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The Gottman Method, Narrative Therapy, and Psychodynamic Approach in
Counseling Interracial Couples

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A Capstone Project submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the Master of Science Degree in
Counselor Education at
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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

CAPSTONE PROJECT

The Gottman Method, Narrative Therapy, and Psychodynamic Approach in
Counseling Interracial Couples

This is to certify that the Capstone Project of

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Has been approved by the faculty advisor and the CE 695 – Capstone Project

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Abstract

Interracial couples often come into counseling for similar reasons to monoracial couples. The common issues that couples often address in counseling include sex and intimacy issues, communication issues, working through events that have happened in the past, things that are happening in the present, and events that may happen in the future. Interracial couples face these common issues along ones unique to them; examples of these include issues about societal context, social support, racialized histories, managing effects of racial privilege, and confronting microaggressions. Three approaches to couples counseling include the Gottman Method, Narrative Therapy, and Psychodynamic Therapy. The Gottman method utilizes the Sound Relationship House, Narrative Therapy utilizes change theory and stories, and Psychodynamic theory uses defense mechanisms and transference to address the couple's issues in the counseling session. To work on unique issues that interracial couples face, Narrative Therapy appears to provide the best therapeutic environment for the couple to express and work through their individual stories and increasing understanding between the individuals in the couple unit.

Keywords: interracial couple, counseling, Gottman method, narrative, psychodynamic

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The Gottman Method, Narrative Therapy, and Psychodynamic Approach in Counseling Interracial Couples

The start of couple's therapy was a part of the eugenics movement in 1920s Germany and brought to the United States in the 1930s as marriage counseling to continue the eugenics movement (Vinas-Nelson, 2017). This was meant to promote further racial purification to ensure that white, middle class families would be able to make marriage work. Due to the very nature of how couple's counseling started, it is important to recognize how systems of couples counseling may need to be analyzed in terms of how they have been or can be applied to interracial couples. A little over 50 years ago, race-based restrictions on marriage were determined to be a violation of the United States Constitution (Vinas-Nelson, 2017). Since interracial marriage in the United States has only been legal for 52 out of the 106 years that the U.S. has legally recognized marriage in law, positive discourse about interracial love, couples, and marriage has not had a long presence in historical research (Vinas-Nelson, 2017). With the growing number of interracial couples and families, it is necessary and important to research what counseling techniques are well suited for unique issues that interracial couples face.

Review of Literature

Beyond individual counseling, the counseling field serves several groupings of clients that have varying relationships with one another, including but not limited to; couples, families, classmates, community members, etc. Within these relationships, the counseling field also serves to address all parts of a client's identity, whether that be their gender, sexual orientation, age, race, occupation, socioeconomic status, etc. To gather research from one particular grouping of client and connecting it with one particular part of clients' identity, counseling couples in interracial relationships will be studied for this review of literature. Couples counseling has held

a long history consisting of a multitude of options for treatment methods. Within this paper, three different treatment modalities will be described; their key terms, interventions, and uses within couples counseling will be covered. Then, these methods will be compared and contrasted with one another in how they may be used for interracial couples. Implications for future research are discussed in order to further develop much needed conversation and research for this particular group in counseling.

Interracial Couples

The term interracial couple is used to describe a romantic relationship between two individuals of a different ethnic, racial, and/or cultural background (Thomas, Karis, & Wetchler, 2003). Historically, in the United States, the idea of two people of different races being together was, and can still be, frowned upon. Prior to the year 1967, it was illegal for interracial couples to get married. When learning about the long history of the counseling field, it is important to note that people of color were often not included in the conversation, the research, or the treatment that was going on until very recently. It is also necessary to note that interracial couples include two people of color in a relationship as well as a person of color and a white person in a relationship. This paper looks at same sex couples as well as opposite sex, however, research on poly-relationship triads or more are not considered due to the nature of the term meaning two individuals.

