

Marital Flourishing, Virtue, and Better Life

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Abstract. Marital flourishing is a concept about marriage quality. It gives relatively different perspective compared to other concepts of marriage quality. A happy marriage should represent virtues reflected in individuals' husband-and-wife related behavior. Therefore satisfying life is achieved as the happy married life reveals good deeds between husband and wife in order to reach the marriage goals.

Keywords: Marital Flourishing, virtue, batter life.

Introduction

Marriage quality has been a hot topic among researchers. There have been several concepts proposed such as a theory of happy marriages, satisfying marriages, marriage stabilities, marital adjustment, and successful marriage. One relatively new concept to describe the quality of the marriage is marital flourishing. This article will try to explain what the quality of marriage is, in this case marital flourishing will be perceived as an embodiment of a good life.

Marital flourishing mentioned in *eudaimonic* theory about the quality of marriage proposed by Fowers&Owenz(2010). They use the word flourishing to describe qualified marriages. According to Fowers&Owenz (2010), a marriage characters is coordinated activities between husband and wife and the activities are meant to achieve meaningful goals together, and the activities are having various excellent. A marriage is flourishes when the activities are held in meaningful ways together. A flourished marriage is the highest quality of a marriage (Fowers&Owenz, 2010) and this is characterized by husband and wife together meaningful activities meant to achieve noble human goals.

This theory of flourished marriage is different from other theories of marriage quality previously referred by many experts, such as satisfying marriage, marriage and happiness, successful marriage, marriage stability and marriage adjustment (Knapp & Lott, 2010). The significant differences lie in the goodness and meaningful activities in a marriage. The term flourishing in a husband-and-wife relation is not merely happiness, satisfaction, adjustment and prosperity, but more than that. Flourishing is characterized by intimacy, growth, resiliency and dynamic balance in terms of other families subsystems, and an involvement in bigger social relations as well (Fincham& Beach, 2010).

The term *flourishing* is usually related to positive psychology proposed by Martin Seligman (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). The latter term is for building human power and the goodness of citizens and to develop positive, growing and justice society. As we know, positive psychology is a science about positive experiences, traits and institutions (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Positive psychology has become a new paradigm in psychology as a science, and it is a new way of both psychological research and practice. This writing is going to review the theory of marital flourishing according to positive psychology paradigm. This writing is also a kind of contribution to all attempts to build a family with positive activities and the growth of all of its members. Besides that, this writing tries to review the core theory of marital flourishing concept.

What is Marital Flourishing?

The term flourishing is inseparable from philosophical and psychological theories which are related to happiness and well-being. First, subjective theories called as hedonistic theories in psychology realm. Second, objective theories are known as *eudaimonic* (Ruyter, 2007). Hedonistic theories see happiness and well-being as subjective experiences as they are related to one's evaluation toward self. Happiness and well-being usually interpreted as high positive feeling, low negative feeling and high life satisfaction (Deci & Ryan, 2008), and the belief to get an important thing wanted (Kraut, 1979). *Eudaimonic theories* reveal that well-being is more than happiness, as when people say they are happy (having positive feeling) it does not mean they are psychologically fine (Deci & Ryan, 2008).

Eudaimonic paradigm in researches about well-being is probably proposed by Aristoteles' philosophy of happiness. According to Aristoteles, humans' happiness lies in the meaning of life, living the good life which represents humans' excellent (Ryan, dkk, 2006). *Eudaimoni* paradigm say that well-being is not an outcome or the final result. It is a process to meet or realize one's goodness or *daimon* (Deci & Ryan, 2008). *Daimonis* one's potentials and the realization of them will represent the biggest fulfillment in life. *Daimon* consists of all potentials owned by human beings such as the goodness of human beings and all unique potentials which differentiate one from others. *Daimon* is an excellent, a perfection in one's struggle. Therefore *daimon* may give meaning and direction in one's life. The all effort to live according to *daimon*, or to realize all self-potentials, will improve *eudaimonia* (Waterman, 1993).

