

The Existential-Humanistic institute: 7th Annual Conference ~ November 15-16, 2013

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Description of Session: The impact of traumatic brain injury (TBI) on the survivor's spouse/partner from an existential-humanistic perspective.

The research is based on three methods used in the nursing research: *concept analysis* (Morse, 1995; Walker & Avant, 2005), *concept advancement* (Penrod & Hupcey, 2005), and *integrative review*, (Broome, 1993). A main tenet and value of the chosen theoretical designs are two-fold: (1) the methods are based in health research, and (2) the conclusions promote practical utilization for clinical application.

The critical review of the literature on traumatic brain injury shows the complexity of brain function and illustrates how damage can negatively affect the survivor's daily existence (Kandel, 2006; Greve, 2009; Werner & Engelhard, 2007). Trauma to the brain frequently causes pervasive cognitive dysfunction and a variety of personality changes, including impulsivity, unpredictability, anger, lack of critical thinking, lack of empathy, and lack of awareness about one's own impairments (Godwin, et al., 2011; Saunders & Struchen, 2011). These problematic issues have a negative impact on the marital/couple relationship, family dynamics, and relationships in general. Yet, a meaningful and supportive relationship can contribute to the TBI-survivor's healing from TBI related life changes and psychological trauma.

The research study highlights the following: 1) due to the complexity of TBI there is a absence of a successful medical cure for repairing neurological damages; 2) therefore, there is a need for improved understanding of the spouses'/partners' experience of living with a TBI survivor in order to design improved supportive interventions; and 3) the challenges of adapting to change, tragedy, and life adversities can be on-going opportunities for personal growth. A visual model for processing change, tragedy, and life adversity will be presented based on *diagrammatic reasoning* (Peirce, 2011) and *existential shattering* (Greening, personal conversation, 2010; Hoxie, 2013). The existential perspective is based on the research by Frankl, Greening, May, Hoffman, and a few other modern day existentialists. Raising existential consciousness in the aftermath of tragedy can be an opportunity to reestablish, recreate, rebuild, and reframe one's foundational worldview. The existential themes address the potential options for exercising one's innate abilities for adapting to changes from unexpected life events.

The purpose is to help facilitate the process of learning to live with the challenges and transcend the psychological pain into existential meaning.

Goals and Learning Objectives:

1. Understand how the complexity of the brain is problematic to effective medical interventions.
2. Identify TBI personality changes, both overt and covert that impair marital/couple relationships, family dynamics, and relationships in general.
3. Use the understanding of the existential perspectives of TBI survivor's spouse/partner to provide interventions as a health and healing practitioner.
4. Apply the visual model of existential shattering as another tool for understanding that change is a continual process and has potentials for personal growth.

Time Outline

10 minutes	I Brain overview
10 minutes	II Trauma – Personality changes
10 minutes	III Family, couple, significant partner – relationship dynamics
15 minutes	IV Four existential concerns and responses
15 minutes	V Existential perspectives of survivor's spouses'/partners'
15 minutes	VI Existential shattering – Transcending pain and suffering from sudden tragedy to facilitate potentials for personal growth and renewal.
15 minutes	Questions/Answers

Relevance to conference theme: “Befriending” the anxiety and worry that arises from changes caused by TBI is the essence of this research and presentation. Especially because there are no medical cures for neurological damage, supportive interventions are essential to help facilitate ways for coping from the tragedy of TBI. The existential-humanistic perspective promotes transcending the pain and suffering into personal growth and renewal.