

## Manifestation of Existential Issues As a Brilliant Function for Quality of Matrimony

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**Abstract:** There are some important issues in marital counselling which are discoursed in Existential thought. These issues are freedom, time, human communication, meaning of life, and anxiety, which are shared by the existential counsellors and philosophers. Even though there are full potentials of the existential issues to be applied during counselling sessions, most of them are ignored by couple counsellors. The purpose of this article is to highlight these issues as the key concepts in four different counselling theories of Existential thought. We found that, each theory used only certain issues as the key concepts. Therefore, this study gathers all of the applied existential issues for a future comprehensive marital counselling model. Applying these issues together seems to be a brilliant function for quality of matrimony. Journal of American Science 2011;7(5):459-465]. (ISSN: 1545-1003). <http://www.americanscience.org>.

**Keywords:** Existential thought; existential issues; marital counselling; quality of matrimony

### 1. Introduction

Nowadays, a major concern among marital counsellors is the survival of marital satisfaction and communication as the barometer of marital quality in matrimony (Halford, 2003; Patrick, Sells, Giordano, & Tollerud, 2007). Several studies have highlighted the fact that the levels of anxiety, depression and meaning in the quality of matrimony are significantly related to the level of marital satisfaction and communication (Frankl, 1984; Kalantarkousheh & Hassan, 2010; Tompson, 1991).

It seems that the aforementioned matters, as factors in the quality of matrimony, have been discussed in Existential thought. Existential counselling has initiated its application among various settings, individuals, and groups (Charny & Asineli, 1996; Kalantarkousheh & Hassan, 2009a; Lantz & Alford, 1995). In fact, issues such as the existential I-You communication, existential freedom, existential meaning of life, as well as existential anxiety and existential time, have been identified as integral parts of human beings, even when individuals get married. These issues have been recognized and regarded as effective potentials which are used in a variety of existential counselling processes (See: Binswanger & Boss, 1993; Cook, 2005; Cooper, 2003; Deurzen, 2002a; Deurzen, 2006; Kalantarkousheh & Hassan, 2010b; Lantz, 2004, 2004b; Lantz & Gregoire, 2000b; Lantz & Gregoire, 2003; Randall, 2001; Schneider, Status, & Availability, 2007; Yalom, 2002). However, as far as the current findings are concern, there is no existential training plan for couples who do not have mental problem and who want to increase their quality of matrimony, whereas the potentials of existential issues are not deniable. Therefore, there is

a gap which demands for research surrounding the existential issues.

### 2. Theories in Existential Counselling

In general, there are four theories in existential counselling (Cooper, 2003), and each of them uses some of the existential issues. The first theory is known as Daseinsanalysis, which was created by Ludwig Binswanger (1881-1966) and then by Medard Boss (1903-1990). The key concept of this counselling theory is paying attention to the two of the fundamental existential issues, namely being in the world with others and freedom. The second theory is known as Logotherapy. Viktor Frankl (1905-1997) is known as the author of Logotherapy. In this therapeutic theory, logotherapists help individuals to discover the meaning and purpose of their life. In doing so, they are observed to actualize their true potentials. In addition, freedom and time are two issues which have vital role in Logotherapy. The third is called the American Existential Humanistic theory. Rollo May (1904-1994) is known as the father of the Existential Humanistic theory. Other researchers who came after May were Bugental, Yalom and Schneider. It is important to note that practitioners of the Existential Humanistic theory, unlike Daseinsanalysts, emphasize on individuality, subjective reality, as well as inner world and inner experience of human existence. In fact, the awareness of the realities of existence, namely death, meaninglessness, freedom, and isolation which lead to real anxieties has an essential role in the Existential Humanistic theory. The final theory is known as the British School of Existential Analysis. This particular theory represents a brilliant

revival of the existential training in the world (Cooper, 2003). The main author of this theory is Emmy Van Deurzen (1951-Present). Just like Daseinsanalytic practitioners, Van Deurzen emphasizes on 'being in the world with self and others' and rejects the humanistic theory which focuses on individualism and subjectivism (Hanscomb, 2006). Indeed, Deurzen (2002a), proposed four existential worlds for human beings; which three of them namely natural world, personal world and spiritual world are related to being in the world with self. The fourth world in her theory is social world which is related to being in the world with others. Table 1 shows all the mentioned theories in brief.

