

MARRIAGE COUNSELING AND FAMILY LIFE EDUCATION IN THE UNITED STATES

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I. THE RELATION OF RECENT SOCIAL CHANGES IN THE UNITED STATES TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF FAMILY LIFE EDUCATION AND MARRIAGE COUNSELING.

Any serious discussion of marriage counseling and family life education must inevitably be concerned not alone with the context within which they exist. Such a consideration leads at once to the social and cultural forces which exert some influence upon marriage and family living in this country. Especially relevant are some of the social and cultural changes which have taken place in the past fifty years or so.

Fifty years ago we were largely a farming nation. Today there can be little question about the fact of industrialization. We have fewer and fewer people living on farms and more and more people living in industrial areas. Whereas formerly the entire family worked together to make a living on the farm, today wage earning members of the family are usually dispersed and see each other only at breakfast, dinner, in the evening, and on weekends if they are fortunate. Moreover, the complexity of urban life tends to diffuse the interests of family members so that the traditional "liebestraum" and family solidarity is more difficult to achieve. Added to this is the fact that one lives rather anonymously in the city and the external behavioral controls, such as one finds in a closely-knit rural community, are lacking. Our rapidly increasing technological development has brought relief from many drudgeries, but it has also subjected the family to pressures to purchase the "latest model," "the newest gad-

get," the most recent innovations, and has, in many instances, eliminated the valuable contributions of each member to a common task.

Today our families are moving more frequently than ever before. Students of the family in any culture recognize that when there is a stable physical basis or place for the family the family tends to acquire symbols and heirlooms of important activities of family members which become significant and important to the solidarity of the total family group. Place relations played an important part in the family throughout the early history of American life. Today, however, the place basis for the family has become a more and more tenuous matter. After World War II there were many expressions from Americans to the effect that they now wanted to settle down and stop moving about the country, but if the figures provided by several long-distance van lines is an indication moving is now at a rate even higher than in war time. Compared with prewar days these firms are moving at least three times as many families and one is moving ten times as many. Apparently not only are more families moving but those who move move more frequently. One van line reports that one out of every seven of its customers will within a year pick up stakes and move again to a new state and seven out of ten will be repeaters within the next five years.

Added to all these transitions which have been taking place is the matter of the family stresses and strains concomitant to the separation from the family of those who have served in the armed forces. The family bears the brunt of what happens to family members.

I shall not attempt further interpretation of these changes in terms of their effect upon our families except to say that with families becoming increasingly confronted with problems and complexities of modern life the family has tended to call more and more upon institutions and agencies outside the family circle for help.

II. THE DEVELOPMENT OF MARRIAGE COUNSELING IN THE UNITED STATES.

Having sketched briefly the historical development of the social setting which forms the context within which the American family

operates today, we turn to the development of marriage counseling in this country. In one sense, there is nothing new about marriage and family counseling. People have for many years turned to their clergyman, to their family doctor, and perhaps to other sources when they were in difficulty, and some of this difficulty was in the field of marriage and family relationships. But such crises as the depression served to bring into sharp focus the need for help to families from sources outside the family unit. At the same time psychology and psychiatry were emerging as scientific disciplines. Welfare agencies were faced not only with the need to help families economically but also with the emotional problems concomitant to financial crises.

The Family Service Association of America, which from 1911 to 1946 had been known as the Family Welfare Association of America, has gradually reduced its relief-giving services in favor of helping people with personal, marital and family problems until today the 265 agencies associated with it are engaged largely in counseling. As the requests for help on marital and family difficulties increased, other agencies began to attempt to help meet the need. For example, the American Institute of Family Relations was started in 1930 in Los Angeles, California. This was one of the first agencies to offer marriage and premarriage counseling services as its central purpose. At about the same time the Marriage Council of Philadelphia was established with its central focus on marital and family problems. Courts of Domestic Relations began developing in the 1930's, one of the most prominent of which was the court of Judge Paul W. Alexander in Toledo who, in this period, appointed a person to serve as a marriage counselor attached to the Court.

It would be unrealistic to speak of the development of marriage counseling in this country without speaking also of the development of marriage and family life education. The two movements are closely related in many respects: both are concerned with integrity and solidarity of the family; both are "preventive" measures in the mental health sense and in the attempt to create awareness of the necessity for fuller understanding of just what is involved in marriage and family relationships, including responsibilities of marriage partners. That these two movements have developed simultaneously and in many instances in relation to each other is

hardly a matter of surprise since the motivation leading to the choice of either of these vocations seems to be centered in the desire to devote one's efforts to the strengthening of marriage and family living among our people.

