

THIRD EDITION

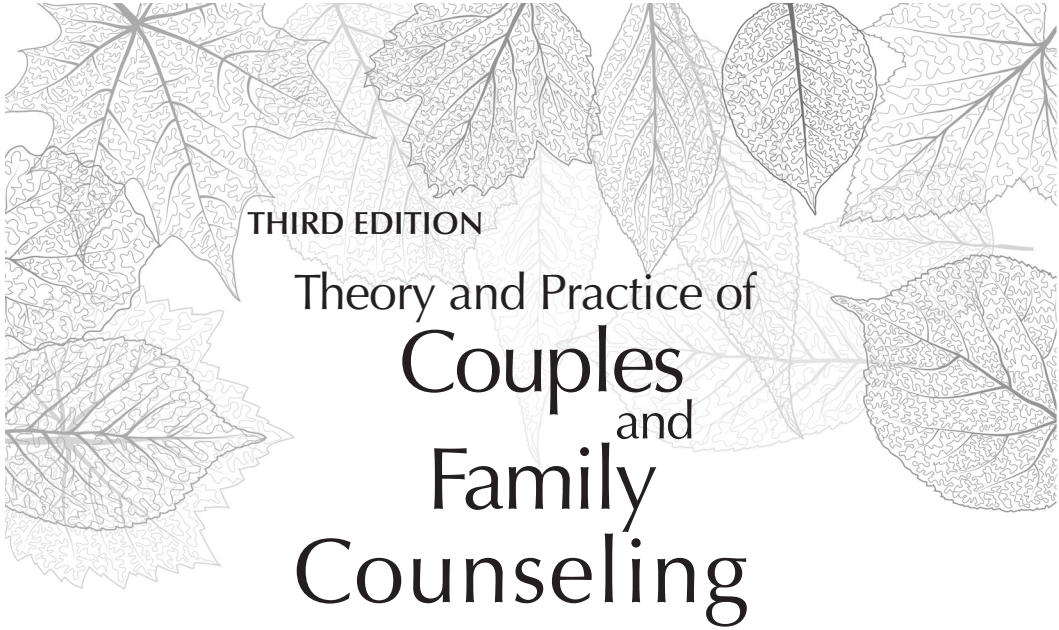
Theory and Practice of
Couples
and
Family
Counseling

James Robert Bitter



AMERICAN COUNSELING
ASSOCIATION

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THIRD EDITION

Theory and Practice of
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DEDICATION

For my loving wife and partner, Lynn Williams, and our wonderful children, Alison and Nora—the real gifts of love that I have in my life.

In loving memory of my parents, Greg and Betty Bitter, who adopted me when I was six months old and gave me a foundation that has sustained me for seventy-four years.

For the couple and family practitioners who nurtured me as a person and a professional: Manford Sonstegard, Oscar Christensen, and Virginia Satir.



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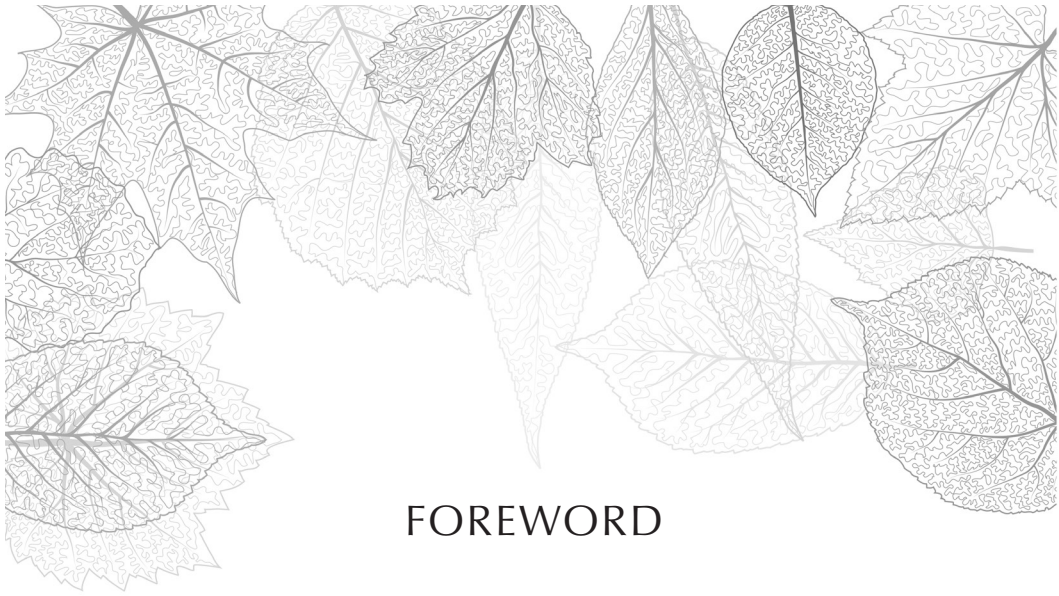
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FOREWORD

