

Sparkle of Existential Time as a Sanctuary in Marital Counselling

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Abstract: Nowadays, Existential thought is considered to be a practical approach among psychologists and counsellors. Nevertheless, what seems to be ignored is paying thoughtful attention to all dimensions of Existential thought which is an essential matter among counsellors and psychologists. Moreover, some issues in Existential thought such as time are disregarded among marital counsellors as well as individual counsellors. The goal of this article is to allocate exhausting existential time to benefit marital counsellors. Findings show that existential time has full potential to be applied for marital counselling. Furthermore, review of the related literature demonstrates that there is not enough experimental and descriptive research to evaluate the effect of existential time on matrimony.

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1. Introduction

Over the years, existential thinkers and existential counsellors have strived to play an indispensable role in matrimony as well as individual life. The existence of potentials and possibilities in this line of thought has benefited, even unconsciously, social workers, psychologists, and counsellors. In fact, what is encouraging for some psychologists and counsellors is to use these existential issues in the form of different kinds of treatments and interventions in Existential thought that can be classified as some human concerns such as responsibility, freedom, meaning of life, living in the world, and trying to become aware of them (Cooper, 2003; Deurzen, 2006; Kalantarkousheh & Hassan, 2010b; Kalantarkousheh, Hassan, Kadir, & Talib, 2011a; Spinelli, 2007; Steger, 2009; Weixel-Dixon & Strasser, 2005). Existential time seems to have a considerable impact on existential counselling. This article aims to outline and give an account of the function of existential time as a fundamental element in couple counselling as well as individual counselling.

2. Existentialism

2.1. What is Existential Thought?

Existential thought considered as a philosophy became popular and more well-known in both Europe and the United States after World War II (Kalantarkousheh & Hassan, 2009c; Lantz, 1994c; May, 1967). Even though philosophers are by and large involved in abstract concepts; existential philosophers' concerns are concrete issues. Indeed, real abilities consist of concrete concepts such as human flexibility, human intentionality, human

freedom, human adaptability, and the ability to respond in a large variety of ways to the essences of life establishing a real attitude toward world and life. These abilities and adaptabilities are known as Existential thought (Cooper, 2003; Kalantarkousheh, et al., 2011a; Lantz, 1994a; Tillich, 1960). These concepts of Existential thought, emphasizing human abilities and possibilities, separate this attitude from others that depend on a deterministic thought.

2.1. Existential Time

Believing in human abilities, existential philosophers put great emphasis on existential time. Existential time like physical time has a present, past and future which is not distinct from human dimensions. Indeed, a human being, in the course of his life, will achieve or fail; in this sense, time is a reciprocal element from an Existential thought (Strasser & Strasser, 1997; Straus, 1967; Weixel-Dixon & Strasser, 2005). It means that human being, as a temporal individual is constituted by future possibilities and past facilities leading to some limitations and abilities for him or her. Furthermore, from Existential thought, in one time, an individual lives in three times; "by memory has brought his past with him into the present and by anticipation and imagination he has already laid hold on his future and projects himself into it" (Macquarrie, 1973, p. 156). From Existential thought, paying close attention to three times in one time is an exceptional human ability. However, a human being, at the extreme end of the scale, may come to now-centered which is the main characteristic of the thing or animal. Existential counsellors following existential philosophers try best to guide others to self-awareness of human

conditions, meaning that, past and future are real concepts and we, as human beings, allow them to live in the present.

2.3. Existential World

Existential time does not have any meaning without existential world. Based on Existential thought, human limitations and human possibilities are under existential world and existential time. Lantz and Gregoire (2003a) following Frankl (1959) believe that existence is manifested or disrupted at the being “of” the world, “in” the world and “for” the world dimensions of existence.

“Being of the world” refers to the fact that the human being has a body and “must” obey the rules of the biological and physical world (Frankl, 1959; Lantz & Gregoire, 2003b). In this dimension, nobody can prevent some matters. By way of exemplification, all family members must die if they are deprived of food, water, or shelter for an extended period of time. There is not any will or choice in such a situation. The past time is also one of the instances of being of the world. Indeed, the past is actualized and formed forever. Nobody can change or deny the reality of what has happened in the past.

The phrase “being in the world” refers to the fact that the human being has some freedoms in his or her existence and “can” make many different choices, and reactions to difficulties and opportunities in life (Lantz & Gregoire, 2003b). Frankl (1984) describes this dimension of existence as the “can”, where individuals have the rewards of “intentionality” and “freedom” in that “can” is used to respond to their limitations and opportunities of life. In reality, the “can” dimension of a human being is related to present time meaning that individuals can increase their quality of life and actualize their potentials of life if they want.