Although some of us are impatient and wish that greater progress could be made in the field of family life education, amazing strides have been made. Dr. Ernest Groves began his pioneering work in this field at Boston University some thirty years ago. According to a study completed by Dr. Judson T. Landis of the University of California, by 1955 more than 1,100 professors were teaching marriage and family courses in the colleges and universities of the United States. More and more high schools have instituted courses or units of study on marriage and the family. Some of these schools have moved toward requiring a course in family living of all senior students.

If one looks closely at the content of family life education today it is obvious that such education and marriage counseling have moved closer and closer together. As Doctor Landis reminds us, courses first offered by Departments of Domestic Science and Home Economics emphasized training girls in household skills; socialists were concerned with the history of the family as an institution; theologians focused on the place of religion in the home; and sex educators emphasized sex facts. Gradually the various disciplines have moved from their narrow focus and have come to see the family as a group of functioning people; "the emphasis has shifted to a study of personality development within the families and to a study of the complex dynamics of interpersonal relationships of family members. The focus now is upon the quality of the relationships."¹

With this increasing emphasis in education upon the quality of interpersonal relationships, increasing numbers of students, in these courses have requested opportunities for counseling. Thus in many high schools, colleges, and universities, professors and teachers are spending considerable time in counseling activity.

1) Judson T. Landis, "The Challenge of Marriage and Family Life Education," *Marriage and Family Living*, XIX, No. 3 (August, 1957) p. 247.

Two important nation-wide organizations have evolved to unite the efforts of professional persons engaged in these activities and to encourage the development of higher standards of training and practice. The National Council on Family Relations was established in 1938 for the stated purpose of advancing "the cultural values now principally secured through family relations for personality development and the strength of the nation. It seeks to unite in this common objective persons working in all the different fields of family research, teaching, and welfare."² This organization now numbers more than 2,500 members from some 30 different professions and groups. Its chief emphasis and interests are in marriage and family research, education, welfare, and counseling.

Another important organization, the American Association of Marriage Counselors, Inc., was established in 1942 to bind together individuals from various disciplines who are engaged in marriage counseling, with emphasis upon the establishment and maintenance of high professional standards in marriage counseling. This organization has become more and more influential in the field of counseling and has evolved high standards of training and practice. There is now common agreement that there is a core of knowledge which ought to be acquired and that there are skills which one ought to develop if he is to be proficient in the practice of marriage counseling.

While it is true that the tremendous demand on the part of the public for marriage and family counseling brought an attempt by many recognized professions, such as the clergy, medicine, attorneys, social workers and others, who were interested in helping the people they contacted to meet some of the problems in the field of marriage and family living, today there is rather general recognition that regardless of one's professional background additional and specific knowledge and skill is required if one is to do an adequate job of counseling.

2) Rex A. Skidmore, Hulda Van Streeter Garrett, and C. J. Skidmore, *Marriage Consulting*, Harper & Brothers, Publishers, New York, 1956, p. 24

III. MARRIAGE COUNSELING TRAINING

With the recognition that adequate marriage counseling practice demands special knowledge and skills, there have come increasing demands for training for the practice of marriage counseling. In order to meet this need a number of training centers have arisen over the country, aside from such basic and traditional training as, for example, that which is provided by schools of social work or theological seminaries. A few of the widely known training centers for marriage counseling in this country are: (a) The Marriage Council of Philadelphia which is now connected with the University of Pennsylvania Medical School and its Department of Psychiatry. This program is under the direction of Dr. Emily H. Mudd in Philadelphia. (b) The training center at the Merrill-Palmer School in Detroit, Michigan under the directorship of Dr. Aaron L. Rutledge. (c) The American Institute of Family Relations in Los Angeles, directed by Dr. Paul Popenoe. (d) The Marriage Counseling Training Program in The Menninger Foundation, Topeka, Kansas, under the directorship of Dr. Robert G. Foster.

In addition to these centers, several universities provide opportunity for those who are working toward a doctoral degree (usually in the field of marriage and family living or in sociology or psychology) to specialize at least somewhat in the field of marriage counseling. In an attempt to meet the demand for graduates who can work specifically in this field, some of the schools of social work, schools of medicine, schools of theology, are beginning to add to the curriculum some of the "specifics" which are considered to be necessary if one is to be helpful to the people who come to them for counseling.

The professional people to whom the great majority of the population turn for help in marriage and family difficulties are clergymen of all faiths, physicians, attorneys, psychologists, social workers, college teachers of courses in child development and marriage and family relationships, medical specialists in obstetrics, pediatrics and often psychiatry. Increasingly members of these professions are seeking specific training in the field of marriage counseling with the recognition that however well trained and experien-

ced one may be in his profession the practice of marriage counseling in conjunction with his other professional activity demands unique knowledge and skill.

