Couple Counseling

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**Research Problem**

Couple counseling can be viewed as a diverse issue in the current society because of the many aspects of it which have been the subject of counseling and therapy. Couples are unique regarding the challenges they face although the counseling procedure, skills and assessment tools incorporated by counselors may be similar in common general problems. This research proposal aims to determine the effectiveness of treatment tools in addressing conflict in lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender(LGBT) couples. Although conflict among couples may be seen as a more common issue in counseling, addressing LGBT couples present counselors with a special attention towards these ‘delicate' couples. Helping heterosexual couples to overcome conflict is viewed differently as handling conflict in LGBT couples. Relationships involving same-sex couples are the subject to multiple challenges by a special set of issues, which are created by the world through interactions with personalities, strengths, and vulnerabilities. Offering therapeutic counseling and assistance to GLBT couple to enhance communications and relations requires professionalism and expertise in counseling which will determine the success or failure of the counseling session (Moller & Vossler, 2015). Many psychiatrist's psychologists and counselors have faced challenges and difficulties in dealing with issues facing same-sex couples whereby the entire counseling process or some stages of it does not deliver by the objectives and goals of the counseling process. For example, while tracking the communication level between couples using a scale or chart, some improvements may be noted during the early stages of the counseling process but may stagnate later on. To maintain a progressive development on the issue being resolved is, therefore, a challenge to counselors.

This research proposal, therefore, enquires more about the methods and techniques that couple counselors use in assisting LGBT couples who face issues in their relationships. The research proposal is specific on the issue of conflict to same-sex couples. It investigates the challenges of LGBT couples which complicate the process of assisting them as well as the problems or shortcomings of the interventions offered in regard to conflicts within couples. Shortcomings within the interventions may be as a result of the tools being used for tracking improvement and progress of the issues being addressed such as communication. LGBT couples seek therapeutic assistance by approaching counselors who assist them in issues within their relationship or issues they face outside their relationships such as external stigma. Established same-sex couples also frequently visit counseling therapists to seek to counsel on a more successful and long-term relationship (Dayringer, 2006). For the case of female couples, it is a more congruent exposure to be counseled by a lesbian therapist while for a male couple case it would be more congruent to have an experience with a gay therapist. Counseling of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender couples are faced with some specific challenges which do not affect the majority heterosexual couples. Handling conflict in LGBT couples is a long-term process, depending on the extent of the conflict, which presents a challenge to counselors and therapists regarding administering all the professional procedures, and assessment tools. This is the identified problem in this research proposal.

**Research Question**

Based on counseling lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender couples, this research proposal aims to get the answer to getting the answer to the question; what is the impact of assessment tools on effective treatment of conflict among LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) couples? In any form of treatment, there have to be assessment tools which the counselor or therapist uses to diagnose the extent of the problem so that he/she can prescribe the best intervention or treatment plan for the problem, depending on the level of seriousness. Therapists and counselors use assessment tools which are designed to diagnose or track the progress of different social problems among clients. Counseling or treating of conflict among LGBT couples are subject to the use of various treatment and assessment tools which different psychologists have previously and continuously used. As a researcher, I perceive that the assessment tools used in the treatment of conflict among LGBT couples have an impact on the effectiveness or determine the success of the counseling process in this specific problem. This proposal, therefore, seeks to find an answer on how the assessment and treatment tools have affected or affect the effectiveness of conflict treatment in LGBT couples (Archer, 2009). It, therefore, develops a hypothesis that the treatment and assessment tools incorporated in couple counseling have a direct impact on the success or failure of the overall counseling process. The assessment tools and chats have various components, structures and parts which are deemed key factors in predicting the causes of conflict as well as the required behavioral adjustments. For instance, the treatment or assessment tool contains a scale for measuring particular attributes which are related to couple conflicts such as communication regarding frequency, substance and alcohol abuse condition of the couple, criminal record, psychological disorders condition, or the external relations with family relatives or the colleagues.

Through this information, a therapist can professionally evaluate the extent of the conflict and draw an appropriate treatment plan from it. The assessment information contained in the tools may not vary or may be less significant at times because all the tools for assessment are prepared and standardized by the national registry of evidence-based practices and programs. However, the interpretation by therapists may be different and therefore impact on the effectiveness of the program. This research proposal recognizes the importance of assessment and treatment tools in responding therapeutically to LGBT couples' conflict and therefore seeks to find the answer to the question on the impact of these tools on the success of the treatment program or process. The focus is on LGBT couples because they present counselors and therapists with a special working dimension and attention, due to their vulnerability to social issues in the society (Laird & Green, 2016).

**Literature Review**

A substantial amount of energy, resources and time has been devoted towards drawing the most perceived treatment and assessment plans for treating LGBT couples faced with conflict in their relationships. These cases have received and continue to receive special attention from counselors, therapists, and psychologists, especially after the enactment of laws legalizing same-sex marriages and relationships in the United States and other countries of the world. Addressing social and psychological issues of LGBT couples has become an emerging issue in the social and psychological sector during the last couple of years (Bepko & Johnson, 2000). It is therefore interesting to review how therapists, counselors, and psychologists have dealt with past issues on LGBT couples relations and conflicts, regarding the interventions, treatment plans, and programs they used, as well as their effectiveness. Programs which offer support and intervention services to LGBT couples in the society have also been on the increase in the country. This review also aims at providing a balanced investigation of previous research on the treatment and assessment of LGBT couples in respect to their relations and conflicts. The review is however not general but narrows the gap up to the therapists who treat the conflicting same-sex couples. After intense research, this proposal identifies the assessment of observable communication as the commonly used tool by previous therapists and counselors to diagnose conflict in LGBT couples. This is interpreted from the fact that communication is one of the major determinant factors in detecting the conflict between individuals. The LGBT couple interventions involve at least an indirect model of the most important aspects of the relationship.

Therapists with different clients choose to intervene on some issues in some clients and not others. This process of decision making is referred to as case conceptualization or case formulation. It has been defined by researchers and therapists as the general model of understanding problems and generating solutions as per this understanding, in a systematic and coherent way. This case conceptualization or formulation can be formal and use empirically proven models; for example, the BCT (Behavioral Couples Treatment), the EFT (Emotionally Focused Therapy) for couples or the insight-oriented therapy for couples (Christensen & Heavey, 2010). The case formulation can also be less formal or informal and developed a certain approach to understand the dysfunctions of a couple of relationships and prevent it. According to many therapists in previous cases, communication is identified as the primary pathway in a couple of conflict or relationship failure because it is the main way for getting the desires of a relationship. Similarly, miscommunication or misunderstanding between LGBT couples is a main pathway to relationship dysfunction and conflict because couples do not maybe share common ideas, interests, values or desires from their relationship. Most therapists and researchers have therefore identified communication intervention as a critical concept which must be conceptualized and tested empirically when treating conflict among same-sex couples. This has produced positive results to some extent but has also lacked consistency as some programs have failed to materialize to the therapy objectives. This review has established that most interventions drawn by previous counselors and therapists are based on or emphasize more on communication when treating conflict among LGBT couples.

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