

SPARKLE OF EXISTENTIAL TIME AS A SANCTUARY IN COUPLE THERAPEUTIC PROCESS

Seyed Mohammad Kalantarkousheh, Dr. Siti Aishah Hassan

ABSTRACT

Nowadays, existential thought is considered as a therapy among psychologists and counselors. Nevertheless, paying accurate attention to all dimensions of existentialism is an essential matter which seems to be ignored among the specialists. It is also clear that Existential Time, as an elemental factor is ignored in existential therapeutic process. Therefore, the goal of this article is exhausting existential time to benefit specialists during the existential couple therapeutic process.

Key words: Existentialism, Existential therapy, Time, Couple

INTRODUCTION

Over the years, existential thought and existential therapy have engaged to play an essential role in matrimony as well as individual life. The existence of potentials and possibilities in this line of thought has been benefited, even unconsciously, social workers, psychologists, and counselors. In fact, in existential attitude, human concerns issues such as responsibility, freedom, meaning of life, living in the world, and trying to become aware of them encourage some psychologists and counselors to use these existential concepts in form of different kinds of treatments and interventions. However, Existential time is having a considerable impact on all kinds of treatments or interventions. This study aims to outline and give an account of the function of Existential time as a fundamental element in couple therapy as well as individual therapy.

EXISTENTIALISM

2.1 What is Existentialism?

Existential thought considered as a philosophy became popular and more well-known in both Europe and the United States after World War II (Lantz, 1994c; May, 1967). Even though philosophers generally are involved in abstract concepts; Existential philosophers' concerns are concrete issues. Indeed, real abilities such as human flexibility, human intentionality, human freedom, human adaptability, and the ability to respond in a large variety of different manners to the essences of life (Lantz, 1994a) are concrete concepts which establish a real attitude toward world and life. These abilities and adaptabilities are known as philosophy of existence (Cooper,

2003; Lantz, 1994a). These characters of existentialism, emphasizing human abilities and possibilities, separate this attitude from others that depend on a deterministic approach.

2.2 Existential Time

Existential philosophers by believing in human abilities, give a great emphasis on Existential time. Existential time like physical time has present, past and future. However, Existential time is not distinct from human dimensions. Indeed, a human being, in the course of his life, will achieve or fail so that time from an existential perspective is a reciprocal element. It means that human being, as a temporal individual is constituted by future possibilities and past facilities. Therefore, human being is considered as a forced person who has freedom in life. His abilities and his limitations set the individual on a special situation. However, regarding 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 hold on his future and projects himself into it" (Macquarrie, 1973, p. 156). From an existential perspective, paying close attention to three times in one time is an exceptional human character. However, human being, at the extreme end of the scale, may come to now-centered which is the main characteristic of the thing or animal (Macquarrie, 1973). Existentialists 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. From an existential perception, human limitations and human possibilities are under existential world and existential time. Lantz & Gregoire (2003a) believe that existence is manifested or disrupted at the being "of" the world, "in" the world and/or "for" the world dimensions of existence.

2.3.1 Being of the World

"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 (Lantz & Gregoire, 2003b). In this dimension, nobody can prevent some matters. For instance, 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 (Lantz, 2001). The past time is also one of the instances of being of the world. Indeed, past is actualized and formed forever. Nobody can change or deny the reality of what has happened in the past.

2.3.2 Being in the World:

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, reactions to difficulties and opportunities in life (Frankl, 1984; Lantz & Gregoire, 2003b). Frankl (1984) describes this

dimension of existence as the “can”, where individuals have the rewards of “intentionality” and “freedom” that “can” is used to respond to their limitations and opportunities of life.

2.3.3 Being for the World:

“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 discover what they “ought” to do and find a sense of meaning and purpose in life. Lantz & 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.

It is worthwhile to mention that “being in the world” and “being for the world” are arenas of decision making, freedom and then responsibility. Moreover, being for and in 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 accept the issues which are related to the past, even the past that is formed by ourselves.

EXISTENTIAL THERAPY

3.1 What is Existential Therapy?

Existential therapy is an approach which originates from the ideas, concepts, and insights found in existential philosophy, literature, and theology (Frankl, 1988; Lantz, 1997; Lantz & Raiz, 2004; May, 1983; Yalom, 1980). In existential therapy the attempt is to help individuals to open up their world so that they can find their place in the world. Through this goal, clients 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. Hence, utilizing creativity, freedom, and responsibility is emphasized by existential therapists(Lantz & Gregoire, 2000b). In existential approach, unlike the others that assume changes in patterns of behaviors and interaction lead to internal experiences, these changes come from internal experience and discovery of authentic existence(Haldane & McCluskey, 1982). It is important to note that the existence of variety of potentials in existential thought leads to form and establish several therapies during a few past decades. Daseinsanalysis, Logotherapy, American Existential Humanistic Approach , and British School of Existential Analysis are existential instances highlighted by Cooper (2003) .