An examination of the kind of training offered by one of the centers for marriage counselor training may be revealing. For the past six years The Menninger Foundation, Topeka, Kansas, has carried on a training program in this field. Prerequisites for entrance to this one year intensive course are a graduate or professional degree (ordinarily a Ph. D. or its equivalent) in one's professional field and three years of counseling experience. Among the 22 professions as social work, sociology, law, psychology, education, and religion.

Underlying our attempts to help professional persons to acquire such additional understandings and skills enable them more adequately to meet the needs of individuals who come to them for marriage counseling are the following basic assumptions. (1) Human behavior is meaningful, however obscure that meaning may seem to the observer. Specific behavior can be understood if one has the knowledge and skill with which to understand it. (2) People in marital difficulty usually obtain far more help from achieving some understanding of the attitudes and behavior of themselves and their spouse and how their interaction in the marriage has produced unsatisfactory relationships than by being given a specific formula for the resolution of their difficulties. (3) Since the adequacy of counseling depends not merely upon the counselor's ability in the use of skills and techniques but also upon his own integrity, motivations, philosophy of life, and his basic attitudes about and toward people, it is important for him to achieve at least a reasonable degree of self-awareness and self-understanding so that he may more adequately use himself in his task of helping other people.

In the training program at The Menninger Foundation we have attempted to bring implementation to these basic assumptions. Throughout his year's course of study the trainee is engaged in three inter-related activities : (1) didactic course work covering what we believe to be basic material for workers in this field; (2)

actual marriage counseling practice under supervision; and (3) constant examination of his counseling work for the purpose of helping him further stant examination of his counseling work for the purpose of helping him further develop skills and techniques most applicable in counseling through his supervisory sessions and through psychiatric consultation and group case conferences.

The didactic work is designed to promote a fuller awereness, understanding, and assimilation of the contributions to the field of marriage and family relationships and to marriage counseling from the fields of psychiatry, child development, sociology, psychology, cultural anthropology, and law. In addition, intensive study is made of the specific fields of family life education and marriage counseling. Through carrying actual cases in marriage counseling under supervision the trainee is provided opportunity to better understand how he is using himself in his attempts to help people with problems and to improve his skills and techniques. It is our hope that those who engage in this intensive year of training begin a professional development that does not end with the termination of their year but continues to enhance their professional activity because they have acquired not merely additional skills and techniques but a point of view, a philosophy, a way of thinking about themselves and the people who seek their help.

Obviously, not many counselors have received this kind of training either in our program or elsewhere, since there are only a few such training centers and facilities are limited. However, the attorney who thinks of referring clients for marriage counseling may find two resources helpful. One, he may write to the American Association of Marriage Counselors, Inc., 104 East 40th Street, New York 16, N. Y., to request names and addresses of qualified marriage counselors in his vicinity. Two, he may contact the Family Service Association agency in his vicinity or write to the Family Service Association of America, 192 Lexington Avenue, New York 16, N. Y., for addresses of the nearest Family Service Agency. Another excellent source for referral is mental hygiene and child guidance clinics which may be operating in your community or vacinity.

In most clinics and agencies the client's fee is based on a sliding scale that takes into consideration the client's income, the number in his family, and in many instances his general financial condition. Ordinarily there is a minimum and a maximum fee on the scale regardless of the client's financial condition, but some agencies and clinics make provision for below cost or no cost services when that is warranted.

IV. HOW MARRIAGE COUNSELING HELPS.

Most of the couples who find themselves in such severe marital conflict that they seriously consider divorce have not arrived at this point overnight. Usually they have struggled with their problems over a long period of time until some "straw that broke camel's back" precipitated their seeking help from the lawyer. Many of these couples do not really want to dissolve their marriages and disrupt their families but they take this step as a last resort because they simply do not know how to cope with their conflictual situation. Now if the lawyer recognizes that a client is seeking a divorce out of a sense of desperation and not out of a real desire for dissolution of the marriage, there may be some hope that sending the couple to a qualified marriage counselor will help. In most instances, indecision on the part of the client constitutes a criterion for referral by the attorney to a marriage counselor.

The marriage counselor may need to evaluate the following factors about the couple in an attempt to determine whether or not counseling will probably be effective. (1) Are both spouses interested in trying to work out some solution to their troubles? (2) Are they reasonably healthy persons emotionally? (3) Can they recognize that their problems did not arise overnight and that there is no magic formula with which the counselor can dissolve them overnight? (4) Are they willing to work with a counselor over an extended period of weeks or months?

