Quantitative Study Design

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**Introduction**

In this study, strategies of disconnection and suicidal behavior are explored through a conceptual framework of relational cultural theory. RCT is a progressive theory that emphasizes the significance of relationships and relational growth throughout the human life span. Contending that condemned isolation is a risk factor for individuals with suicidal behavior, it is suggested that RCT be applied in treatment for the aforementioned issues.

According to Paulson and Worth (2002) in a study that utilized concept mapping, two perilous errors within counseling treatment are the inadequacy of identifying a client’s support system and failure to confront and explore strong emotions and suicidal decisions with a client. Relational-cultural theory informs us of the central relational paradox which posits that individuals long for connection but in attempt to protect oneself from hurt and rejection, engage in strategies of disconnection (Frey, 2013). This can result in increased psychological distress such as feelings of depression and suicidal behavior are client concerns involving intense negative emotions and condemned isolation. Severe depression, defined as Major Depressive Disorder in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, fifth edition, can lead to high risk of suicidal behavior. David Jobes (2000) argued that suicidality is a *relational phenomenon* in that the presence or absence of close connection in relationships can paradoxically cause suicidal behavior or prevent suicidal behavior.

As it is known, suicidal behavior is preceded by a unique set of factors that lead to severe psychological distress. These factors can include chronic disconnections, feelings of fear, humiliation, and self-blame; all of which can lead an individual to condemned isolation (Comstock, 2008). Condemned isolation is defined by relational-cultural theorists as feelings of severe shame and a deep sense of unworthiness of connection, along with their ongoing awareness of their desire for true connection. This type of isolation may be caused by the belief that one’s relational or cultural disconnections cannot be transformed or reconnected (Comstock, 2008). Considering the relational aspects of RCT, we examine how connections and disconnections in the client’s world impact engaging in strategies of disconnection that have the potential to lead to suicidal behavior.

**Research Question and Hypothesis**

This study was induced by observation of how engagement in strategies of disconnection within key relationships relate to behaviors that lead to suicide. This observation invoked curiosity of what patterns pertain to these behaviors and how relevant they are in the United States population. Thorough research has been offered in the literature to encourage further investigation of these questions relating to suicidal behavior and relationships. The hypothesis was then developed to state that engagement in strategies of disconnection in close relationships are positively associated with suicidal behavior. The Connection-Disconnection scale will be used to test this hypothesis.

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