### 3. Existential Issues for the Quality of Matrimony

The main duty of existential counsellor is helping individuals to be aware of variety of possibilities and conditions in their life to make a high quality of life. This assert has supported by Flanagan , Flanagan (2004) and Emmy van Deurzen (2006) since they explain that existential counselling is almost always to facilitate individual's self-awareness. Moreover, existential counsellors by emphasizing awareness of individuals explain that any change in a life is by-product of the discovery of authentic existence (Haldane & McCluskey, 1982).

However, there is no existential training to be applied for spouses do not have mental problem and who only wish to improve the quality of matrimony. Notwithstanding emphasizing on giving awareness is main duty of existential counsellors with several possibilities in the existential counselling. This is supported by Lantz (1999) who eloquently states that the goal of existential counselling is to help spouses to increase their awareness towards love, fidelity, caring, and meaning in their matrimony and decrease alienation.

As mentioned earlier on, each existential counselling theory uses some existential issues while ignoring the rest. The major goal of this review article is to highlight and gather all effective existential issues in a comprehensive model for the quality of matrimony. Hence, Table 2 illustrates both the existential counselling theories and the extracted relevant existential issues. These issues seem to have high potentials for the quality of matrimony.

#### a. Existential I-You Communication

One of the essential issues in Existential thought is being in different communicational situations based on the I-You communication and I-It communication. Martin Buber (1958), known as the existential philosopher of dialogue, believes that the

world of human beings has two kinds of communications, namely the I-You communication and I-It communication. From Existential thought, 'It' has only essence but 'you' as 'I' exists, and this creates the essence during his life when making communication with others (Heidegger, 1962; Macquarrie, 1972; Sartre, 1953). Moreover, 'You' and 'I' are unique, singular and irreplaceable; however, 'It' is replaceable and is not singular or unique (Sartre, 1953). Furthermore, matters which are referred by 'It', unlike human beings, are without aspiration. They cannot try, or hope, or wish, or long to be other than they are. Hence, they never expect human beings to pay attention to them because they do not have any feelings like human beings. Indeed, the I-You communication is an interaction between two human beings, whereas the I-It communication is between human beings and animals, or human beings and objects. Whenever 'I' takes a communication with 'It', this is because of the use of It, but the communication between I-You is transcended using the communication. Additionally, the I-You communication is always dependent on dialogue, which is impossible in the I-It communication. Furthermore, love is only between the I-You communication, so someone who does not care about that communication does not understand love (Buber, 1958). Furthermore, characteristics such as to be present for each other, the lack of looking at each other proprietary, believe in other individual's freedom, and admit others' ideas are outlined in the I-You communication. Therefore, to be fully human, we are obliged to open ourselves for I-You communication.

It is necessary to highlight that the I-You communication is sometimes reduced to I-It. As indicated earlier, however, the I-It communication is dependent on the use of human beings' sideways rather than mutuality. Therefore, it is duty of existential counsellor to help human beings to do and act in a manner to prevent the I-You communication from being reduced to I-It communication. It seems that these kinds of existential communications can form a communicative model in matrimony.

Accordingly, couples can find brilliant communications for their lives and consequently continue their marital lives successfully, and at the same time, with love if they become aware of the model (Kalantarkousheh & Hassan, 2010a ). Buber (1958) declares that marriage will never give a new life except by that out of which true marriage always arises, the revealing by two people of the You to one another. Each spouse in the dialogue becomes a You for the other if each is committed to an honest interfacing (Ventimiglia, 2008). Fitzpatrick and Noller (1993) state that the I-You communication is

problem-solving as it involves an open and direct expression of feelings, exploring the causes of the conflict, clarifying misunderstandings and looking for a solution that is satisfying to both partners. Indeed, being totally present and open to another leads to a highly positive anxiety which leads to height quality of life (May, Angel, & Ellenberger, 1958). Human beings, in this kind of encounter, will be able to make real communication and brilliant relatedness to others. In this condition, their existential needs, such as love, finding meaning in life, human relatedness, and freedom from deception are highlighted in both their matrimony and their individual life.

