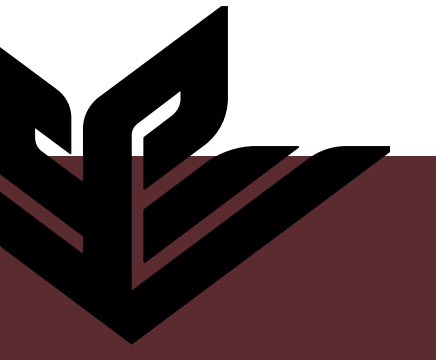
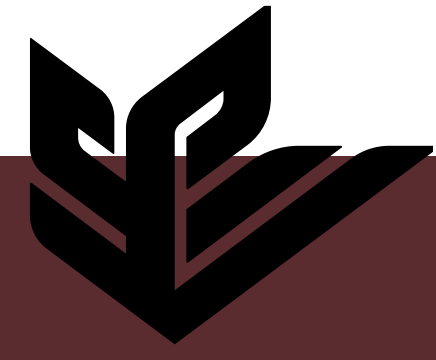


Socioculturally informed emotionally focused couples therapy: Impacts on biracial couples



Angie Lai

ABSTRACT

This quantitative study aims to explore the efficacy of Emotionally Focused Couples Therapy (EFCT) for biracial couples using a randomized controlled trial with a control group and an experimental group. Each group will consist of 15 biracial couples who will receive 20 sessions of EFCT. The experimental group's treatment will also include the 5 Practice Guidelines of Socioculturally Attuned Family Therapy (McDowell et al., 2018). Using the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DSA), the Trust Scale, and the Relationship Structures (ECR-RS) questionnaire to measure efficacy, I hypothesize that couples who receive the socioculturally informed EFCT will show greater improvement.

INTRODUCTION

- ❑ Randomized controlled trials of EFCT, widely considered an effective intervention for couple distress, have been conducted on almost entirely white populations. It is time to expand the research to focus on biracial couples and to explore whether the addition of sociocultural interventions in EFCT yields a more significant result.
- ❑ In 2019, roughly 1 in 5 set of newlyweds in the United States were biracial couples, each from one or more different ethnic cultural groups (Pew Research Center).
- ❑ EFCT is an effective couple therapy model to decrease relationship distress and promote secure attachment (Beasley & Ager, 2019). Gains in relationship satisfaction for couples who have undergone EFCT hold over time (Halchuk et al., 2010 & Wiebe et al., 2019).
- ❑ Increasing healthy racial awareness involves increasing value for one's cultural and racial experience, as well the cultural and racial experience of others, which is a significant predictor of marital quality for biracial couples (Leslie & Letiecq, 2004).
- ❑ Given these factors, I believe that adding a socioculturally attuned perspective to EFCT will result in greater relationship satisfaction for biracial couples.

PRIMARY AIM AND HYPOTHESES

- ❑ Research Question 1: Does the addition of sociocultural interventions to a course of EFCT show greater efficacy for biracial couples than a course of standard EFCT?
- ❑ Hypothesis 1: Biracial couples who receive sociocultural interventions included in their course of EFCT will report greater relationship satisfaction in comparison to the control group.
- ❑ Hypothesis 2: Biracial couples who receive sociocultural interventions included in their course of EFCT will report greater trust in comparison to the control group.
- ❑ Hypothesis 3: Biracial couples who receive sociocultural interventions included in their course of EFCT will report greater attachment, in comparison to the control group.

METHODS

Participants

- ❑ Biracial couples who have been married or cohabitating for a minimum of two years.
- ❑ How/where recruited?: The public will learn of the study through radio and social media advertising, flyers posted at public places, and word-of-mouth.
- ❑ Exclusion criteria: Couples must be biracial couples who have been married or cohabitating for a minimum of two years. Couples must complete an initial interview to screen for intimate partner violence that would contraindicate EFCT treatment. Participants must not be dealing with an active substance/alcohol abuse disorder during treatment sessions.
- ❑ Sample size: 15 biracial couples in the experimental group; 15 biracial couples in the control group.

Procedures

- ❑ Responses to all surveys completed by participants will be completed online. The data will be collected at the beginning of treatment (T1), after 10 sessions (T2), and after 20 sessions are completed (T3).

MEASURES

Relationship Quality

- ❑ Relationship quality will be measured using the 32-item Dyadic Adjustment Scale (Spanierin, 1974). Items will be summed, and a higher score indicates a higher level of relationship quality and a lower level of relationship distress.

Levels of Trust

- ❑ Levels of trust in one's partner will be measured by the 17-item Trust in Close Relationships Scale (Rempel, Holmes & Zanna, 1985). Items will be averaged, and a higher score indicates a higher level of trust in one's partner.

Attachment Patterns

- ❑ Attachment patterns will be measured in the nine-item Relationship Structures (ECR-RS) questionnaire (Fraley, 2011). Items will be summed, and a lower score indicates a more secure attachment orientation.

RESULTS

- ❑ **Research Question #1:** Does the addition of sociocultural interventions to a course of EFCT show greater efficacy for biracial couples than a course of standard EFCT?
- ❑ The data from the Dyadic Adjustment Scale, the Trust in Close Relationships Scale, and the Relationship Structures questionnaire will be analyzed using Friedman's ANOVA. The results on all these measures from T1 to T3 is expected to improve for the control group and the experimental group, as EFCT has repeatedly been shown to yield statistically significant results. However, the improvement is expected to be greater across the measures for the experimental group who also received the sociocultural interventions.

Discussion

- ❑ **Social Implications:** The success of EFCT is built upon couples gaining awareness of their negative interactional cycle and then exploring the attachment fears and disowned needs that maintain their part in the cycle. The social implications of this research is the assertion that a person's sociocultural location is fundamental to the way a person experiences the world, and has a definite impact on their couple system, their attachment fears, and their disowned needs, whether they are identified overtly or not. To explore the sociocultural experiences of a couple, and to place their cycle in that greater context is logical from the perspective of intersectional identities (Crenshaw, 2017). The results of this study will demonstrate that EFCT is enhanced by the exploration of a couple's present process as it relates to their sociocultural experience.
- ❑ **Clinical Implications:** The International Centre for Excellence in Emotionally Focused Therapy (ICEEFT) has a statement on Diversity and Racism on their website that acknowledges their commitment to families and partners across the globe, while also acknowledging systemic racism and their desire to grow as an organization to better serve all people. Research like this will help the growing network of EFCT therapists and trainers to confidently include sociocultural interventions into EFCT treatment, revising the standard of care to better meet the needs of all couples, not just white, middle-class couples that represent the majority of current EFCT research.
- ❑ **Implication for Future Research:** The success of this study will galvanize future researchers to continue to study EFCT with increasingly diverse populations, like Black couples (Nightingale et al., 2019) and Asian couples (Wong et al., 2018), while branching out into couples who represent sexual and gender diversity, which is almost completely unexplored in the current EFCT research.