In the 1960's I went through my entire doctoral program thinking the best way to study counseling was to understand the dynamics of the individual. My friend and colleague, Dr. Jim Bitter, was one of the key people to introduce me to a couples, family, and systemic approach to counseling and psychotherapy. Being exposed to a systemic perspective broadened my view of individual counseling and working with individuals in group counseling. I appreciate his emphasis on knowing the role of an individual's family of origin if we hope to effectively counsel a person.

Dr. Bitter has given workshops in Canada, England, Greece, Ireland, South Korea, New Zealand, and Peru as well as throughout the United States. He is an exceptionally gifted therapist who is a master at doing live presentations. He demonstrates respect, curiosity, interest, compassion, and a deep understanding of individuals in a family in his workshops. His presence encourages the family he is working with to reveal themselves in significant ways, and genuine encounters occur. His style as a person and as a practitioner is evident in this book. He draws from his practical experience to give this book an applied slant. This textbook is written in a scholarly manner, yet it is also personal and conversational. The theories come to life, and you are likely to have a sense that you are not just seeing them presented in a textbook but observing them being demonstrated. You are invited to reflect on your own family-of-origin experiences as you read each theory. In this way, reading and reflecting on the chapters is somewhat akin to having a therapeutic experience.

In this third edition of *Theory and Practice of Couples and Family Counseling*, several new topics and theories are introduced. New to this edition are

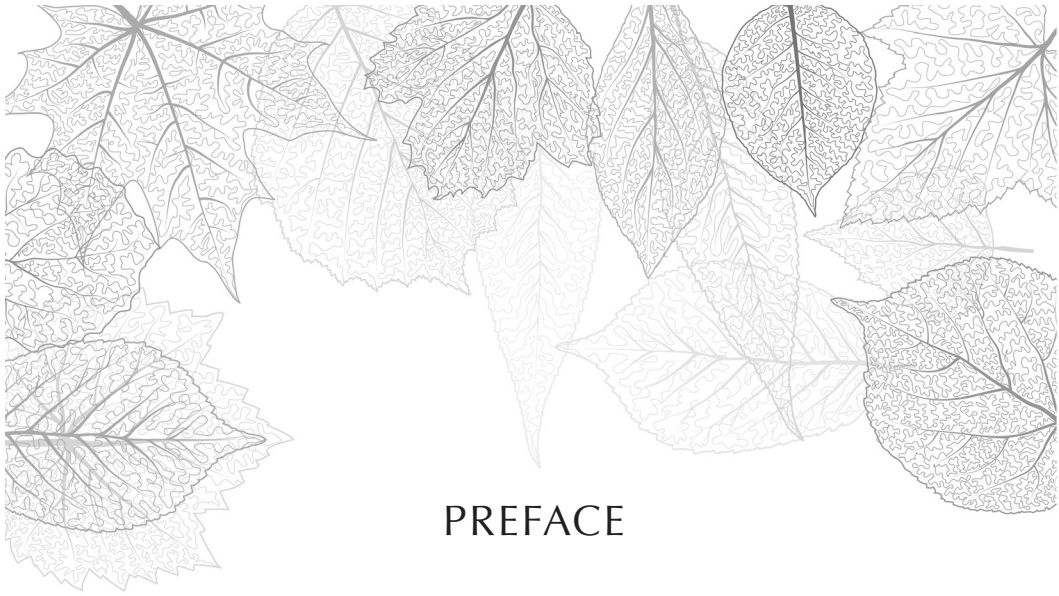
- a focus on couples counseling (three new chapters and sections in each of the earlier family chapters);
- an emphasis on wellness and resiliency;
- an expanded history of the profession; and
- the case example of the Quest family, a part of each of the theory chapters, which involves a blended family with two children from a different culture.