According to Aristoteles, *eudaimonia* is the highest form of human's life (Fowers, 2012a). *Eudaimonia* is usually referred as happiness and flourishing, but it may create misunderstanding as happiness commonly considered as superficial and temporary affective state (Fowers, 2008; 2012a). According to Aristoteles, *eudaimonia* is humans' way of life manifested in positive activities. *Eudaimonia* is an activity pattern throughout the life in order to reach good goals in wise ways (Fowers, 2012b). Some experts therefore (Kraut, 1979; Ruyter, 2007; Snow, 2008; Fowers, 2012b) refer *eudaimonia* as *flourishing*. The term *Flourishing* is used to describe one's life quality across the time or to evaluate one's life during certain time period (Ruyter, 2007).

An individual with *eudaimon* *flourishes* the one who fully develops and regularly deliver good deeds of humans, both morally and intellectually. He also involves in moral activities such as justice, generosity, self-control (Kraut, 1979; Kristjánsson, 2010) and he contributes constructively to the world around him (Keyes, 2007). *Eudaimonia* achievement is voluntarily and usually is a kind of self-expression, without any control from external world. Therefore, *eudaimonia* is showed by living properly and it needs active extraordinary struggle, reflective decision making, and voluntarily try to reach the goals which represent humans' noble traits (Ryan, dkk., 2006; Ryff & Singer, 2008). The success of achieving the goals needs a kind of excellent wisdom and team work with others (Fowers, 2012b).

Eudaimonia condition is presumably creates *human flourishing*, which is showed by external kindness, such as good family, good friends, good offspring, good appearance and being happy to held good activities. These are parts of flourishing life --- humanity goodness (Snow, 2008). So the term *flourishing* is inseparable from the term *eudaimonia*. *Flourishing* is full development of affective, cognitive, behavior, social and political aspects (Fowers, 2012b). *Flourishing* begins to show when the goodness are integrated, and the meaningful goals are achieved in accordance to talents, choices and situations. Unfortunately, there is no clear form of flourishing that people can follow as flourishing is an open theory that people can apply by combining various kind of goodness (Fowers & Owenz, 2010). So, flourishing is a description of a complete life for achieving useful goodness through meaningful activities in a high quality and close relationship (Fowers & Owenz, 2010), in a social unity, cohesive, and successful (Conly, 1988).

Fowers & Owenz (2010) said that marriage is another kind of friendship. It has been characterized with coordinated activities between husband and wife, directed to humans' noble and meaningful goals and the activities has various excellent. A flourished marriage is the highest quality of a marriage. The friendship relation in a marriage is as important as in *eudaimonia*, and this friendship is for supporting and realizing the meaningful goals together.

Fowers&Owenz (2010) describe the concept of *flourishing* from Aristoteles who proposed *eudaimonia*. First, *flourishing* is an activity, and it is different from other measurements of marriage quality which usually stress on feeling and satisfaction. Second, flourishing life consists of pleasant activities. It is pleasant to achieve meaningful goals. Third, *flourishing* is a pattern of integrated, complete and intertwined activities. Fourth, *flourishing* is related with wisdom, so the flourished activities are positively motivated to bring goodness. Fifth, flourished life substantially consists of any achievement of good humans' goals. According to Aristotele (in Fowers&Owenz, 2010) the goals are suitable with humans' character as social creatures, such as getting knowledge, sense of belonging and justice.

Based on the explanation above, it is concluded that marital flourishing is a marriage quality characterized by good and meaningful activities, held together by husband and wife, in order to reach humans' noble goals.