Research shows that this topic is worth exploring due to evidence of marital satisfaction and longevity being lower in interracial relationships than same race relationships; however, little research has been done to look underlying causes and propose potential interventions (Thomas et al., 2003). Couples from different racial backgrounds may be more vulnerable to stress, breakups, high divorce rates, and intimate partner violence due to a lack of conversation,

research, and treatment models that surround them. The existing literature about interracial couples often looks at either treatment model or common issues that arise in counseling. After going through three different treatment models to couple's counseling, it is now necessary to assess each when they are put up against common issues that arise within this population specifically.

Interracial couples going into therapy are usually not going into therapy because of racial issues (Thomas et al., 2003). When asked, effects of racial issues are often minimized within the couple. They are often coming into couple's counseling because of common couple problems (e.g. communication, financial struggles), or problems that arise in almost every relationship; however, it is important for counselors to understand that there are unique problems that interracial couples have to face in addition to the common couple problems. Since the couple is often unaware of these unique problems, it is up to the counselor to broach the subject and adjust their treatment model to make sure that they are being culturally competent in therapy.

Common Couple Issues in Counseling

Couples can often seek couple counseling due to a difference of opinion about one or several things. Many couples going into therapy are experiencing a combination of issues from different categories, though there might be one that is the strong presenting issue that got them into counseling. It is also worth noting that couples at any stage in their relationship or sexual orientation can experience any number of these issues. Some examples of these can include parenting styles, marriage, money management strategies, lifestyle, relationships within laws or other family members, or engagement with friends outside of the couple (Solsberry, 1994). Another type of issue could be that something bad happened, and the couple is struggling to work through the aftermath. This can include infidelity, loss or bereavement, redundancy,

bankruptcy, or illness. On the other hand, an issue could also consist of fear that something bad will happen; for instance, becoming parents, committing or settling down, buying a house, moving in together, or death. Issues can also revolve around a big life change like retirement, moving, children leaving home, or changes in health. Sex and intimacy issues are also common; difference of libido, lack of trust, feeling stuck, a partner questioning their orientation, or more. Lastly, communication issues are a large category of common issues as well, and some examples of this include secrets, not sharing feelings, and drifting.

In couples' counseling, there are many common issues that come up time and time again for all couples: negotiating gender roles, poor communication, disagreements over financial management, and intimacy issues. There are several broad categories that are necessary to go over so that there is an understanding of how many common issues there are within the world of couple's counseling (Solsberry, 1994).

Unique Issues in Interracial Couples Counseling

While interracial couples experience common couple issues that monoracial couples experience, there are issues that are unique to interracial couples. Some of these may include broad issues like managing societal disapproval, managing effects of racial privilege, understanding how race has affected each partner's life experience, differences in culture and beliefs about gender roles or expectations, and racial identity issues (Solsberry, 1994). Additionally, learning to talk about and manage the following specific unique issues to interracial couples would be important as well: current social context, social support, racialized histories, and confronting microaggressions. It is simply not enough to just address common issues for interracial couples, it is necessary for the therapist to also be aware of and comfortable with addressing these unique issues.

Gottman Method

The Gottman Method is based off over 40 years of clinical research with over 3,000 couples (Bergental, 2012). John Gottman and Julie Gottman created one of the most well-known and respected models of addressing relationship difficulties caused by the Four Horsemen. Gottman's research showed that these Four Horsemen (e.g., criticism of the partner's personality, defensiveness, contempt, and stonewalling) were factors that often-predicted divorce. In order to address these negative thoughts and behaviors in the couple, the Gottman Method tailors the research to each couple's unique patterns and challenges and help couples increase closeness and friendship behaviors, address conflict productively. To accomplish the goals, the couples will learn seven principles that the method utilizes: building love maps, expressing fondness and admiration, turning toward one another, accepting influence, solving problems that are solvable, managing conflict and overcoming gridlock, and creating shared meaning (Gottman, Gottman, & McNulty, 2017).

