

# Marriage, couple and family essay sample

[Family](#), [Marriage](#)



Counselors face a myriad of issues. Marriage, couple and family counselors are not exempt from such issues. On the contrary marriage, couple and family counselors deal with added stressors and dilemmas. The intent of this paper is to guide a future counselor through the history of marriage, couple and family counseling. While displaying the great need for counseling. As the American family evolves towards extinction the paper gives five prevalent themes seen in marriage, couple and family counseling. In addition it will touch on how a counselor should interact and function in as a competent counselor. Being wrapped up with a Christian and biblical perspective on the matter.

In 2010 the Pew Research Center in conjunction with TIME conducted a study on Families. The Pew Research Center used demographic and economic data from U. S. Census' spanning from 1960 to 2008. In addition they conducted a nationwide survey with 2, 691 participants (Pew Research Center, 2010). The study was a comprehensive look at issues such as; the drop in marriage rates, is marriage obsolete, what effect does the economy have on marriage, gender roles, does love trump money, and how to define family (Pew Research Center, 2010). Presently marriage, couples and family counseling face a myriad of variables thwarting the productivity of a happy union. Consequently the work of each counselor has grown to be increasingly complicated. In 1963 Marriage and Family counseling was defined as “ the process through which a professionally trained counselor assists two persons to develop abilities in resolving, to some workable degree, the problems that trouble them in their interpersonal relationships as they enter into marriage” (Mudd & Goodwin, 1963, p. 979) . Marriage and Family counseling in the

United States has evolved from individual psychotherapy to thinking as a family system.

Family counseling has shifted from individual care to system care. Systems theory, “ which views psychological problems as arising from within the individual’s present environment and the intergenerational family system” (Corey, 2011, p. 449). This was paradigm shift for therapist. Marriage, Couple & Family was in its infancy during the late 1980’s to early 1990’s. However it first appeared in the 1950’s. Family counseling was seen as a radical approach of counseling. During this time it was unacceptable for therapist to work with anyone other than individuals (Clinton, p. 529). In the early period of family therapy there were few therapist who worked in this kind of therapy. A few of the pioneers are Ackerman, Bowen, Whitaker and a group from the mental research institute (Clinton, p. 529). In the beginning stages much work was done to make Marriage and family counseling a competent therapeutic field. The former American Association of Counseling and Development now the ACA established interest groups or networks in marriage and family counseling in the 1970’s and 1980’s (Smith, Carlson, Stevens-Smith, & Dennison, 1995).

However it was not until the mid 1980’s that a more focused emphasis on marriage and family counseling occurred (Smith et al., 1995). With an overwhelming interest in an organization that focused on couples and family issues the International Association of Marriage and Family Counselors (IAMFC) was established (Smith et al., 1995, p. 155). Likewise In the late 1980’s to early 1990’s marriage and family counseling became one of the

fastest growing associations in behavioral science (Smith et al., 1995). For example from 1986 to 1993 the IAMFC organization grew from 143 to over 8000 members (Smith et al., 1995). The IAMFC established initial goals that covered such topics as; the enhancement of marriage and family by conducting programs of education, by stimulating, promoting and conducting programs of research, by conducting scientific and educational meetings and conferences, by examining conditions which create barriers and working to remove them, and to engage in activities that accomplish the objectives of IAMFC” (Smith, et al., 1995, p. 155). There was a calling and counselors saw the need to focus on the Family. With the focus being put on the two married individuals vice each individual independently brought about a series of dilemmas.

The new type of counseling translated to a lack of empirical data, thus research and a material base was needed for competent counseling. Thus a training program was needed (Smith et al., 1995). Furthermore during the late 1980’s training standards were adopted for marriage and family counseling therapy. The Association for Counselor Education and Supervision (ACES) and IAMFC helped establish training standards (Smith et al., 1995). Such standards as: “ knowledge and skill development in foundations of counseling, focus on individual, marital, and family systems; conceptual emphasis on systems outside the immediate family that interact with the family system; extensive clinical instruction” (Smith et al., 1995, p. 155). As counseling focused on the family as one unit, systemic theories and techniques took major roles in training programs. Such theories focused on mastering the basic counseling skills by having a training program that had

core training components seen throughout the counseling community (Smith et al., 1995).