A number of features make this book unique among couples and family counseling textbooks. Dr. Bitter uses a common format to organize each of the theory chapters, which will make your job of comparing these approaches easier. The first four chapters give you a fine introduction to the field and to the rest of the book; in two of these chapters, you get a real sense of Jim Bitter the person, the author, the teacher, and the couples and family counselor. Each of the theory chapters has exceptionally clear sections on key concepts, goals, and techniques. You will be introduced to the Quest family and then follow this family for each of the theory chapters. This case example gives a concrete illustration of how each theory can be applied to counseling the same family. The personal exercises that appear at the end of each chapter will assist you in personalizing your learning and help you apply what you are reading to gain a fuller understanding of how your family background influences you personally and professionally. The chapter on integrative approaches aims to assist you in thinking about your own personal synthesis. Dr. Bitter does an excellent job of guiding you through the process of learning how to focus on aspects of various theories that fit the person you are.

I found the summary sections to be very helpful in pulling together the key ideas of each chapter; furthermore, the sections on multicultural and gender concerns are most useful for seeing practical applications. You will find numerous suggestions for where to go beyond the chapter if you want to learn more about any theory. This text will challenge you to think and to reflect on what you are reading. I trust that you will feel encouraged in your own quest to better understand how your family history impacts you and your journey to becoming a relational practitioner. I have read this book several times, and it has been instrumental in helping me gain a deeper understanding of family counseling. My hope is that you too will be enlightened and encouraged to do what it takes to become an effective relational practitioner—and that this book will be a part of that experience.

Although other family therapy textbooks are available, in my view *Theory and Practice of Couples and Family Counseling* is the most personal and well written, and it is my choice for a text for a family therapy course.

—Gerald Corey, EdD, ABPP
Professor Emeritus, Human Services and Counseling
California State University, Fullerton



PREFACE

Theory and Practice of Couples and Family Counseling is intended for undergraduate and graduate students interested in the field of couples and family counseling. Although this book is designed especially for counselors—both those in training as well as those currently practicing as licensed professional counselors—it also accommodates students and practitioners in family studies, human services, marriage and family therapy, nursing, pastoral counseling, psychiatry, psychology, and social work. My overall goal in writing this book was to survey the major theories and practices of contemporary relational counseling as well as support the development of personal, professional, and ethical couples and family practice. Most important, the book provides a model for a successful integration of multiple points of view.

I had several goals in writing this book. I wanted to

- address the use of theoretical models across several fields, giving as much consideration to health, growth, and resiliency as I did to assessment and remediation;
- present some models that are absent from other textbooks;
- provide real examples of quality work for each approach as well as work with a single couple or family system that could be used for comparison across models;
- focus on personal as well as professional development; and
- write in the kind of conversational tone that has made other textbooks so successful.

This book is a thoroughly updated version of my previous textbook *Theory and Practice of Family Therapy and Counseling* (2nd ed.). The most significant change in this edition is the emphasis on couples counseling. Here is the complete set of changes:

- The history of couples and family counseling based on the genograms of couples and family counseling has been completely updated and revised to include the discipline of couples counseling.