Gottman's extensive research on relationships is comprised of studies upon studies with significant findings. Among the most prominent, a study done in 1992 predicted which couples would divorce within that study with a 93.6% accuracy (Bergental, 2012). Gottman has over seven studies that look at predictions of divorce, however, he emphasizes that it is more beneficial to understand actions that increase risk of divorce rather than being able to predict it. Some of the ways to measure the actions in his studies include looking at interacting behavior, perception, physiology, interview, and questionnaires. From there, key terms and interventions were developed to be able to help couples identify and increase awareness of how their relationship may be dysfunctional.

Among the research that was found, Gottman concluded a “magic ratio” for couples to manage a healthy relationship; he stated a need for a 5:1 ratio of positive to negative moments (Gottman et al., 2017). This means that for every negative feeling or interaction in a relationship, there should be five positive feelings or interactions. When negative interactions outweigh or are equal to positive interactions, a relationship can feel unstable or frustrating. The Gottman Method of couples counseling addresses ways to increase the ratio, whether the couple’s actual ratio is close to the magic number or not.

As conflict is discussed, Gottman’s research also looks at something called conflict style. He determined four types of conflict style and looked at compatibility of styles within a couple; the three “functional” conflict styles include conflict avoiding, conflict validating, and conflict volatile (Busby & Holman, 2009). Conflict avoiding couples tend to show low levels of effort to try and persuade the other partner to see and understand their perspective in an effort to minimize conflict. Conflict validating couples tend to have balanced amounts of positive and negative interactions during conflict and go through stages of trying to understand their partner, persuade their partner, and then finding a compromise; they generally display calm behavior throughout the discussion. Conflict volatile couples tend to have high intensity, high passion conflict that consist of a lot of trying to persuade one another and has a balance of positive and negative interactions throughout. The fourth type of conflict style is called hostile; this is when couples argue often and intensely, but the arguments are often harmful and hurtful toward one another. Gottman determines that these types of conflict style often lead to divorce.

It is normal for couples to have conflict and work through them in different ways, but the presence of the Four Horsemen, more specifically when couple engages in one of or a combination of behaviors such as criticism, defensiveness, contempt, and stonewalling, increase

the likelihood that a hostile conflict style is being used (Busby & Holman, 2009). Criticism is when partners are complaining by attacking or blaming the personal characteristics of the other. Then on the other hand, defensiveness happens when partners are trying to prevent or protect themselves from an attack. Contempt is shown through the devaluing of the other; one partner believes that they are superior and therefore engage in verbal and non-verbal language that tells the other person that this is so. Stonewalling is when a partner essentially shuts down and disengages in conflict altogether. The important thing to note with all of this past research on conflict is that it can be managed, and skills can be learned to improve.

In order to effectively manage conflict and improve the relationship over time, the Sound Relationship House (Appendix A) was developed (Busby & Holman, 2009). The first three levels are based on building a friendship within the couple. The idea is to start at the foundation with building love maps; here, the couple learns to get to know one another's world. Work is done to understand the inner psychological workings through day to day thoughts, likes, dislikes, stressors, and more. Couples are encouraged to learn about one another by asking open questions and in turn, they deepen the feeling of being understood. This would hopefully lead to the next step, sharing fondness and admiration; this is when the couple learns to identify positive behaviors and verbalize the recognition of those behaviors. Then, working on turning toward one another versus turning away includes the couple learning to respond to one another by conveying attention, interest, warmth, and empathy. These three skills are laid out as the foundation for being able to do the rest of the skills; particularly managing conflict.

