

Marriage Through the Lens of Eternity

Johanne R. Smith

Alliance Graduate School of Counseling, Alliance University

GCN 605.OA: Marriage and Family Counseling: Foundations

Dr. Julio A. Orozco

March 25, 2023

*You and Me Forever* is a book by Francis and Lisa Chan that explores what it means to have a Christ-centered marriage. The book emphasizes the importance of putting God first in a marriage, and how that can lead to a deep and fulfilling relationship between spouses. Although this is not a clinical book, but faith-based book, the principles contained therein can be adapted and applied to use in a clinical setting with Christian and non-Christian couples.

Throughout the book, the authors encourage the readers to view marriage from a unique perspective: through the eyes of eternity. They endeavor to shift the married person's vision of marriage from an "us" viewpoint to God's point of view. This is the major theme that permeates the entire book: Marriage is not about you or your spouse individually or as a unit; it is about God and using your marriage as an opportunity to glorify Him. When one views marriage from this eternal standpoint, it makes getting upset about squeezing the toothpaste from the middle instead of the bottom or remembering to refill the icetray before returning it to the freezer, inconsequential. The book also includes practical advice and examples from the authors' own marriage as well as other couples. It covers the purpose of marriage, the importance of forgiveness and the role of communication in a healthy relationship (Chan & Chan, 2014). It also addresses the challenges and struggles that couples face, such as conflicts and difficulties in parenting. Solutions suggested include: praying for your spouse and marriage, cultivating a humble attitude, self-sacrifice and (re)discovering God's purpose and plan (the why) for bringing you and your spouse together (which is to call attention to Jesus and tell His story). In brief, *You and Me Forever* attempts to inspire couples to pursue a deeper, more meaningful relationship with each other by pursuing a deeper, more meaningful relationship with God.

Clinicians with or without a Christian world view can benefit from this book in clinical (and non-clinical) settings. The principles described can be adapted to serve Christian couples

and non-Christian couples alike. For example, the authors suggest praying for your marriage and spouse. Muslims, Jews, Hindus, and people of other faiths pray, not just Christians. Even those who are atheist or agnostic can apply this principle. Instead of praying, they can share with each other verbally or in writing their hopes for each other individually and as a couple. Couples who wish to integrate faith in their marriage / couples' counseling can apply all the principles and suggestions made in this book, adapted to their personal beliefs and values. The book encourages readers to focus on Jesus and adopt a humble and self-sacrificing posture, which will translate into a humble, selfless posture towards your spouse. Couples who do not believe in Jesus can still apply the ideas of humility and self-sacrifice towards each other in their marriage.

Regarding ethical considerations, after a thorough review of consent with the couple, it would not be appropriate to directly apply the principles from this book if a couple has expressly requested not to include faith-based and/or Christian based resources, techniques, or approaches. With that said, the person of the therapist with a Christian world view can exclude this book from the counseling sessions, however it may still inform their therapeutic and theoretical treatment approach. In a case where the clinician is at risk of imposing their own beliefs on a client, they would do well to become familiar with the ACA Code of Ethics and seek supervision. The 2014 ACA Code of Ethics states: "Counselors are aware of—and avoid imposing—their own values, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors. Counselors respect the diversity of clients, trainees, and research participants and seek training in areas in which they are at risk of imposing their values onto clients, especially when the counselor's values are inconsistent with the client's goals or are discriminatory in nature."

Adult attachment theory explores how early childhood experiences with caregivers shape the way individuals form and maintain relationships in adulthood (Capuzzi & Stauffer, 2015).

These four primary attachment styles: secure, anxious-preoccupied, dismissive-avoidant and fearful-avoidant can influence the way couples form and maintain their intimate relationships and experience marital satisfaction (Mohd Hasim et al., 2021). Clinicians can use this theory to assess their clients and give them awareness into their specific attachment style. Knowing their attachment style can empower couples and assist them in recognizing patterns of relating to each other that are dysfunctional, which will lead to deeper understanding, connection and acquiring tools to combat communication breakdowns in the relationship. This theory is different to the approach in *You and Me Forever* because the adult attachment theory is asking couples to focus on their past experiences to understand how and why they are relating a specific way towards their partner in the present. In the book, couples are encouraged to focus their attention on their future destiny and on eternity rather than going back in the past to understand themselves. According to Chan & Chan (2014), it is this forward looking (to their eternal destination for Christians; to a brighter future for non-Christians) posture that inspires and motivates change in one's present marriage. Put another way, seeing where they want to go and where they want to end up will inform how a couple lives out their marriage in the present - whether that is an eternal place or a literal place. behavior theory is based on the idea that behavior is learned through experience and reinforce through rewards and punishments.

Behavioral theory suggests that couples' problematic behaviors are a result of learned patterns of behavior that have become entrenched over time. According to this theory negative behaviors such as criticism, blame, and defensiveness can be unlearned and positive behaviors such as active listening, expressing appreciation, and negotiation can be learned and reinforced. Behavior theory focuses on identifying the specific behaviors that are causing problems in the relationship (Overall, 2020) and teaching couples more positive behaviors to replace them.

Couples are encouraged to identify the triggers that lead to negative behaviors and to develop strategies to avoid these triggers or respond to them in more positive ways. This behavior modification is a different approach than the one found in *You and me Forever*. As in Adult Attachment theory, Behavioral theory approach lends itself to the couple focusing on each other, while the book repeatedly calls on couples to focus on something external (God).

A challenge for clinicians regarding this book is the fact that it is not congruent with evidence-based practice. While a clinician and or a client couple can glean from the principles described, neither one can answer the question of how effective the book is in helping couples overcome their relationship issues. This book would be best in a pre-marital setting, for couples seriously dating, engaged, or otherwise considering marriage. This book would also be beneficial to helping married couples maintain a healthy and thriving marriage as it provides a general posture and attitude couples can adopt. But it would be difficult to apply the principles in a crisis situation with a couple needing immediate relief of relational symptoms, i.e. recent infidelity, porn addictions, etc.

*You and Me Forever* is a book by Francis and Lisa Chan that really gets to the heart of marriage, its original purpose and how couples can reclaim the intent for the institution of marriage, namely to glorify God. There is some clinical contribution that can be made through the principles of this book regardless of the faith orientation of the clinician and or the client couple being serviced.

## References

- ACA code of Ethics - American Counseling Association. (n.d.). Retrieved March 26, 2023, from <https://www.counseling.org/resources/aca-code-of-ethics.pdf>
- Capuzzi, D., & Stauffer, M. D. (2015). *Foundations of couples, marriage, and Family Counseling*. Wiley.
- Chan, F., & Chan, L. (2014). *You and me forever: Marriage in light of eternity*. Claire Love Publishing.
- Mohd Hasim, M. J., Hashim, N. H., & Mustafa, H. (2021). Married life: Measuring adult romantic attachment and satisfaction. *Couple and Family Psychology: Research and Practice*. <https://doi.org/10.1037/cfp0000188>
- Overall, N. C. (2020). Behavioral variability reduces the harmful longitudinal effects of partners' negative-direct behavior on relationship problems. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 119(5), 1057–1085. <https://doi.org/10.1037/pspi0000231>