- The Quest family, which is used for comparison purposes throughout the text, has been revised to include a multicultural dimension, as has every theoretical model.
- All previous family chapters have been updated generally and specifically to include a section on working with couples.
- Three new chapters on couples counseling have been added, featuring the models of John and Julie Gottman, Susan Johnson, and Harville Hendrix and Helen Lakelly Hunt; each of these chapters has a section on working with families.
- To make room for the new chapters, I have updated two chapters from the previous edition and made them available at www.jamesrobertbitter.com. These two chapters are on Carl Whitaker's symbolic-experiential model and effective parenting.

This book is divided into three parts. Part 1 deals with the language, conceptualizations, history, and issues that are the foundation for couples and family practice. Chapter 1 provides an overview of the book and of the field of couples and family counseling. It defines the language and thinking associated with family systems theory. In Chapter 1, I also tell you a little bit about my own family history and how it relates to both my personal and professional development. I hope this brief biography can serve as a model for students who may be starting their own personal explorations in preparation for a career in the helping professions.

Chapter 2 uses the genogram of couples and family counseling, presented at the end of the chapter, as a structure for considering the history of the field of couples and family counseling. Four interlocking histories are presented in this chapter: (a) a history of the pioneering individuals who first introduced family and systems concepts to the field of psychotherapy as well as their offspring and supporters; (b) the development of the structural, strategic, and solution-focused/solution-oriented models of family counseling; (c) the evolution of postmodern, social constructionist, and feminist models of couples and family counseling; and (d) evidence-based counseling approaches to couples and family counseling, including three couples counseling models that are brand new to this edition and that are discussed at length in the next part of the book.

Chapter 3 more directly addresses personal and professional development. In this chapter, I use some of the processes I learned from 10 years of training with Virginia Satir, a late, great pioneer of family counseling and therapy. They are designed to help you discover self in family context and consider the tremendous influence family systems have on each of us as growing counselors and therapists. I also list some personal and professional characteristics that are particularly useful in relational practice: some ideas for how to get started with couples and families, the relationship of scholarship to practice in the field of family counseling, and a first look at a model for integration that is more fully developed in Part 3.

Chapter 4 introduces you to the ethical, professional, and legal issues that have shaped the development of family practice. This chapter on applied ethics has been completely updated and coauthored with my friends and colleagues David Kleist and Mark Young. We focus on learning to think about ethical issues from the perspectives of virtue, professional ethics codes, and legal requirements in the field. This chapter takes into account the guidance and mandates of multiple ethics

codes, including those developed by the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy, the American Counseling Association, the American Psychological Association, the International Association of Marriage and Family Counselors, and the National Board for Certified Counselors.

Part 2 is devoted to a consideration of 13 models of couples and family counseling. It starts with a presentation of the biography and genogram of the Quest family, a family that is part of each of the theory chapters. The 13 theory chapters have a consistent organization so that you can compare and contrast the various models. Each chapter starts with an introduction to the model that defines its major characteristics and identifies its founders. The introduction is followed by a transcript of an actual couples or family counseling session, usually featuring a major contributor to that approach. I want you to have these sessions in mind when you consider the key concepts, counseling goals, counselor's role and function, and process and interventions that follow. Toward the end of each chapter, I present another counseling session with the Quest family using the model presented in that chapter. I end each of the theory chapters with a summary of the chapter, a consideration of cultural and gender issues, and suggested readings and videos. Each of these chapters has been updated with the latest ideas and references for the model. The three chapters on couples counseling are brand new from start to finish.

Part 3 addresses the integration and application of models. Chapter 18 on integration is designed to help you discover a model or set of models that fits your worldview and perspectives on family practice. An emphasis is placed on assessing personal values and beliefs and using videotapes of initial work for reflection and development as a family counselor or therapist-in-training. A four-stage process for conducting couples and family sessions is also described: forming relationships, performing relational assessments, hypothesizing and sharing meaning, and facilitating change. An emphasis is placed on resiliency work, tailoring treatment to individual families, and methods for ensuring treatment adherence and relapse prevention. Finally, the integrative model is applied one last time to the Quest family.