Descriptive field studies emphasize that using existential therapy can be considered as a useful treatment approach for clients who are encountered with problems such as chronic illness, migrating issues , assault , rape, and cancer (Frankl, 1988; Lantz, 1996b; Lantz & Raiz, 2004; Yalom, 1980). It is important to note here that existential perspective can be useful for both couple therapy and individual therapy. For instance, in a research Lantz and Raiz (2004) treated twenty-nine couples with existential approach. The couples were given Marital Relationship Perceptions Text (MRPT) and *Purpose in Life Test* (PIL) at intake and termination. The results

showed an enhancement in scores on both the PIL and the MRPT. It was proved that there is a considerable improvement was resulted from the treatment.

3.2 The Role of Existential Time in Existential Therapy

Time plays an important role in therapy process. 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 essential role to play. Existential philosophers and Existential therapists point out different approaches so that the time is known as an important and central aspect of existential therapy (Frankl, 1988; Heidegger, 1962; Lantz, 1995; Lantz, 2004b; Lantz & Ahern, 1998). They believe that individuals have different responsibilities regarding each part of time. It is believed that 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 existential therapist to help client become aware of the relationship because present individuals have this responsibility to *actualize* the meaning potentials 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 meaning potentials and opportunities 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. 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 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. The past is a point of time as a 'storehouse' in which all actualized meaning potentials are placed forever real. This is *must* dimension of human beings so that nobody can change his/ her past. It is 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; Lantz, 1994a; Lantz, 1995; Lantz, 2004; Lantz & Ahern, 1998).

In short, existential psychotherapists use curative factors as clients' responsibilities called recollection and recognizing (Frankl, 1986, 1988).

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

Figure 1 : The relationship among Existential Time , Dimensions of Existential World and Responsibility.

FUNCTION OF EXISTENTIAL TIME IN EXISTENTIAL COUPLE THERAPY

From Existential Couple Therapy approach, many marital problems happen when spouses do not discover, experience, and/or make use of the meanings and meaning potentials in matrimony (Lantz, 1974, 1991; Lantz, 1994b). Therefore, it is the therapists' duty to help spouses extract covered meaning potentials from unconscious level into conscious awareness to be used in matrimony. This help is called reflection (Lantz & Raiz, 2004). For this purpose, Existential Time has a brilliant role to play in Existential Couple Therapy. From an existential 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 therapists is to help the couples become aware of the meanings and meaning potentials which are useful for the matrimony (Frankl, 1988; Lantz, 2004b). However, this purpose and duty will not take place and existential therapists 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, namely must dimension, they have achieved many cases during that time. Spouses, by doing so, *can* find or make meaning for their matrimony. Actuality, in 'can' dimension, spouses can choose their attitudes towards life so that show their abilities to response to life situations (Lantz & Gregoire, 2003b). It is believed that common matrimony problems originating at this dimension include both structural and communicative problems (Lantz & Gregoire, 2003a). In other words, the awareness of meaning within the matrimony positively effects on healthy interaction, whereas lack of awareness about meanings within the matrimony can stimulate dysfunctional interaction (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 so that it was useful with the population group. In another study, he showed that existential therapy with chronic illness couples is useful and effective so that PIL and MRPT scores increased with the couples (Lantz, 1996b). This achievement happened when the couples discovered and experienced a sense of meaning and purpose in intimate life (Frankl, 1988; Lantz, 1993).

The vital point to be noted is that in existential couple therapy, focusing on the past provides an enhanced understanding of the future and the present (Lantz, 1974; Lantz, 1995; Lantz & Ahern, 1998). Moreover, re-collection which is related to the past, occurs every evening when each of spouses share their achievements, problems, joys, and actualized meaning potentials with each other in a regular and consistent way (Lantz, 1993; Lantz, 1996a). These responsibilities help spouses to recover and recollect forgotten meaning potentials that have been deposited in the past (Frankl, 1955; Lantz, 1995, 1996a; Lantz & Alford, 1995). This recollection leads and provides considerable energy in matrimony. From an existential approach "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, 1974; Lantz & Ahern, 1998).

CONCLUSION

The obtained results from this study showed the importance of Existential Time in existential therapy. Inevitably, the consequence necessitates investigating and considering Existential Time as a fundamental factor in the therapy. As already indicated, there is a close relationship between parts of Existential Time and meaning of life, which is more needed and demanded in matrimony. More specifically, it is the existential therapist's responsibility to use existential treatment for helping couples to enrich their life on three dimensions of existence, three parts of time and three responsibilities.