The ACA and Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP), “ emphasizes the importance of examining and developing one’s personal skills and becoming grounded in basic counseling and therapeutic skills prior to specialization” (Smith et al., 1995, p. 155). Also from 1990-1991 using the CACREP standards the first graduate training program was accredited for marriage and family counseling (Smith et al., 1995). With a unified agenda therapist formed organizations with goals and created training standards the next step was licensure. That came through a state licensure programs. That was the initial state while the national credential program was established. The methodology for licensure came in form of a state examination, created by the American Association of Marriage and Family Therapy (AAMFT) (Smith et al., 1995, p. 155). The early marriage and family counselors did not have set rules to base their work on.

Therefore ethical dilemmas occurred as they crossed new situations. Such ethical questions as, “ can therapists automatically assume the right to define couples’ and families presenting problems in terms of their own therapeutic orientation”, “ Should one family member suffer due to another not participating in counseling”, “ Should therapists impose control over patients”, “ How much stress is too much in the counseling session” (Smith et al., p. 156). The early solution to these ethical dilemmas were; confidentiality, dual relationships, research, training, and competence (Smith

et al., 1995, p. 156). Additionally a counselor may be specialized in only one area of the marriage and family-counseling such as; premarital counseling, separation/divorce counseling, relocation counseling, or single parenting leaving him to be incompetent in many areas (Smith et al., 1995). Here are some additional dilemmas arising in the early years; incompatibility of orientations (dysfunction in an individual leads to dysfunction to the family), stigma of diagnosis (possible negative results), misrepresentation of diagnosis, competence to diagnose (Smith et al., 1995, p. 156).

As seen the Marriage, couple and family counseling is a relatively new idea. Thus allowing room to grow as counselors move towards new techniques to help families. Marriage, couple & family counseling is practiced by a variety of helping professionals, such as religious leaders, physicians, psychologists, social workers, educators, and specialized agencies (Smith et al., 1995). The one thing these individuals have in common is a common goal to help couples, marriages, and families. Marriage, Couple and Family Counseling is desperately needed in today's culture. The family is under attack and the study conducted by Pew Research Center has the data to prove it. In the Pew Research Centers study they found, " In 1960, two-thirds (68%) of all twenty-somethings were married.

In 2008, just 26% were", " about half (52%) of all adults...were married in 2008; in 1960, seven-in-ten (72%) were" (Pew Research Center, 2010, p. ii). Additionally the study show's a disparity between classes, in 2008, 64% of college graduates were married compared to 48% of those with a high school diploma or less (Pew Research Center, 2010). Although there is a

prominent disparity, this does not reflect on the desire to marry. Translating to both sides wanting to marry with relatively close percentages. With the desire to marry creates a need for marriage, couples and family counselors.

The desire to form a family and marry remains high on individual's life goals. However analyzing prevalent issues can be beneficial to the individual and to the counselor. One such issue plaguing the family is Divorce. As a counselors it is important to be competent in this area. In the past half century the divorce rate has nearly tripled from 5% in 1960 to 14% in 2008 among American adults (Pew Research Center, 2010). Compared to the western world, the United States had 7.4 divorces per 1,000 people from 2005 to 2006, compared to the European Union having 3.7 divorces per 1,000 people (Pew Research Center, 2010). As a counselor divorce will be a common issue to experience. In Robert J. Sternberg's (1986) Triangular Theory of Love he states " Why do certain loves seem to last, whereas others disappear almost as quickly as they are formed" (p. 119). That same question is asked in 2012 just as it was asked in 1986. A working knowledge of Love is important in dealing with marriage, couple and family counseling. Sternberg's (1986) theory is based on three vertexes of a triangle, intimacy, passion, and commitment.

He describes intimacy as " feelings of closeness, connectedness, and bondedness in loving relationships" (p. 119). The American Association of Christina Counselors (AACC) takes a non-committal stance on divorce leading to ethical decisions by therapist. The non-committal stance stems from the responsibility to not impose the therapist's morals or values on the

patient. From the AACC, “ Christian counselors refuse to assume the decision from client divorce” (Ohlschlager George, 2004, p. 7). The job of the Christian counselor is to guide the patient through the process. The Christian view is an ethical one, not endorsing divorces unless under certain circumstances. On the other hand the American Counseling Association (ACA) has nothing on divorce. However it does state “ In couples and family counseling, counselors clearly define who is considered “ the client” and discuss expectations and limitations of confidentiality” (ACA, p. 8). That view gives little to no advice to the counselor. Though important there is no ethical implications.

