

Healthy Family Interview

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Table of Contents

Abstract.....	3
Introduction.....	4
Application of Individual & Family Life Cycles.....	4
Interview Summary.....	6
Self-Critique.....	8
Professional Reflection.....	9
Conclusions.....	10
References.....	12

Abstract

On Wednesday, May 26, 2021 I interviewed Mark and Melissa, a married couple, for the healthy family interview. The purpose of this interview was to discover what keeps a family healthy and functioning. During the course of the interview the couple revealed what keeps their marriage healthy and functioning and what binds their family together. Mark and Melissa explained how through organization and creativity the family was able to withstand the stresses of modern American life. The couple also explained how their roles have changed since they have been married and that the biggest role and challenge they have assumed is becoming parents.

During the course of a normal life span individuals and families pass through a series of cycles. Mark and Melissa are in middle adulthood at a point in the family cycle of being a family with young children. At this point in the family life cycle, many young families have trouble balancing work and family life. This was an issue, which Mark discussed during the interview and is something for which he is still trying to find a balance. The interview showed by keeping lines of communication open, and having mutual trust and respect for one another, Mark and Melissa are able to maintain a healthy family life.

Introduction

On Wednesday, May 26, 2021, I interviewed “Mark” and “Melissa,” (not their real names) a married couple, in order to complete the healthy family interview for the Family Counseling 636 class. I chose Mark and Melissa for my interview, as Mark is a work colleague whom I have known for a number of years and both Mark and Melissa were willing to be interviewed. Mark and Melissa’s family is a traditional nuclear family. For this study, a nuclear family is defined as ‘a two generation family consisting of a father and mother and children' (Lohhi et al, 2021, p. 2)

When I began the interview, I asked questions relating to demographic information. Mark is a 35 years old, male, and was born in Scottsbluff, Nebraska. He is employed as a public school teacher. Melissa is 37 years old, female, and was born near Dallas, Texas, she works part time in a grocery store although she was formally a teacher and has a degree in elementary education. They are white, American citizens, have been married for 14 years, and have two children, Andrea who is seven years old, and Martin who is three years old.

Application of Individual & Family Life Cycles

Both Mark and Melissa are in their mid-to late-thirties placing them in early middle adulthood which “lasts from about age 34 to 60" (Newman & Newman, 2018, p. 470). This phase of their lives is linked to raising children, managing a career, and the task of balancing work and family life. During the interview, Mark indicated he sometimes had problems balancing his family life with his work life, and he decided to give up some of

his work responsibilities for the next school year, including giving up a coaching position with the school. (Smith & Smith, personal communication May 26, 2021). What Mark was experiencing is what Newman & Newman refer to as “Role Overload” (Newman & Newman, 2018, p. 477) which “occurs as a result of too many demands and expectations to handle in the time allowed” (Newman & Newman, 2018, p. 477).

Such issues are common in early middle adulthood as individuals try to balance the needs of their occupational life with those of their personal and family lives. For Melissa, balancing occupational and family life has been easier because she works part-time and is thus better able to balance work needs with family life. Mark and Melissa are at the “responsible stage of middle adulthood” (Broderick & Blewitt, 2015, p. 491). At this stage an individual must learn to use their problem solving skills not only for whom they are responsible for at home, work, and in the community, but must also use those skills to achieve their own goals and needs (Broderick & Blewitt, 2015).

“The family life cycle is usually defined as a succession of stages through which the typical or nuclear family passes” (Roland, 1991, p. 3). Mark and Melissa’s family are at the stage of being a family with young children. At this stage, “raising children is a significant part of adult life” (Broderick & Blewitt, 2015, p. 510). In this period of adult life individuals tend to have difficulties balancing family and work life, which can cause stress to the parents. Mark and Melissa discussed the issue of stress and how it affects their family life and work life. This indicates most young families are not immune from such stress and the family interviewed was no exception. Mark and Melissa are best

summed up as being in early middle age, with two young children, which place them at the child rearing stage in the family life cycle.

Interview Summary

The interview began with a discussion of the strengths Mark and Melissa brought into their family and relationship. Melissa said they were “both yin and yang in a lot of ways.” (Smith & Smith, personal communication, May 26, 2021). Melissa said she was the more spontaneous of the couple while Mark was the one who was better at organizing. Mark agreed and said he tended to be “better organized” (Smith & Smith, personal communication, May 26, 2021). Both agreed their skills showed up around their home because Melissa is the one who makes the house a home with her creative abilities while Mark is able to keep the house neat and organized. The issue of the couple's strengths was recurring during the interview in how they managed their home and parented their children.

In balancing relationships within the family, Mark said he was the only one who had immediate family close to them. Melissa's family live in Texas and Pennsylvania which makes it difficult to have regular, in person contact with her family. Mark said their family tends to do a lot more with extended family “because they are here” (Smith & Smith, personal communication, May 26, 2021). Mark stated he preferred to spend more time together as “just the four of us” (Smith & Smith, personal communication May 26, 2021,) rather than spend time with extended family. Kristen stated he preferred to spend time with his family rather than with his parents or brothers and sisters because he did “not really want to” (Smith & Smith, personal communication, May 26, 2021).

