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Signs of Existential I-Thou Communication in Luminous Matrimony

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Abstract. Lately, counselors and psychotherapists have shown a great concern in the Existential Thought. Undoubtedly, the existence of potentials and possibilities in this kind of thought, specifically during therapeutic processes, can result in modern and new models in psychology and counselling. One of the essential elements in Existential Thought is being in different communicational situations based on I-Thou relationship and I-It relationship. 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. Therefore, in the light of the mentioned issues, the main objective of the following paper is to show that Existential Thought has possibilities to build an effective interaction in marital life.

Keywords: Existentialism, Communication, I-Thou relationship, Matrimony

1. Introduction

Spouses, in marital communication, demand some especial issues which are completely different in usual communication. Therefore, finding and giving positive and useful communication models are always known as fundamental concerns among psychologists and counsellors. They have outlined some communication skills as useful approaches for matrimony. Indeed, patterns of couples' communication have an important role in matrimony. Communication skills are considered as treatment ways to prevent marital distress (Cornelius, Alessi, & Shorey, 2007). Lewis and Spanier (1979) have stated that high marital quality and happiness are related to high level of communication. Communication is described as necessary component of marital adjustment (Ammons & Stinnett, 1980; Landis, 1965). Elliott (1982) recommends that it is vital to develop new technique for teaching spouses to communicate more effectively. Furthermore, in his research, he found that there is a significant relationship between communication and marital adjustment.

On the one hand, inability to have or manage an effective communication is a critical issue which influences the romantic quality of partners' relationship. On the other hand, struggling to have a better mutual understanding helps spouses feel closer to each other (Eğeci & Gençöz, 2006). Additionally, many research studies emphasize this point that whenever communication problems increase, satisfaction decreases (Bradbury, Cohan, & Karney, 1998; Eğeci & Gençöz, 2006; Kiecolt-Glaser & Newton, 2001). Therefore, one of the crucial duties of marital counsellors is finding and teaching modern communication skills to increase quality of life in matrimony. Majority of family therapists tend to place a great emphasis on family conditions that each of the spouses had when they were living (Becvar & Becvar, 2006). It means that past preferred compared to the present. However, from an existential approach, present conditions should not be ignored because change comes whenever individuals demand it (J. Sartre, 2003).

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Consequently, presenting a new communication model, which notices present as well, is essential. To achieve this aim, it seems that existential I-Thou relationship recognized by Buber (1958) who is considered as an existentialist, has a fundamental role to play in this regard.

2. Marital communication

Whether the main reason for getting married is physical attractiveness, fear of loneliness, rebound or any other thing, the main issue is spouse's interactions and expectations of her partner. These expectations and interactions usually show themselves in form of several communications. Indeed, communication is the principal area of marital quality.

The vital point to be noted is that in the modern world, human being is at risk of bad interrelationship because s/he rests on advanced tools and then s/he feels that s/he does not need to the other person. In addition, there is a greater potential for conflict in the modern couples due to lack of implicit agreement about sex roles, the demand for role flexibility and interchangeable ability, and the changing assumptions about how to make family decisions (Fitzpatrick & Noller, 1993). Matters such as directness, presence, honesty and reciprocity play an important role in marital communication. Comparing couples who are not distressed, in some researches, with couples who are under the treatment in relationship skills and couples who are divorcing, has indicated that there is a significant relation between lower mutual constructive communication and distress or divorce (Christensen & Shenk, 1991; Resnick, 2007; Sher, Baucom, & Larus, 1990). Mayer (2000) points out that unsuccessful communication causes more conflict situations. Marital communication is generally divided into two kinds. First, positive communication in which partners' interaction are in form of solving the problems together, and understanding one another, communication of assent, approval and caring, empathy, humour, smiling, kind physical touch, and laughing (Epstein & Baucom, 2002). It is believed that cornerstone of marital quality is positive effective communication (Eckstein & Goldman, 2001) so that the positive communication is associated with high satisfaction. The second one is negative communication. In fact, relations such as adversarial, conflictive, avoidant, contempt communication of hostility, and criticism, come from negative communication. The commonly noted "demand/withdraw" interaction pattern is also a form of negative interaction as it likely serves to maintain a sense of power or control over a situation (Epstein & Baucom, 2002). It is indicated that the negative communication results in low satisfaction (Resnick, 2007). It would be fair to say that communication and relationship are regarded as vital matters for individuals. However, Uebelacker and Courtnage et al (2003) emphasize that the communication and relationship are more involved in dependence among females rather than males. This condition causes women more than men to stand precariously on the edge of precipice of inauthenticity. On the other hand, the sense of independence among men can shake matrimony.