“Being for the world” is a dimension in which human beings answer the call of life. Frankl (1984) refers to this dimension as the “ought” dimension. It means that individuals should listen to the “call of life” to be able to discover what they “ought” to do and find a sense of meaning and purpose in life. Lantz and Gregoire(2003b) believe that when such a sense of meaning and purpose 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 and anxiety.

What is worthwhile to mention is that “being in the world” and “being for the world” are arenas of decision making, freedom and then responsibility.

Moreover,” being in” and “for” the world belong to present and future because only present and future are under decision-making. There is no must or force in present and future so that we as human beings can follow the call of life or reject it. We have choice to refuse or accept present or future matters except for those issues that are related to the past, even though the past is formed by ourselves.

3. Existential Counselling

Existential counselling is an approach originating from the ideas, concepts, and insights found in Existential thought (Frankl, 1988; Kalantarkousheh & Hassan, 2010b; Lantz, 1997; Lantz & Raiz, 2004; May, 1983; Yalom, 1980). Existential counsellors attempt to help individuals to open up their world in a way that they can find their place in the world. Through this goal, individuals can manage their different and difficult situations encountered during their lifetime. Indeed, awareness of their abilities and limitations guides them to find their position in the world and to utilize creativity, their freedom, and responsibility (Frankl, 1988; Kalantarkousheh & Hassan, 2009a; May, 1994; Van Deurzen, 2006; Yalom, 1995). In Existential thought, unlike the others that assume changes in patterns of behaviors and interaction lead to internal experiences, these changes come from internal experience and the discovery of authentic existence (Haldane & McCluskey, 1982; May, 1983).

Something worth mentioning is that the existence of a range of potentials in Existential thought leads to the formation and the establishment of several existential counselling theories during a few past decades. Daseinsanalysis, Logotherapy, American Existential Humanistic theory, and British School of Existential Analysis are all theories based on Existential thought (Cooper, 2003). In a study conducted by Kalantarkousheh and his colleagues (2011a), gathered existential issues extracted from the four existential counselling theories and stated that the existential issues can be useful to apply for marital counselling as well as individual counselling.

Descriptive field studies, additionally, accentuate that existential counselling can be considered a useful approach for clients dealing with problems such as chronic illness, migrating issues, assault, rape, and cancer (Frankl, 1988; Kalantarkousheh & Hassan, 2010c; Kang, et al., 2009; Lantz, 1996b; Lantz & Raiz, 2004; Yalom, 1980).

4. The Role of Existential Time in Existential Counselling

‘Time’ has been discussed in different approaches of counselling and psychology. From an essence-oriented approach, the ‘time’ cannot be past which leads to depression and cannot be future that comes

into anxiety but present is considered to have an essential role. Existential philosophers and existential counsellors point out different approach so that the 'time' is known as an important and innermost aspect of existential counselling (Frankl, 1988; Heidegger, 1962; Lantz, 2004b; Sapienza & Bugental, 2000; Strasser & Strasser, 1997). They suppose that, regarding each part of time, individuals have different responsibilities. Indeed, mental problems come from lack of attention to the relationship among responsibility, each part of time, and different dimensions of the world. It is the role of the existential counsellor to help individuals become aware of the relationship between each part of time and related responsibility. The relationship among existential time; dimensions of the existential world and human being's responsibility towards each part of existential time beside dimensions of existential world is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: the relationship among Existential Time, Dimensions of Existential World and Responsibility

Existential Time	Three dimensions of human world	Responsibility
Future	Ought dimension	Noticing
Present	Can dimension	Actualizing
Past	Must dimension	Honoring

In *present* time, individuals have a responsibility to actualize the potentials of meaning in their life. Frankl (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 and opportunities presented by life. Frankl (1986, 1988) also points out that the present is the period of time in which individuals can use "bad faith" and "irresponsibility" by avoiding the actualization of the potentials that are presented in life.

Future is the minute of time in which individuals have responsibility to notice meaning potentials in their future life. Frankl (1984, 1986, 1988) states that *future* is the side of time that holds the potentials of meaning and opportunities of human life. Individuals, in this part, ought to pay attention to the call for meaning. However, they have the choice to select the call.