### **b. Existential Freedom**

Existentialists put a great emphasis on the awareness of human being's freedom and highlight that this can play a crucial role in matrimony (Cohn, 1997; Cooper, 2003; Deurzen, 2002a; Frankl, 1988; Lantz, 2004; Yalom, 1980). It is believed that the main factor in the development of the Existential thought is to recognize the importance of human encounter, choice and freedom (Aborms, 1993; Deurzen, 2002a; Lantz, 2004; Yalom, 1980). Therefore, freedom is emphasized by the existential counsellors who have shown a great legacy in the well-known sentence of Sartre (2003), i.e. "existence precedes essence". In reality, the existence of human is an upsurge (J. Sartre, 2003), i.e. a doing, becoming in the world out of willingness and freedom. The objects of the world, unlike individuals, are being rather than existence, which means they are fixed, static and substance.

Existential philosophers and counsellors believe that freedom accompanies with some elements in human being. The first one is limitations. Existential philosophers such Heidegger (1962) and Sartre (2003) point out that freedom "depends" upon the limitations of life. For Heidegger and Sartre without limitations the human being is not capable of choice in life and that the presence of limitations is the core ingredient of freedom. The second one is responsibility. To make matters even more daunting, human being is responsible not only for her/his choices, but also for her/his non-choices. This is because every choice s/he makes represents, at the same time, the death of hundreds of other possibilities. The third one is anxiety. Due to awareness of our forced freedom and making choice implies the rejection of other alternatives (Sartre, 1948; Cohn, 1997); anxiety permeates to entire human life (Kierkegaard, 1984). In other words, faced with freedom, finitude and having a large load of responsibilities lead to variety of anxieties

(Deurzen, 2002a; Hanscomb, 2006; Kalantarkousheh & Hassan, 2009c; Kierkegaard, 1984).

In general, from existential marital counselling, the term freedom does not indicate an absence of limitations upon marital life (Lantz & Gregoire, 2000b). Existential counsellors do believe that there are internal and external limitations that constrict some responsibilities, and that spouses always have some choices about how to respond to the limitations in life (Frankl, 1988). Therefore, in existential marital counselling, counsellors utilize the opportunity for choice to exercise the spouses' freedom, responsibility, strength, and internal locus of control (Frankl, 1988; Lantz, 2004).

### **c. Existential Meaning of life**

Every day, people are tormented by questions that underlie the existential crisis; these include: What do we live for? What is the meaning of life? If an individual cannot come to a satisfying and at the same time reasonable answer to these questions, he will see his whole life in ruin. Albert Camus (1955) believes that the only serious philosophical question in a man's life is whether one should go on living at the time he fully realizes the meaninglessness of human life. Camus (1955) continues on by saying, "I have seen many people die because life for them was not worth living." In this light, the existence of "meaning" in life definitely plays a significant role in one's motivation for continuing the life.

Additionally, in many researches the significance of establishing a meaning in the quality of matrimony is emphasized (Kalantarkousheh & Hassan, 2010c; Kantor & Lehr, 1975; Tompson, 1991). Some statistics also show that existence of meaning in matrimony positively affects marital relationship (Frankl, 1984). Boerop (1975) has utilized existential counselling and indicated that matrimony is a vehicle for making meaning which initiates by spouses' creation of a real marriage. According to Frankl (1984), every person has a unique task waiting to be fulfilled in life and it is a person's responsibility to actualize its meaning. Lantz and Gregoire (2003b) believe that when such a sense of meaning in life is frustrated, disrupted, or ignored, individuals develop a psychological "existential vacuum" that either becomes filled with a developing sense of meaning and purpose or with symptoms such as depression. Existential couple counsellors declare that family change most frequently occurs when spouses are able to find the meaning for the change (Frankl, 1988; Lantz, 2004). They emphasize that existential counsellor's most important responsibility is to help them become more aware of the meanings and meaning potentials in their

matrimony (Frankl, 1988; Lantz, 2004). This kind of awareness is related to existential time which will be discussed in the following section.