Mark said his goal was hopefully to one day retire and travel. Melissa stated her goal was to keep her children "safe, healthy, and make them respectable" (Smith & Smith, personal communication, May 26, 2021). Mark hopes his children could go to college and get good jobs doing something they liked. Bring up their children to be safe, healthy, and respectable citizens are an important goal for the couple.

Both Mark and Melissa said their complementary strengths were organizational skills and creativity. These skills made their house a home and also contributed to their children's developing skill sets. Both children expressed an interest in creativity and Avia, the oldest child, "is as smart as a whip" (Smith & Smith, personal communication, May 26, 2021) who gets most of her intelligence from Mark's side of the family.

For the family Mark and Melissa said spending time together as a family and keeping the channels of communication open was most important and is what keeps the family tied together. The couple said they will "talk and listen" (Smith & Smith, personal communication May 26, 2021) which helps maintain strong family ties and helps them through any difficult times. Mark said he and Melissa had similar interests, which was also important in helping the family move in the right direction and binds them together.

Another overarching theme for the couple was the idea that Mark and Melissa see their family as a close and loving family. Mark stated the children were too young to fully understand many of these concepts of strong communication and a close and loving family, so such ideas applied to them as a couple. Such ties help them through the good times, but also helped when they were facing a crisis and in dealing with stress and

change. Mark also said when he gets stressed out he likes to exercise while Melissa stated she liked to do arts and crafts and paint.

Another theme was how their roles had changed over the years. The couple agreed early on in the marriage there was a focus on careers, but also spending time together. This totally changed once they had children. The focus on the couple shifted to caring and looking after the children and fulfilling the role of parents. This was an important shift in their roles within the marriage and the biggest responsibility the couple has faced since getting married. Overall, parenting shifts the roles of parents compared to early on in a marriage. The shift brought about new responsibilities and duties as both Mark and Melissa discussed in the interview.

Self-Critique

When completing the interview with Mark and Melissa I could have asked them more questions about their strengths as a family. This was an important component of the interview and this paper. While I covered the strengths adequately, it would have been possible to delve deeper into the issue of strengths in the family. It would also have been possible to discuss in greater detail the importance of communication between the couple and their children. Family strengths and communication were an important theme of the interview and how keeping the lines of communication open during both good and difficult times should have been addressed more by the interviewer.

When conducting the interview, I should have asked more direct questions about other aspects of their lives, such as what qualities each family member brings into the family.

While Mark and Melissa discussed their organizational skills and creativity they brought into the family, it would have been interesting to see what other qualities they also brought into the family. In addition, there could have been more discussion of the overall family dynamics of what makes the couple and family work well together and what does not work so well.

Overall, the interview went well and much information was gathered about the family. The fact that communication, organization and creativity are important in the family gave me great insight into how the family functions and operates. In the future, if I were to complete this interview again, I would ask more of more own questions during the interview and not rely so much on the questions provided to us in the syllabus.

Professional Reflection

Upon reflecting on my interview with the family, I realize the traditional nuclear family is still an important component of American society. The traditional “family has its own, natural, unique, essential and foundational tasks of nurturing and caring, which distinguish it from all other social institutions” (Bernard & Shea, 2013, p. 6). At the same time, other forms of family have become important, including single parent families, blended families, and LGBT families. The growth of such families has challenged the idea of the traditional nuclear family. Today, “only a minority of American households are traditional two-parent nuclear families and only one-third of American individuals live in this kind of family” (Brooks, 2020, p. 57). Yet most individuals still see the nuclear family as the ideal. Mark and Melissa's family is what many people see as the ideal, a traditional nuclear family.

During the course of the interview, the couple reflected on their strengths and coping skills as a family. In many ways, the family dealt with day-to-day struggles as so many American families do, issues with balancing work with family life, paying bills, and raising children. In modern America, the family which was interviewed is in a minority. No one type of family structure dominates, and with the exception of 1950 to 1965 (Brooks, 2020) when nuclear families formed a majority of American families.

Since 1965, the nuclear family has been in retreat, “from 1970 to 2012, the share of households consisting of married couples with kids has been cut in half” (Brooks, 2020, p.58). Thus, while the family which was interviewed may seem like the American ideal, the truth today is fewer and fewer families fit the stereotypical nuclear family.

Conclusions

Based upon the healthy families interview, it is apparent Mark and Melissa's family are able to deal with the stresses and challenges of modern American life. Their strengths are Mark's organization skills and Melissa's creativity to help them cope with the stresses of modern life. They live in what might be considered a traditional nuclear family with husband, wife, and two children. Spending time together as a family and keeping the lines of communication open are important to maintaining family equilibrium.

Since being married 14 years ago, the couple's roles have changed, most notably when they became parents to their two children. Parenting produces many challenges the parents must face at each stage of individual and family life cycles and for Mark and Melissa their role of parents has been their greatest challenge.

In order to have a healthy family dynamic, and based upon the interview conducted, most healthy families rely upon each other for child rearing and the day-to-day running of

the household. This is true whether the family is a nuclear family or another type of family structure. To maintain a family requires trust, maintaining the lines of communication, and hard work. All of these facets were present in the couple I interviewed and are essential to healthy family functioning.

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