In the Sound Relationship House (Appendix A), the middle fourth and fifth skills appear to be the bulk of the "work" that a couple would need to focus on if they were really struggling to have that friendship (Busby & Holman, 2009). By focusing on a positive perspective, the

couple addresses any negative sentiment override that may be present. Negative sentiment override is when a partner hears criticism when it is not intended to be criticism. When that negativity is replaced with a positive sentiment override, partners tend to be able to cope with negativity by seeing evidence that their partner is stressed rather than seeing evidence of a personal attack. Then, managing conflict is a stage where couples work on accepting the partner's influence, talk about their problems, and practice self-soothing. A big part of this is learning about perpetual and solvable conflict. Gottman's research shows that about 69% of all relationship conflict have to do with problems that are perpetual, or ongoing (Gottman & Gottman, 2015). These types of problems tend to revolve around fundamental differences in personality or lifestyle needs. This means that only a small portion of relationship conflict is solvable. These types of issues tend to be about the topic at hand and not something that holds a deeper meaning within the relationship. Then, the method also looks at something called gridlocked perpetual problems; these are perpetual issues that have not been handled effectively and have moved into an area where the couple feels stuck whenever they discuss it.

The last two steps in the Gottman Method include making life dreams come true and creating shared meaning (Gottman & Gottman, 2015). Making life dreams come true is similar to building love maps at the foundation. However, it is a deeper approach to it where the open questions are asked like when the couple is building love maps, but the answers are remembered and followed up on. Creating shared meaning is meant to help the couple create formal and informal rituals of connection and agreeing on their core values as a unit. This is also another, even deeper, version of the love map foundation. Surrounding the skills in the Sound Relationship House are trust and commitment; these values are ideally built stronger as the couple moves through building their house from the love map foundation up.

Assessment and Treatment Planning

When a couple first meets with a therapist using the Gottman method for therapy, there is a three-part assessment to identify strengths and challenges before a treatment plan is presented (Gottman & Gottman, 2015). In the first assessment, the counselor conducts a semi structured clinical interview to understand couple's narrative and reasons for counseling; this is when the counselor will get a verbal history of the couple while they are together in a room. The next assessment consists of sessions that are forty-five minutes each where each partner is interviewed individually about their wishes, complaints, and commitment level. During the last part of the assessment, the couple is given a set of surveys to separately rate strengths and challenges of the relationship. Then the counselor uses the information gathered to create a treatment plan that uses the Sound Relationship House to map out the relationship work that the couple will do. Overall, the Gottman method appears to really focus on managing conflict and building deep love through friendship.

Narrative Therapy

Developed by Michael White and David Epston in the 1980s, narrative therapy in couples counseling works to challenge simple explanations of objective truth by uncovering neglected aspects of stories that have been learned over time (Kim, Prouty, & Roberson, 2012). When problems or issues in relationships have become part of the "truth" for the couple, then the problem appears to be much more difficult to address. However, by looking at each individual's relational identity and separating the problem from the person or the couple, the couple is able to hopefully work together to look at relationship issues in a different way. By taking stories that have been learned over time, and shifting to a different perspective, away from the couple, it may add possibilities or alternatives to problem solving that the couple may not have seen before.

Narrative therapy functions from a foundational understanding that two dimensional normative scales don't work. For instance, it does not label the couple as healthy or dysfunctional, it empowers them to name and create their own definition of their relationship.

Narrative approach to couple's therapy includes a theory of how change happens; change is based on the presence of three factors which include experiential, meaning making, and new stories (Kim et al., 2012). Experiential part of change is based on experience and observation; to be able to work on this, attention needs to be brought into the here and now. Then, meaning making is to reclaim, relieve, and make meaning of old stories. Lastly, new stories have to be created by adding new substances and possibilities. With these three factors, a couple would be able to create change in their relationship by not seeking to change the person, but rather change the effects of a problem.

Application of Change Theory

In order to carry out narrative therapy with couples, change theory is used in treatment. A couple in counseling would start with evaluating the current situation (Kim et al., 2012). The counselor acts as an active facilitator that takes a not-knowing stance; this is to allow clients the space to be the expert in their own life. During the experiential part of the theory of change, the counselor then works with the clients to name the problem and evaluate their relationship to those problems. By drawing attention to the problem and what is going on as an effect of the problem, the couple can then move onto the next step of taking a stand in regard to the problem (Barnes-Holmes, Barnes-Holmes, & McEnteggart, 2018). During the working stage, the couple is making meaning and exploring the stories that they have learned over time in regard to themselves, their partner, or the relationship. In order to develop new stories, couples analyze what they would like to keep versus what stories they would like to rewrite. After that, the

couple learns to tell more satisfying stories of their relationship and evaluate the usefulness of the alternative stories. This part in therapy allows the couple to explore new stories and practice looking at what is effective for them as a couple.