#### **d. Existential Time**

Just like the physical time, existential time has the present, past and future. However, existential time is not distinct from human dimensions. Indeed, a human being, in the course of his or her life, will achieve or fail, so time from Existential thought is a reciprocal element. As for individual's relation to time, the individual in one time lives in three times, "by memory has brought his past with him into the present and by anticipation and imagination he has already laid holds on to his future and projects himself into it" (Macquarrie, 1973, p. 156). Existentialists try their best to guide others to self-awareness of human conditions, i.e. their past and future are real concepts and we as human beings allow them to live in the present. Existential counsellors also point out different approaches, so time is known as an important and central aspect of the existential counselling (Frankl, 1988; Heidegger, 1962; Kalantarkousheh & Hassan, 2009b; Lantz, 2004b). They believe that individuals have different responsibilities in each part of their time. It is also believed that mental problems come from the lack of attention to the relationship between the responsibilities and each part of time. Thus, it is the role of the existential counsellors to help clients to become aware of this relationship.

First, in the present time individuals have the responsibility to actualize the potentials of meaning in life. Frankl (1986, 1988) believes that the present is the period in which human beings can utilize courage, wisdom, good faith, and responsibility to actualize and make use of the potentials of meaning and opportunities that are presented by life. Frankl (1986, 1988) also points out that the present is also the period of time in which individuals can use "bad faith" and "irresponsibility" by avoiding the actualization of the meaning potentials that are presented in life.

Second, future is the minute of time in which individuals have responsibility to notice the potentials of meaning in their future life. Frankl (1984, 1988), states that the future is the side of time that holds the meaning "potentials" and meaning "opportunities" of human life. Individuals, in this part, ought to pay attention to call for meaning. However, they have choice to select the call. From an existential counselling point of view, it is believed that change among couples occurs only when spouses are capable to find a reason or purpose for change, namely call dimension of life which is related to the future. Hence, the responsibility of existential

counsellor is to help the couples become aware of the meanings and potentials of meaning which are useful for the matrimony (Frankl, 1988; Lantz, 2004b).

Third, the past is the point of time which serves as a 'storehouse' in which all the actualized potentials of meanings are placed for real. This is a must dimension of human beings so that nobody can change his/her past. It is the responsibility of spouses, by recollection, to encounter, accept the reality, and then honour their past in order to settle and form their shining present and brilliant future (Frankl, 1959; Lantz, 1994a; Lantz, 1995; Lantz, 2004; Lantz & Ahern, 1998). Spouses need to remember even though they have some limitations in their past matrimony, namely must dimension, they have achieved many cases during that time. Spouses, by doing so, can find or make meaning for their matrimony. From existential counselling, focusing on the past provides an enhanced understanding of the future and the present (Lantz, 1998). Moreover, re-collection which is related to the past occurs every moment when each of spouses share their achievements, problems, joys, and actualized meaning potentials with each other in a regular and consistent way (Lantz, 1996a). This reminding helps spouses to recover and recollect the forgotten potentials of meaning that have been deposited in the past (Frankl, 1955; Lantz, 1995; Lantz & Alford, 1995).

According to existential marital counselling, many marital problems happen when spouses do not discover, experience, or make use of the meanings and potentials of meaning in matrimony (Lantz, 1974, 1991; Lantz, 1994b). Therefore, it is the counsellor's duty to help spouses extract the hidden potentials of meaning from the unconscious level into conscious awareness to be used in matrimony (Lantz & Raiz, 2004). The obtained results of the study showed the importance of existential time in existential counselling. Inevitably, the consequence necessitates investigating and considering existential time as a fundamental factor in the counselling.