REFERENCES

- Cooper, M. (2003). *Existential Therapies*. London: SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Frankl, V. (1955). *The doctor and the soul*. New York: Vintage Press.
- Frankl, V. (1959). *From death camp to existentialism*. Boston: Beacon Hill Press.
- Frankl, V. (1984). *Man's Search for Meaning*. New York: Washington Square Press.
- Frankl, V. (1986). *The Doctor and the Soul : From Psychotherapy to Logotherapy* (R. Winston & C. Winston, Trans. 3 ed.). New York: Vintage.
- Frankl, V. (1988). *The will to meaning: Foundations and applications of logotherapy*. New York: Meridian.
- Haldane, D., & McCluskey, U. (1982). Existentialism and family therapy: a neglected perspective. *Journal of Family Therapy*, 4(2), 117-132.
- Heidegger, M. (1962). *Being and Time* (J. Macquarrie & E. Robinson, Trans.). Oxford: Blackwell.
- Lantz, J. (1974). Existential treatment and the Vietnam veteran family. *Ohio Department of Mental Health Yearly Report*, 33-36.
- Lantz, J. (1986). Family logotherapy. *Contemporary Family Therapy*, 8(2), 124-135.
- Lantz, J. (1991). Franklian treatment with Vietnam veteran couples. *Journal of Religion and Health*, 30, 131-138.
- Lantz, J. (1993). *Existential family therapy: Using the concepts of Viktor Frankl*. Northvale: NJ: Jason Aronson.
- Lantz, J. (1994a). Mystery in family therapy. *Contemporary Family Therapy*, 16, 53-66.
- Lantz, J. (1994b). Primary and secondary reflection in existential family therapy. *Contemporary Family Therapy*, 16(4), 315-327.
- Lantz, J. (1994c). Marcel's "availability" in existential psychotherapy with couples and families. *Contemporary Family Therapy*, 16(6), 489-501.
- Lantz, J. (1995). Frankl's concept of time: Existential psychotherapy with couples and families. *Journal of Contemporary Psychotherapy*, 25(2), 135-144.
- Lantz, J. (1996a). Basic concepts in existential psychotherapy with couples and families. *Contemporary Family Therapy*, 18(4), 535-548.
- Lantz, J. (1996b). Existential psychotherapy with chronic illness couples. *Contemporary Family Therapy*, 18(2), 197-208.
- Lantz, J. (1997). Poetry in Existential Psychotherapy with Couples and Families. *Contemporary Family Therapy*, 19(3), 371-381.
- Lantz, J. (1999). Meaning and the Post-Parental Couple. *Journal of Religion and Health*, 38(1), 53-66.

- Lantz, J. (2001). Depression, Existential Family Therapy, and Viktor Frankl's Dimensional Ontology. *Contemporary Family Therapy*, 23(1), 19-32.
- Lantz, J. (Writer) (2004). World View Concepts in Existential Family Therapy [Article], *Contemporary Family Therapy: An International Journal*: Springer Science & Business Media B.V.
- Lantz, J. (2004b). Research and Evaluation Issues in Existential Psychotherapy. *Journal of Contemporary Psychotherapy*, 34(4), 331-340.
- Lantz, J., & Ahern, R. (1998). Re-Collection in Existential Psychotherapy with Couples and Families Dealing with Death. *Contemporary Family Therapy*, 20(1), 47-57.
- Lantz, J., & Alford, K. (1995). Existential family treatment with an urban-Appalachian adolescent. *Journal of family psychotherapy*, 6, 15-27.
- Lantz, J., & Gregoire, T. (2000b). Existential Psychotherapy with Couples Facing Breast Cancer: A Twenty Year Report. *Contemporary Family Therapy*, 22(3), 315-327.
- Lantz, J., & Gregoire, T. (2003a). Couples, Existential Psychotherapy, and Myocardial Infarction: A Ten Year Evaluation Study. *Contemporary Family Therapy*, 25(4), 367-379.
- Lantz, J., & Gregoire, T. (2003b). Existential Trauma Therapy with Men After a Heart Attack. *Journal of Contemporary Psychotherapy*, 33(1), 19-33.
- Lantz, J., & Raiz, L. (2004). Existential Psychotherapy with Older Adult Couples. *Clinical Gerontologist*, 27(3), 39-54.
- Macquarrie, J. (1973). *Existentialism*. New York: Pelican Books
- May, R. (1967). *Psychology and the human dilemma*. New York: Norton.
- May, R. (1983). *The discovery of being*. New York: Norton.
- Yalom, I. (1980). *Existential psychotherapy*. New York: Basic Books.

Corresponding:

Seyed Mohammad Kalantarkousheh
kalantar_mofide@yahoo.com

Dr. Siti Aishah Hassan
siti8_hassan@yahoo.com