Intervention Techniques

Within the structure of narrative therapy work, there are a number of interventions that a counselor may use throughout different stages of treatment. These interventions are externalizing conversation, naming the issue as the problem or the project, and reauthoring and remembering conversation (Kim et al., 2012). Externalizing conversations through deconstructive listening and deconstructive questioning. This allows the client to challenge assumptions and become aware of internalized manifestations that have become personal beliefs. It attempts to have the couple look at the presenting problem as separate from themselves as people. It breaks down cultural and historical values; for instance, a couple talking about differences in expectations of how to handle money or disciplining children might work with their counselor to deconstruct what the expectations are and where they came from for each partner. Deconstructing and externalizing are essentially taking apart the pieces of an issue and having the couple look at them together rather than having the couple look at one another as the issue.

In relation to deconstruction and externalization, naming the issue as the problem or the project is important (Kim et al., 2012). This serves to help the couple practice removing the issue from their partner, and they work on looking at the issue as a third-party presence in their relationship. By actually putting a name to it, the topic is further externalized from the couple.

Another intervention used in narrative therapy includes reauthoring and remembering conversation (Kim et al., 2012). This helps couples to develop and nurture stories that have been neglected in the past by including important experiences that the couple has pushed to the side

for their dominant story. The couple works to remember times where they have solved the problem in the past or looks when the problem started. The counselor helps to lay out the landscape of action toward the issue throughout the couple's history (Barnes-Holmes et al., 2018). In addition to reauthoring and remembering conversation, the counselor also looks at landscapes of identity and helps both partners to recognize how certain events have affected each partner's beliefs about themselves. The counselor works to facilitate recognition of strengths and motives within the context of the couple. This is all done by remembering several themes: a partner's contribution to the other partner's life and vice versa, implications of those contributions, and one partner's identity through the eyes of the other.

Through looking at the research, the most prominent part of narrative therapy appears to be the story-telling aspect. This approach helps couples to gain awareness of the stories that they've held on to because of past experiences and helps them gain control to be able to rewrite their own stories for their future. However, it does all of this through a hyper focus on the present experiences within the couple and the individual partners.

Psychodynamic Approach

With roots of the theory set forth by Freud, Psychodynamic therapy focuses on interpreting mental and emotional processes (Brok, 2017). It helps couples gain insight into their lives and current issues by looking at patterns that have been developed over time. This perspective helps couples in therapy by diving into emotions, thoughts, early life experiences, beliefs, and looks at how each individual avoids distress by using defense mechanisms. Some examples of defense mechanisms include denial, repression, projection, displacement, regression, rationalization, sublimation, reaction formation, compartmentalization, and

intellectualization. In couples' therapy, this approach seeks to address the foundation of the issues that the defense mechanisms are covering up.

Key Terms in Psychodynamic Couple Counseling

There are several key terms to understand when looking at psychodynamic therapy in couple's counseling; one of the most prominent terms is transference (Brok, 2017). Transference in therapy is when a client is taking experiences from the past and manifesting them as assumptions and beliefs for the present. This can happen in therapy toward the therapist and it can also happen within a couple; one partner can have transference toward the other partner. A psychodynamic therapist works to explore and uncover those unconscious beliefs that the couple uses to function within a relationship.

Another key term in psychodynamic therapy is understanding the difference between finding versus discovering (Brok, 2017). Finding is when a partner is looking for something to validate their assumptions whereas discovering is based in curiosity and interest. In the therapy setting, the counselor manages the interactions so that the couple does not just attempt to find underlying reasons for transference, but they actually go through the process of discovering what those underlying reasons are; it is a small difference on the surface, but finding versus discovering may be similar to looking at content versus process of getting to the root of transference.

