions 10 through 13. It should be noted that Emotional Irresponsibility did not show a T score as extreme as several other scales, but the client and the therapist agreed that it was directly related to Frustration Reactivity and Blame Proneness.

The first step in implementing therapy involved Socratic discussions that introduced irrational beliefs (Ellis, 1962) and that were designed to help the client recognize that such beliefs are untenable and lead to emotional distress. The client was taught to challenge irrational self-statements and to replace them with rational self-statements. Situational hierarchies were developed for the irrational beliefs previously listed. Functional analyses of situational antecedents, self-statement mediators, and emotional consequences were conducted using historical and current situational exemplars. Rational restructuring of the hierarchies followed hierarchy construction. Between sessions, the client maintained informal records of emotional distress in naturally occurring problem situations. The records were also discussed during restructuring sessions.

The therapist reviewed therapy tapes and recorded the frequency of verbal statements that he judged to represent Blame Proneness, Emotional Irresponsibility, and Frustration Reactivity. The frequency of healthy, independent self-statements was also tabulated. These statements did not include those specifically trained in rational restructuring. No reliability measures of self-statements were obtained. Six weeks after the final therapy session, the client completed the irrational beliefs questionnaire a second time.