#### **e. Existential Anxiety**

Anxiety is defined as a negative emotion which manifests on human's physical situation as well as mental one (Kalantarkousheh & Hassan, 2009c; Kirkland-Handel & Mitchell, 2005). However, from the existential counselling, the potentially beneficial effects of anxiety are preferred over its negative effects (Deurzen, 2002a; Kalantarkousheh & Hassan, 2009c). May (1977) was perhaps the first modern mental health professional to conceptualize anxiety as a good thing. He emphasizes that it is a normal and essential by-product of the human existence. In short, his

formulation of anxiety encourages individuals to view anxiety differently. Human beings should embrace it as a part of their experience. In other words, it should be explored, experienced, engaged in, and redirected into constructive activities — it should not be avoided (Deurzen, 2002a). From the existential counselling point of view, other existential issues are known as the reasons of anxiety. These issues, like their result (i.e. anxiety), have positive fundamental roles in the growing of individuals. Due to the awareness towards forced freedom, making choice and responsibility implies the rejection of other alternatives (Sartre, 1948; Cohn, 1997), while anxiety permeates to entire human life (Deurzen, 2002a; Hanscomb, 2006; Kalantarkousheh & Hassan, 2009c; Kierkegaard, 1984). Although anxiety leads to the feeling of loneliness at first, freedom is a fundamental element to change this crisis into

opportunity (Kalantarkousheh & Hassan, 2009c). Authenticity is another positive existential dimension of anxiety. It causes individualization which brings human beings back from their falling so it makes manifest to him that authenticity and inauthenticity are the realms of their choices (Heidegger, 1973; Deurzen, 2002a). Meanwhile, anxiety has negative effects on sexual satisfaction (Adams, Harper, Emberly, & Cobia, 2006). The goal of existential counsellors is not to do away with anxiety, but to reduce neurotic anxiety. This is accomplished by helping their clients to live with and cope effectively and creatively with the normal anxiety that accompanies existence (Antoniadis, 1991; Deurzen, 2002a; Flanagan & Flanagan, 2004)

**Table1: Theories in Existential Counselling**

	Authors	Theory	Key concepts
1	Ludwig Binswanger (1881-1966) / Medard Boss (1903-1990)	Daseinsanalysis	Ø Being in the world with others Ø Freedom
2	Viktor Frankl (1905- 97)	Logotherapy	Ø meaning of life Ø Time Ø Freedom
3	Rollo May (1904-94)	The American Existential Humanistic	Ø Encountering real anxieties
4	Emmy Van Deurzen (1951-present )	The British School of Existential Analysis	Ø Being in the world with self and others

**Table 2: Existential Counselling Theories and the Extracted Existential Issues for the Quality of Matrimony**

	Authors	Theory	Key concepts of the theory	Extracted Existential Issues
1	Ludwig Binswanger (1881-1966) / Medard Boss (1903-1990)	Daseinsanalysis	Ø Being in the world with others Ø Freedom	-Existential I-You Relationship - Existential Freedom
2	Viktor Frankl (1905- 97)	Logotherapy	Ø meaning of life Ø Time Ø Freedom	- Existential Meaning - Existential Time - Existential Freedom
3	Rollo May (1904- 94)	The American Existential Humanistic Approach	Ø Encountering real anxieties	- Existential Anxiety - Existential Freedom
4	Emmy Van Deurzen (1951-present)	The British School of Existential Analysis	Ø Being in the world with self and others	-Existential I-You Communication

#### 4. Conclusion and Suggestions

In conclusion, there are various potentials in the Existential thought which can be useful for a brilliant matrimony. In this paper, on one hand, it has shown that existential issues have possibilities to be applied, while on the other, each of the theories has used some of these issues. Therefore, by integrating the aforementioned existential issues, they can be used in the form of a model for the quality of marital life. Additionally, it seems that conducting some experimental research to measure the effect of existential issues on quality of matrimony can be regarded as a response to therapists' and counsellors' concerns which are surrounding the survival of matrimony.

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