Intervention Techniques

Psychodynamic therapy uses cognitive maps to explain how people organize and structure themselves in terms of unconscious beliefs (Nielsen, 2017). Couples learn to map one another and work to understand each other's beliefs, categories, and conflicted fears. The therapist facilitates this work through using observations, interventions, and interpretations; with

help, the couple enters newfound emotional territory. One intervention that is often used in this therapy approach is the practice of being an involved witness. Couples get to know one another and build understanding in new ways through this; one partner shares about a part of their history that has not been discussed before while the other partner practices listening as an interested and involved witness (Nielsen, 2017). As an involved witness, the partner is not acting as an interpreter or merely an observer, it includes reacting to what is happening in the story as if they are there with them, with interest and empathy. Another intervention that is often used in this approach, often in late sessions, is dream sharing. Symbols and metaphors are explored to see how each partner organizes the relationship and the other partner in their mind; building an understanding of this can often help to get a gauge of how the couple experiences satisfaction in the relationship.

Psychodynamic therapeutic approach looks at whether a relationship is transitional or transformational (Rambo, West, Schooley, & Boyd, 2013). It is believed that transitional relationships tend to serve attachment purposes of love; this is when the relationship is focused on finding what has been missing, like a missing relationship with a parent from childhood. In transitional relationships, the partners can grow apart or fall stagnant because they might not be evolving together; the relationship is meant to be a transition. Transformational relationships are based in involvement purposes, this is when the relationship is focused on discovering possibilities of what could be.

Building off of transformation, another psychodynamic intervention looks at the couple through time (Rambo et al., 2013). The counselor helps the couple analyze the historical couple, the current couple, and the potential couple. Exploring the historical couple means looking at what dynamics were present for the couple to build that original attraction to one another, and

the partners work on addressing the unconscious needs that drew them in. Then, exploring the current couple means to comb through the dynamics that are currently present in the relationship; in therapy, it is exploring what conflicts are present and what threads are still holding them together (Rambo et al., 2013). If they were approaching the relationship in a transitional way before, the therapist works to help them move to a more transformational relationship by addressing and adjusting those unconscious attachment purposes. Then, the potential couple explores where the couple is going or what their shared project will be; the idea is that the couple's project is being put on hold because of conflict happening with the current couple.

Therapists using this approach to couple's counseling will use the initial session to orient both partners to the therapy setting and set the stage for listening (Nielsen, 2017). This often includes observing and addressing the verbal and non-verbal process of what is happening in the session rather than diving in right away to the underlying issue.

Applications of Three Interventions to Interracial Couples

Each method of therapy has shown to be effective with couples overall, however it is necessary to discuss how interventions in the Gottman Method, narrative therapy, and psychodynamic therapy could be tailored to better serve interracial couples in counseling. The interventions that have been a part of these treatment models are a part of the models because they have been shown to be effective for couples in general, however, some are lacking in taking specific racial issues into account.

Using the Gottman Method with Interracial Couples

The research on using the Gottman Method with interracial couples is lacking. There is literature that lists what attributes present within a couple might hinder the effectiveness of the method and this includes some of the following: one partner does not wish to know the other

well, one partner does not wish to show respect for the other partner, and one does not wish to dialogue about perpetual conflicts (Gottman & Gottman, 2015). These are relevant because if there are microaggressions and discomfort about racial discourse within the couple, then those could both be solvable and perpetual conflict that is uncomfortable for the couple. If problems in the past have not been addressed, this could be an issue that has put the couple in gridlock.

Racial issues are often difficult to talk about, but if a couple is not able to understand what it is like to be a racial minority or dominant race, building love maps would be incredibly difficult. Since building love maps and understanding the phenomenological world of the partner is at the very foundation of this method, there needs to be active facilitation from the counselor. In this case, counselors need to be able to broach difficult racial conversations and work to minimize harmful microaggressions that may come out throughout treatment (Gottman & Gottman, 2015).