With this structure in place, we are now ready to begin a journey together. It is my hope that you will enter the field of couples and family counseling and find an exciting place for yourself as a relational practitioner. Couples and family practice is very much a growing and developing field. Only 70 years ago, the field was still in its infancy. I hope you will feel yourself grow into couples and family practice as you consider the different models presented in this book.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

James Robert (Jim) Bitter, EdD, is professor of counseling and human services at East Tennessee State University in Johnson City. He is a nationally certified counselor, an Adlerian family counselor, and a former officer of the North American Society of Adlerian Psychology. He is also a former editor of the *Journal of Individual Psychology* and a Diplomate in Adlerian Psychology. He is a reviewer for the *American Journal of Family Therapy* and has served in the past in a similar role for *The Family Journal* and the *Journal of Counseling & Development*. He received his doctorate in counselor education from Idaho State University in Pocatello in 1975.

Jim has received awards for outstanding teaching in the College of Human Development and Community Service at California State University, Fullerton, and for outstanding scholarship in the Clemmer College of Education at East Tennessee State University. In 2015, Jim won the American Counseling Association's Don Dinkmeyer Social Interest Award. He has taught in graduate counseling programs in three universities and has authored or coauthored four books as well as more than 60 articles and chapters.

Jim is the featured expert on Adlerian family therapy in the Allyn & Bacon/*Psychotherapy.net* series *Family Therapy With the Experts*, and he has offered workshops in Canada, England, Greece, Ireland, South Korea, New Zealand, and Peru as well as throughout the United States. He was introduced to Adlerian family counseling by Manford A. Sonstegard, with whom he worked for more than 30 years.

Jim studied and worked for 10 years with one of the pioneers of family therapy, Virginia Satir. He was a trainer in her Process communities for three of those years and published an article and a number of chapters with her before her death in 1989. He is a past president of AVANTA, Satir's training network.

Jim currently sees couples and families together with graduate students at East Tennessee State University's community counseling clinic. He continues to develop Adlerian counseling models for individuals, groups, couples, and

families. His focus on a fully present relationship in all forms of counseling is an integration of Adlerian counseling and the work of Virginia Satir, Erv and Miriam Polster, and Michael White, all of whom have trained Jim in the past.

Jim has been married to Lynn Williams for 37 years; they have two grown daughters, Alison and Nora Williams. In his leisure time, Jim likes to travel, collect stamps, play basketball, and read.



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

No one writes a textbook like this without a lot of help, and I have had wonderful support from the very beginning, starting with Carolyn Baker, Nancy Driver, and the rest of the team at the American Counseling Association. Special thanks to Beth Ciha for copyediting the project, and also to my daughter, Alison Williams, who carefully proofread every page of this book. In many ways, this is the third edition of a textbook I wrote back in 2009. Sherry Cormier served as a developmental editor, friend, and confidant for that first edition. Her wisdom is still in every chapter. And of course, this book would never have been started without the kindness, support, and constant encouragement of Jerry Corey.

Special thanks are extended to the chapter reviewers who provided consultation and detailed critiques. Their recommendations have been incorporated into this text:

- Chapters 1–4 : Gerald and Marianne Corey
- Chapter 4: David Kleist and I cowrote the original chapter, and Mark Young updated and improved it
- Chapter 5: Jill Scharff
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- Chapter 7: Betty Carter and Monica McGoldrick
- Chapter 8: Jean McLendon and John Banmen
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- Chapter 10: Madeleine Richeport-Haley
- Chapter 11: Jane Peller
- Chapter 12: Don Bubenzer and John West; and J. Graham Disque
- Chapter 13: Roberta Nutt and Patricia E. Robertson
- Chapter 14: Frank Dattilio
- Chapter 15: Rob Freund and Jon Sperry

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- Chapter 17: Harville Hendrix
- Chapter 18: Gerald and Marianne Corey

I also want to thank the students in the couples and family counseling concentration of the Counseling Program at East Tennessee State University who gave this text an initial trial run and offered many helpful additions and corrections.

To each and every person who contributed to the completion of this book, my heartfelt thanks.