3. Existentialism

3.1. What is Existentialism?

Existential thought is a call for a consideration of man in his concrete situation, including his culture, history, relationship with others, and additionally, the meaning of personal existence. Insofar as one can define existentialism, it is a progress from the abstract and the general to the specific and the tangible experience (Hanscomb, 2006; Macquarrie, 1972). Existentialists who believe in second approach, in contrast, emphasize the precedence existence over essence (J. Sartre, 2003). It means that, in order to understand human being, we must pay attention to him as a particular and concrete being rather than as a universal and abstract one. In other words, existential philosophers have argued that, to rigorous understanding of human being, we need to ignore abstract hypotheses and philosophical theories and focus solely on concrete existence of a human being as s/he has actually lived. The vital point to be noted is that the word 'exist'

originates from the Latin verb *existere*, which means to stand out or emerge (Heidegger, 1962; Macquarrie, 1972). Indeed, existence is an upsurge (J. Sartre, 2003): a doing, becoming in the world out of willing and freedom. The objects of the world, unlike human beings, are being which means that they are fixed, static and substance. An object in the world is full of itself, and no more total plenitude can be imagined, no more perfect equivalence of content to container and then it is static. As human beings, we are constantly making sense of ourselves and understanding who we are. It means that our future depends on nothing but on our decision-making.

3.2. The Existence of Existential Potentials for Matrimony

There are some important concrete concepts such as communication, responsibility, and decision making in matrimony which are discoursed in existential thought. Indeed, although existential thought is a philosophical theory, its paramount concerns are the main concerns of matrimony. Therefore, one of the best solutions for giving and applying communication model can be made of existential thought. From an existential perspective, human existence is always meaningful considering another human. This consideration can be highlighted when a person is in the position of choosing other as spouse. On the other hand, there is a meaningful relationship between human beings which is I – Thou so that couples are not allowed to reduce human relation to animal relation that is I- It. As a result, it seems that existential thought has enough potential to form and create a communication model in the hope of having a brilliant marital communication in wedlock.

3.3. Existential I-Thou Relationship

Martin Buber (1958), known as the existential philosopher of dialogue, believes that the world of human being has two kinds of communications: I–Thou communication and I – It communication . I-You relationship is an interaction between two human beings and I-It relationship is between human being and animal, or human being and an object. When a man says 'I', he refers to It or Thou. There is never doubt that I is meaningless if we do not pay attention to what is in front of I. Therefore, when he says Thou or It, the I is one of the two primary words which presents (ibid). From an Existential attitude, 'It' has only essence but 'you' as 'I' exists which creates his essence during his life when makes communication with others (Heidegger, 1962; Macquarrie, 1972; J. P. Sartre, 1953). Moreover, 'You' and 'I' are unique, singular and irreplaceable but "It" is replaceable and is not singular or unique (ibid). For instance, it can be said two apples are the same without any differences but we cannot consider two individuals the same. In fact , it is impossible to replace one person with another. 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. Indeed, they are solid (Warnock, 1967). Hence, they never expect human beings to pay attention to them because they do not have any fallings like human beings. Additionally, I-You relationship always depends on dialogue which is impossible in I-It relationship. Furthermore, characteristics such as to be present for each other, lack of looking at each other proprietary, believe in other individual's freedom, and admitting others' ideas are outlined in I-Thou construct. Buber (1958) states that:

"The moments of relation are here, and only here, bound together by means of the element of the speech in which they are immersed.... Here alone, then, as reality that cannot be lost, are gazing and being gazed upon, knowing and being known, loving and being loved" (p. 103).