The *past* is a point of time as a 'storehouse' in which all actualized potentials of meaning are placed and are forever real. This is a must dimension of human beings so that nobody can change his/ her past. It is the responsibility of individuals, by

recollection, to encounter, accept the reality and then honor their past in order to settle and form their shining present and brilliant future (Frankl, 1959; Kalantarkousheh & Hassan, 2009a; Lantz & Ahern, 1998; May, Angel, & Ellenberger, 1958; Strasser & Strasser, 1997; Weixel-Dixon & Strasser, 2005).

5. Function of Existential Time in Existential Marital Counselling

From existential marital counselling, many marital problems happen when spouses do not discover, experience, and make use of the meanings and the potentials of meaning in marriage (Lantz, 1974; Lantz, 1994b). In other words, the awareness of meaning within the marriage has a positive effect on healthy interaction, whereas lack of awareness about meanings within the matrimony can stimulate dysfunctional interaction (Kalantarkousheh & Hassan, 2010c; Lantz, 1986; Yalom, 1980). Lantz (1999), as a testimony, in a study with post parental couples, found out that existential treatment with the couples is an effective approach and it was useful with the population group. This achievement happened when the couples discovered and experienced a sense of meaning and purpose in intimate life (Frankl, 1988; Lantz, 1993). Therefore, it is the existential counsellors' duty to help spouses extract the covered potentials from an unconscious level into conscious awareness to be used in marriage (Lantz & Raiz, 2004). For this purpose, existential time has a brilliant role in existential marital counselling. In other words, finding and making meaning in marriage depends on existential time and each part of time namely present, past and future has an important role in actualizing the meaning in matrimony. Hence, the existential marital counsellor has the responsibility to give awareness about all parts of time.

Regarding the present, an existential counsellor has the duty to facilitate conditions for spouses to actualize the potentials for meaning in life. The counsellor has the responsibility to remind the spouses, in the present time, of the potential to look towards the past of their marital life based on new interpretation. In addition, spouses should be made aware that their future will be made based on how they see their future.

Furthermore, existential marital counsellors have the duty to help spouses pay close attention to their past as an honoring responsibility. They need to remember even though they have some limitations in their past matrimony they achieved in many cases during that time. By doing so, spouses can find and give meaning to their marriage. Indeed, considering the 'can' dimension, spouses 'can' choose their attitudes towards life to be able to show their abilities

in giving response to life situations (Lantz & Gregoire, 2003b). It is believed that common marriage problems originating from this dimension include both structural and communicative problems. Re-collection which is related to the past occurs every evening when each of the spouses share their achievements, problems and joys with the other in a regular and consistent way (Lantz, 1993; Lantz, 1996a). Indeed, re-collection is a responsibility for spouses looking for a successful marriage. This responsibility helps spouses to recover and recollect forgotten meanings that have been deposited in the past (Frankl, 1955; Lantz, 1995, 1996a; Lantz & Alford, 1995). This recollection leads and provides considerable energy to the marriage. From an existential counselling "forget the past" will create a marital meaning vacuum in which symptoms grow and flourish (Lantz, 1993; Lantz & Ahern, 1998). In other words, symptoms and problems grow and develop among couples when they cannot discover and experience a sense of meaning and purpose in life (Lantz, 1999). Helping spouses to remember the meanings that have been actualized and deposited in the past is a mainly useful way to "shrink" the marital meaning vacuum and those symptoms that grow and flourish in this existential meaning vacuum (Lantz & Ahern, 1998). Additionally, changing the past to a good interpretation motivates spouses to notice and actualize the present and future of their marriage creatively, logically and out of responsibility. Therefore, focusing on the past provides an enhanced understanding of the future and the present (Lantz, 1995; Lantz & Ahern, 1998).

From an existential point of view, it is believed that change among couples occurs only when spouses are able to find a reason or purpose for change, namely through the dimension of life which is related to the future. Hence, another responsibility of existential counsellors is to help the couples become aware of potentials of the meaning that are useful for the future of their marriage (Frankl, 1988; Lantz, 2004b).

6. Conclusion

This article represents an attempt to present the application of existential time in existential marital counselling. Inevitably, the consequence necessitates investigating and considering existential time as a fundamental factor in counselling. As already indicated, there is a close relationship between parts of existential time and meaning of life, which is a need in marriage. More specifically, it is the existential counsellors' responsibility to use existential time for helping couples to enrich their life on three dimensions of existence, three parts of time and three responsibilities. However, it seems that, up

to now, there is a lack of adequate descriptive and experimental research in existential time. Therefore, further research needs to be done to provide more empirical evidence for existential time as a sanctuary in marital counselling.

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