The Autonomy of the client supersedes all else. Regardless weather you use the ACA or AACC as your guideline the important part to remember is the best interest of the patient. The AACC states a counselor can assist without advocating divorce. Likewise the ACA advocates to prevent harm “ Counselors act to avoid harming their clients” (ACA, p. 4). Another theme currently seen, is the evolution of the Family. This can be best seen in how Americans define Family. In the Pew Research Center’s study they found that by “ the public does not see marriage as the only path to family formation” (Pew Research Center, 2010, p. iii). The survey generated the following definitions for family, 86% defined it as “ single parent and child”, 80% defined it as “ unmarried couple living together with a child”; and 63% defined it as “ gay or lesbian couple raising a child” (Pew Research Center, 2010, p. iii). Additionally the study found that without children the view on Family changed. It found that a couple living together without children did



not define family. However the same scenario but married produced different results, 88% defined “ a married childless couple” as a family.

Counselors should understand and be competent when dealing with families. A counselor may face single parents, gay couples, married couples, and non-married couples. The ACA demands counselors to “ practice in a non-discriminatory manner” (ACA, p. 9). Additionally the AACC urges counselors to be an example “ God’s love is unconditional and, at this level of concern, so must that of the Christian counselor”. This does not give the right to ignore ethical counseling. It simply implies to practice in a non-discriminatory way. The AACC states not to “ condone or advocate for the pursuit of or active involvement in pre-marital and extra-marital sexual behavior by clients” (Ohlschlager George, 2004, p. 7). A couple living together may violate that guideline stated in the AACC. The AACC also speaks on homosexuality “ Christian counselors refuse to condone or advocate for the pursuit of or active involvement in homosexual, transgendered, and cross-dressing behavior, and in the adoption gay & lesbian & transgendered lifestyles by clients” (Ohlschlager George, 2004, p. 7). Regardless of what type of marriage, couple or family involved it is imperative for the counselor to be well informed and professional in all situations.

With the numbers of married people at an all time low it is important to analyze all aspects of marriage, couples, and family counseling. Another prevalent theme is the economics involved in maintaining a family. The Pew Research Center found that being married brought an economic advantage, “ median household income of married adults was 41% greater than

unmarried adults” (Pew Research Center, 2010). The Pew Research Center argues that those in the lower rungs of the socio-economic ladder place a higher value economic security thus. They place economic security as a prerequisite for marriage (Pew Research Center, 2010). Additionally the study argues that more and more young adults are waiting for marriage. The Pew Research Center found “ In 1960, 68% of adults ages 20-29 were married. By 2008, only 26% were married” (Pew Research Center, 2010, p. 3). Producing similar findings a study conducted by Farrer, Tsuchiya and Bagrowicz (2008) analyzed the Japans perspective on emotional expression. The age of marriage has moved to the right from 27 to 30 for men and 24 to 28 for women (Farrer, Haruka & Bagrowicz, 2008).

The study argued that Japan’s economic stagnation during the 1990s influenced premarital relationships(Farrer et al., 2008). Also “ Declining expectations of future income, increasing economic independence for women, difficulties finding permanent employment, and a general dismantling of the lifetime employment system for men may be reasons young people are delaying marriage (Farrer et al., 2008). That sounds similar to present day America. Another theme seen in marriage, couple and family counseling is parenting. Parenting can be stressful and challenging. Parents must be on the same sheet of music. The decline of marriage and redefinition of family has brought Single parents to an all time high. As stated earlier, 86% found single parent as being a family (Pew Research Center, 2010). Most important the study found race to play a factor in single parenting. In 2008 “ seven-in-ten black women giving birth (72%) were unmarried” (Pew Research Center, 2010, p. 9). With 53% for Hispanic and

29% for white. This disparity was linked to more adverse childhood for children in this situation. As a counselor it is important to understand the challenges families face. Such ethical issues as payment or abuse may be higher than a married parent. Though unmarried single parents label their family as “ most important element of their life” with 86% answering it is, second was living w/parent with 84%, and married w/children was 83% (Pew Research Center, 2010, p. 47).

Another theme seen in marriage, couples and family counseling is domestic violence. In 2003 a survey conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimated “ 1. 3 million women are victims of physical assault by an intimate partner each year” (“ National coalition against,” 2007).