If the counselor's exploration of these factors reveals positive motivation on the part of the spouses, counseling will probably be of substantial assistance to them.

Counseling can help not so much by telling a couple what to

do to solve their difficulties as by helping them to clarify their attitudes, actions, and feelings so that they can see more clearly what has gone wrong in their interpersonal relationships in the marriage. This means that ordinarily the two partners begin gradually to recognize their own involvement in the difficulty. Once they have reached the point of discovering that they have contributed to the problem and that it is not merely the fault of the partner it is possible for them to evidence a more generous spirit toward each other. Ordinarily this facilitates communication between the partners so that they begin talking about their marriage and the attitudes and feelings, hopes, disappointments, frustrations and so on so that perhaps for the first time they begin really to understand each other. The counselor can then help them to explore various ways by which they may be able to build a better relationship in the marriage.

It must be obvious that this process can require considerable time, not only in terms of the hours spent in actual counseling sessions but also in terms of the amount of time necessary for each spouse to assimilate the newer understandings he is achieving in his counseling sessions. If each spouse is seeing a counselor one hour each week, the remaining hours of the week may be fully as important as his counseling hour for the assimilation process. Our experience has been that the people who have received help in counseling tend to feel that what has helped them most is that the counselor helped them better to understand themselves, their partner, and their marital situations and that these understandings enabled them to alter some of their behavior and attitudes which had contributed to marital unhappiness and dissatisfaction.

V. PRESENT TRENDS IN EDUCATION FOR FAMILY LIVING IN THE UNITED STATES.

No one recognizes better than the marriage counselor that if we are to help the vast majority of our families to achieve greater satisfactions in marriage that counseling is not enough. It is challenging, though sad, to see the desperate unhappiness of couples whose marriages have been impoverished for long years and to think that it might not have been and perhaps need not have been if only as a society we had been able to help them develop qualities

that would promote happiness in interpersonal relationships rather than unhappiness. One approach to this matter is to be seen in the increasing movement toward marriage and family life education in this country. This is such a new field for us that we are still really in a pioneering stage of development. We do not have enough research information as yet nor teaching material for the various age levels nor sufficiently trained teachers, but we are gradually moving toward meeting these needs. Happily, many research studies concerned with marriage and the family are now directed toward the understanding of the dynamics of relationships within families. The major emphasis in family life education seems to be coming more and more to be a focus upon the interpersonal relationships among family members and what these relationships mean in terms of the development of healthy or unhealthy personalities within the family.

Today we face a number of challenges in the field of family life education. (1) Only a segment of our population is involved in these courses. The majority of students registered in functional courses in preparation for marriage are in their last year or two of college. Only a small proportion of the students who in their first or second year of college quit school and get married have had a course in marriage. Moreover, many high school students marry as soon as they graduate and since the trend in this country is toward earlier marriages many students do not finish high school but drop out for marriage. With the increasing emphasis among family life educators upon the quality of relationships within the family group there has come more and more emphasis upon the need for family life education at the elementary level. Unfortunately, we do not have adequate materials for this level at the present time.

(2) We need greater cooperation for research purposes among such groups as psychiatrists, sociologists, psychologists, and marriage counselors and educators so that we may achieve a better understanding of what it is in the family that contributes to better emotional functioning, mental health, and competence in marriage and family relationships. To some of us it seems obvious that persons who are successful in marriage are those who by some process

have been able to come through crises and difficult times and really profit by them so that the marriage relationship is strengthened rather than deteriorated, but we are not at all certain as to what this process may be.

(3) We need more cooperative training programs for teachers in the field of family life education. This is to say that adequate knowledge of education or of sociology or of home economics or of psychology but from all of these. Adequate inter-divisional programs for teachers in colleges and universities, then, would seem to provide a more effective kind of training than would concentration in only one of the areas mentioned.

Summary

In this paper we have attempted to describe the historical development of marriage counseling in the United States and to give some indication of its present status, the kind of training we believe necessary for the counselor, and how the client and the attorney may know of available counseling services in their community. We have indicated something of the possibilities of marriage counseling as well as its limitations. We have attempted to describe briefly how the counselor helps a couple, as well as to point out some of the factors which may prevent counseling from being of maximum benefit. We have also attempted to provide some indication of the present trends in marriage and family life education, its possibilities and limitations. Far from being pessimistic about marriage and the family, most of us who are working in the field believe that with a positive program of marriage and family life education and with adequate premarriage and marriage counseling there is every reason to believe that family life in this country can become more and more stable and satisfying. If so, not only individual family members and the family unite but our society as a whole will be benefited.