Using Narrative Therapy with Interracial Couples

Narrative therapy looks at each partner's internalized stories and approaches focus on how client's problems relate to the broader socio-political context (Kim et al., 2012). This allows freedom in therapy to explore some of those deep held beliefs that each partner holds about people of the other partner's race. The intervention that externalizes the issue works to remove these deep held, possibly racist beliefs, from the person and allows the couple to address the issue without deeply attacking one partner. The therapist in this setting needs to be completely comfortable in recognizing stories rooted in racial differences to be able to take the couple there.

Using Psychodynamic Approaches with Interracial Couples

In this treatment model, partners really have to be comfortable exploring themselves in a new way; some clients may be coming from cultural and racial backgrounds where they are

uncomfortable with exploring the unconscious (Rambo et al., 2013). In using metaphors within the therapy setting, research shows that metaphors may work better with certain racial groups as compared to others. The counselor would have to balance understanding in the session if they are using metaphors, and it might be necessary to use culturally relevant metaphors for a better understanding during treatment.

Strengths

Each method has a distinct strength for its use with interracial couples. The Gottman Method is highly structured and there are options for couples to participate in workshops where they are in a large group and working on the Sound Relationship House (Rambo et al., 2013). This is beneficial for clients that prefer a community approach to recovery. Strengths of narrative therapy include it's local and present discourse ensures that cultural values and beliefs are central to the therapy process (Kim et al., 2012). Additionally, narrative therapy is practiced around the world with all different cultures. A strength of the psychodynamic approach to counseling interracial couples is that it can provide a space for addressing unconscious emotions that have never been brought up before in a client that has trouble doing this in individual therapy or was not open to individual therapy (Rambo et al., 2013).

Conclusion

Overall, these three methods have both strengths and limitations to their application for counseling interracial couples. Their interventions can be tailored to work better, but the point is that it needs to be tailored. Though the method used in counseling is important, the therapist's level of comfort in broaching these topics and the therapeutic relationship takes high importance in helping interracial couples develop deeper connections and address conflict.

Implications

From the research, it is necessary to note that narrative therapy may be the most effective treatment modality for interracial couples as compared to the Gottman method and psychodynamic approaches. Its focus on telling and understanding stories may help couples be better able to align with one another because when a partner is telling a story of their own, it might be easy for the other partner to align with the “protagonist” of the story, and it could increase empathy and understanding for racially specific experiences (Kim et al., 2012). In addition, the deconstruction and externalization appear to protect partners with personal biases and allow them a space to address those biases without attributing the biases with themselves. This implies that counselors working with an interracial couple might want to consider using narrative therapy or integrating parts of narrative therapy into their treatment (Brok, 2017).

Future Research

Further research on this topic should continue to be done, particularly because of the continuing increase of multiracial families in the United States. In addition to research for couples counseling, future research should also extend into effective treatment modalities for family therapy as well. If possible, a longitudinal study should be done to actually measure outcomes of therapy methods across different couple identities.

Author's Note

Learning about how people love one another and themselves has always been an interest for me; this curiosity is what brought me into the counseling field in the first place. Throughout the counseling program, I've come to realize that couple's counseling is working directly with a lot of what I enjoy about counseling. It incorporates relationships with personal stories and managing (small) group dynamics, all of which I love. I don't have personal experience doing counseling for a couple at this time but doing research on it has only increased my interest in doing it in the future. I specifically chose this topic because of a personal career goal to help individuals of color increase or find satisfaction in their personal well-being. Many times, relationships can be a piece of well-being that is difficult to navigate. This capstone research paper allowed me to expand my knowledge and curiosity in both couples counseling and my personal career goal.

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Appendix A

The Gottman Method's Sound Relationship House and additional materials can be viewed at this link: <https://www.gottman.com/blog/the-sound-relationship-house-build-love-maps/>



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