Furthermore Robert S. Feldman found similar statistics “ half the women who where murdered in one recent 10-year period where murdered by a partner” (Feldman, 2011). It is important to know the signs of domestic violence and the effects it has on children and adults. Children who are abused are predisposed to abusiveness when they are adults, this theory is called “ cycle of violence hypothesis” (Feldman, 2011, p. 525). Similarly the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence facts sheet states “ Boys ho witness domestic violence are twice as likely to abuse their own partners” (“ National coalition against,” 2007). Domestic violence can happen to anyone thus making it a prevalent theme for counselors to understand. The AACCC urges counselors to notify the authorities when identifying abuse, “ When child abuse or elder abuse or abuse of dependent adults exists, as defined by state law, Christian counselors shall report to child or elder protective services, or to any designated agency established for protective services”

(Ohlschlager George, 2004, p. 7). Feldman also states that violence occurs “across social strata, races, ethnic groups, and religions, gay and straight” (Feldman, 2011, p. 524).

Being an ethical and competent is the goal of every counselor. Balancing the rights of an individual and the rights of the family is the most challenging. The counselor must fully explain all aspects of the counseling process, possible scenarios, projected goal, payment, confidentiality, and possible ethical dilemmas prior to starting the therapeutic process. Neglecting to do so may lead to adverse outcomes. Likewise the counselor must fully understand their role as the therapist and make the role clear to the family, “Marriage and family therapist have unique confidentiality concerns because the client in a therapeutic relationship may be more than one person. Therapist respect and guard confidences of each individual client (Corey, 2009, p. 452). Marriage, couples and family counseling may lead to the dilemma of whose interest must be served “ Marriage and family therapists advance the welfare of families and individuals. Also the counselor must respect the rights of those persons seeking their assistance, and make reasonable efforts to ensure that their services are used appropriately (Corey, 2011, p. 451). In finding a solution the counselor must give the patient their appropriate autonomy.

Being a competent counselor means knowing your job and doing it well. Counselors must first learn skills to in professional counseling then focus on a specialty that deals with marriage, couples and family counseling. Being a professional counselor is though being a marriage, couples and family

counselor is additionally though. Thus a counselor must rely on God and the Holy Spirit to guide the counseling session towards the desired goals.

Although the family has changed and continues to change God's love for us has not nor will ever change. Furthermore it is important as a Christian counselor to have a steady foundation on the rock of Jesus Christ. The first family formed was Adam and Eve. Seen in Genesis " Then the Lord God said, " Then the Lord God said, it is not good for the man to live alone. I will make a suitable companion to help him." Genesis 2: 18 Good News Translation; " Then the Lord God made the man fall into a deep sleep, and while he was sleeping, he took out one of the man's ribs and closed up the flesh.

He formed a woman out of the rib and brought her to him." Genesis 2: 21-22.

The bible also brings light on gender roles, advice for family members and how to manage a family, " A wise son brings joy to his father, but a foolish man despises his mother" Proverbs 15: 20. Proverbs 31: 10-31 speaks of how much of a blessing a good wife is to her husband, it also speaks of all the great qualities. Though some may be old fashioned this verse can be used in today's context. A good woman can live in the 21st century society, " She brings home food from out-of-the-way places, as merchant ships do", " She is a hard worker, strong and industrious", " She is always busy and looks after her family's need's" Proverbs 31: 14, 17, 27. That does not mean a good wife must fall in line with 1950's gender roles. God wants a wife who stands next to her husband with the best interest of the family in mind. A good wife must seek and honor God, " Charm is deceptive and beauty disappears, but a woman who honors the Lord should be praised" Proverbs 31: 30.

In the Christian sense the man is the head of the household, he is responsible for all that takes place or fails to take place, “ But if any do not take care of their relatives, especially the members of their own family, they have denied the faith and are worse than an unbeliever” 1 Timothy 5: 8. Likewise “ Husbands, love your wives just as Christ loved the church and gave his life for it” Ephesians 5: 25. God asks men to be men, to be a pillar as he is a polar. God does not want lazy, abusive, drunk, despotic, vulgar, cold, cowardly, weak men. God wants power, strength, faith, commitment, resilient, loving, caring, and kind men. Men should lead their family in the ways of the Lord. He should set the example of what a man should be.

The statistical issues seen by the Pew Research Center are a direct reflection of poor Father and Mother hood. America has placed its emphasis on other themes of daily living that they took their eyes of the real guide, the real goal. As God has his best interest for his church so to must a man have the best interest of his wife and family in mind. It is my intent to have a loving relationship with all whom I meet. It is my goal to have a loving relationship with my family. It is my goal to have a loving relationship with my patients. God is the Rock and without him nothing is possible. It is sad to see in what misery the American family is facing. To many Generations with the “ Let Live Attitude” have gone without being challenged. Similarly to the calling heard in the 1990’s. The calling is here once again. It is our job as Competent Christian Counselors to carry the torch to live for God and to promote his name.

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