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- *Commentary.* This case shows how the value system of the counselor can determine the direction of counseling. The counselor who is dedicated to preserving family life is bound to function differently from the counselor who puts primary value on the welfare of individual family members. What might be best for one family member is not necessarily in the best interests of the entire family. It is essential, therefore, for counselors who work with couples and families to be aware of how their values influence the goals and procedures of therapy. In ethical practice, clients are encouraged to look at their own values and to choose a course of action that is best for them.
- Kleist and Bitter (2009) advocate for an ethical process for family practitioners from the perspective of virtue ethics—that is, from consideration of what constitutes the “good life” for individuals, systems, and human life in general. Through consideration of ethical codes and legal requirements within a process they call *participatory ethics*, family members are made aware of counselor values and concerns; are informed about professional, ethical, and legal standards affecting their situation; and are asked to share in the process of finding a resolution to any ethical dilemmas that may emerge.

▪ The Case of Emily and Lois.

Emily and Lois, lesbian partners, were married in San Francisco when it was legal. They have now moved to a state that prohibits same-sex marriages and find themselves scorned and threatened by their neighbors. In addition, Emily had a child through in vitro fertilization, and Emily's parents have filed a petition in court to obtain custody of the child. The parents believe that the two women are unfit to raise a child because of their sexual/affectional orientation. Emily and Lois recognize that they need a support system that works for them, and they hope a counselor can help them sort out what is best for their family.

- **Counselor A.** This counselor says that she cannot even imagine what it must be like for them to have to face the reactions of the neighbors and of Emily's parents on a daily basis. She indicates that she will make every effort to support and assist them in working through their situation.
 - ▪What are your reactions to this counselor's approach?
 - ▪Do you think the support the counselor is offering is enough in this case?
- **Counselor B.** This counselor lets Emily and Lois know that they must have seen the problems inherent in returning home to a community that has a very strong anti-gay bias. He informs them that the best approach to the problem is to relocate to a more liberal community, at least for the sake of the child.
 - ▪What, if any, ethical issues do you see in this response? Is this counselor imposing his values?
 - ▪What interventions made by the counselor do you agree with? What are your areas of disagreement?
- **Counselor C.** This counselor feels a bit overwhelmed, especially in trying to define the problem. Is it a marriage problem? A problem pertaining to their sexual orientation? A community problem?
 - ▪What are your personal reactions toward this counselor?
 - ▪Do you see any ethical issue in the counselor's reaction?

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- If you felt overwhelmed with this situation, how would you handle it?
- *Commentary.* This case demonstrates the necessity for counselors to be prepared to deal with complex situations. Counselors need to know in advance where to find consultation and what resources are available. We like Counselor A's affirming approach and hope that this would be a fundamental response for any mental health professional. Counselor B seems to have given up before he has even begun, and Counselor C needs to make an appropriate referral for these clients due to an apparent lack of experience with such complex issues.
- In counseling this couple, we would begin by recognizing the complexity of the case and showing our support for the difficulty Emily and Lois are facing. We would ask their permission to consult with legal, ethical, and clinical experts so that we could better assist them. We would probably ask Emily and Lois's thoughts on having a family session with the extended family of each of them. If Emily and Lois expressed an interest in family therapy, we would make an appropriate referral.
- Rebecca Farrell (personal communication, March 20, 2009) points out that this case also involves custody issues that are challenging when counseling a same-sex couple. For example, in Virginia in a custody battle, the maternal grandparent contended that her daughter was unfit to raise her child due to her sexual orientation. The court ruled in favor of the grandparent who was given custody of her grandchild because the mother was in a lesbian relationship. Counselors need to know their state's laws and consider their ethical obligations when deciding on a course of action. Some states (for example, Kentucky) are introducing bills to prohibit same-sex couples from adopting or fostering children. Cultural norms and