In the I-It domain, by contrast, 'you' values 'It' only insofar as 'It' benefits or serves 'you's purposes. As a matter of fact, in I-Thou relationship, Buber(1958) exposes the essential attitude that human being takes towards another, a relationship of respect in which the other person is viewed as having natural value. Each person has immense value and capable of experiencing a fulfilled life (M Friedman, 1993). Thus, we

must never value people only for what they can do for us. We need to value each other for humanness, regardless of what we can or cannot do for each other. It is important to know that human being needs to do and act in a manner to prevent I-Thou relationship to be reduced to I-It relationship. Indeed, whenever 'I' takes a communication with 'It', this is because of using It, but a communication between I - Thou transcended using communication. To be fully human, we are obliged to open ourselves for I-Thou interrelating. Significantly, Freud made a similar claim. As he wisely said, a truly healthy person is able "to love and to work" (Adams, 2007). Undoubtedly, the high level of work and love visualize through I- Thou relationship. In I - Thou relationship, each person is fully present and open to the other. That relationship involves the recognition of the other as s/he presents him/herself and is characterized by mutuality, directness, presence, honesty and reciprocity (Buber, 1958).

4. Appearance of Existential I-Thou Relationship as a Positive Model for Marital Communication

It is necessary to remind that sometimes I-Thou relationship reduces to I-It. I-It relationship depends on using of human being sideways rather than mutuality. Nevertheless, marriage will never give new life except by that out of which true marriage always arises, the revealing by two people of the thou to one another (Buber, 1958). Marriage is a living life if it depends on mutual life. It means that, each spouse should not give life to marriage from the other spouse but s/ he must give life to it from his / her own self. In this condition, each of them does not have an undue expectation from the other. Buber (1958) points out that a person who gives life to marriage for other spouse is not different from the one who wants to "abolish it"(p. 46). Indeed, this person merely enjoys spouse without opening to the spouse. How can we regard thus life as I-Thou relationship? The person has ignored the vital factor in marriage that is love accompaniment. Buber (1958) adds eloquently:

" In every situation in which the one is not present to the other but merely enjoys itself in the other what then would be left?" (p.46).

Such a person is a self-willed individual who wants to use the spouse: When this person says Thou, he means "O my ability to use" (ibid, p. 60). This person considers individuals around himself as machines, capable of various achievements, which taken into account and utilized for his purpose. Couples who institute an I-It relationship in their life degrade their spouse because that relationship motivates them to ignore their lovely relationships. From an existential point of view, love is only between I - Thou relationship so that someone who does not care about that relationship, does not understand love (Buber, 1958). As a matter of fact, in that situation two rude issues happened: losing freedom and ignoring responsibility for spouse; whereas lovely relationship, that is I-Thou relationship, comes into a responsibility (ibid) as well as it depends on freedom. Inevitably, those issues cause getting divorce because by ignoring freedom and responsibility, there is no meaning for their humanity as well as matrimony. The responsibility for marital life is nothing but good relationship, namely, I-Thou relationship. Each person in the dialogue becomes a Thou for the other if each is committed to an honest interfacing. At the same time, neither person is objectified by the other nor he is controlled or defined as something (Ventimiglia, 2008).

In short, this line of thought opens a new door to future research considering existential communication model to apply for couples. Undoubtedly, these aforementioned possibilities in existential thought can lead to make an effective communication model in matrimony. Nevertheless, some counsellors and psychologists used these possibilities for other purposes (Cooper, 2003; Etzioni, 1999; Maurice Friedman, 2002; Sloan, 2002; Ventimiglia, 2008), rather than communication model in matrimony. That is why more research studies about the communication are needed to be done.

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