A Good Life

A good life is a main theme in positive psychology (Comptom, 2005). It is described in many ways. The history of positive psychology said that theorists described that good life can be found in fully functioning people. One of them is Allport who thought that a mature and healthy individual is the one who owns several functional characters such as the ability to have good relationship with others, thinking positive about himself, having common sense, being objective toward himself and others, having abilities to think broadly and the most important is having internalized life philosophies (Linley & Joseph, 2004). Meanwhile, according to Comptom (2005), a good life depends on three elements: good relationship with others, good traits and qualified life management. Human behavior aspects that contribute to good interpersonal is the ability to love, altruistic attention, the ability to forgive and spiritual relationship. Positive traits consists of integrated feeling, the ability to act and to create and having virtues such as hardiness and humble. Meanwhile life management quality is helping individuals regulate daily acts in suitable and appropriate ways to the goals. The daily acts are like being independent, high self-control, and having life wisdom for life manual. Research by King & Napa (1998) to a group of students and adults found that the source of goodness in life and things that make people enjoy their life is happiness, life meaning and richness. For the group of students particularly, the individuals with high level of these three aspects were considered living in heaven. In the adult group, the perception about life meaning and happiness are important and money is less important.

The relation between happiness and good life has been a debatable topic in research that rise a question "is a good life also essentially a happy one?" (Linley & Joseph, 2004). Seligman (in Woolfolk & Wasserman, 2005) distinguish a pleasant life, a good life and meaningful life. A pleasant life, usually called as the first generation of positive psychology, is referred as having as much fun as possible by creating, keeping and intensifying positive feeling. A good life does not have anything to do with maximum fun, but it is a life that full with success by using all potentials to reach satisfying conditions which are pure and abundance. This condition is the same as what Csikszentmihalyi called as *flow*. *Flow* is described as one's involvement with his activities, without any distance or without the feeling of being an agent of the activities. Seligman said there was a kind of similarity between flow and the concept of *eudaimonia* of Aristoteles which means the highest goodness, no need to add any goodness anymore to make it better. According to Aristoteles, the goodness of something depends on its function, so something is considered good when its function is also good for humanity. The good life is the one that is meaningful, which Seligman relate it with something beyond the individual or related with one's commitment toward an entity out of himself (Woolfolk & Wasserman, 2005).

Aristoteles (in Linley & Joseph, 2004) distinguished between a pleasant life or *hedonia* and a good life or *eudaimonia*. A pleasant life is an easy-to-understand concept, but *eudaimonia* refers to a more complex happiness, which related to maintenance and virtues. For one with a pleasant life, this condition is subjective. On the other hand, *eudaimonia* refers to a condition where one has found more objective standard. Waterman (1993) described Aristoteles' ideas on *hedonia* and *eudaimonia* by using the terms simple pleasures and self-expression. According to his ideas, *eudaimonia* is the emergence of basic self-expression

activities. According to Aristoteles (in Kristjánsson, 2010), *eudaimonia* is not possibly reached by one without being morally good, without actualize the moral goodness or virtues. Therefore goodness or virtues is the core of *eudaimonia*.

Virtue and Marital Flourishing

As mentioned at the beginning of this writing, the fundamental difference between marital flourishing with other marital qualities is the emphasis on kindness and meaningfulness of the activity in marriages. According to Fowers (1993), marital relationships determines the direction of human life, so the ethical dimension is important to understand the marriage itself, the research and theories related to marriages. Generally, ethic is appropriate behavior, but this tends to ignore other moral questions such as how valuable and meaningful life created. Therefore Fowers (1993) said that ethics are explored in the goodness and truth context.

Virtue is generally described as traits or internal disposition which morally wanted to be good. Virtue is the quality of humans' characters and excellent which can be improved to live better. Philosophical explanation about virtue stating that some of the same area between virtue and positive psychology include mental health promotion and human flourishing (the good life), healthy relationships between characters with the welfare of society, fertilization of human endurance and resilience, relationship with the meaningfulness of life, as well as basic wisdom (Sandage & Hill, 2001).

In this regard, Aristotle (in Fowers&Owenz, 2010) stated that flourishing is an integrated activity patterns. Quality of life will appear on the completeness (completeness) and coherence. Therefore sporadic and irregular activities cannot form relationships or life flourishing. Quality is also an important activity, and Aristotle described it as a virtue that allows individuals achieve useful end. For example, in marriage, it would be easy to see if couples routinely act generous, faithful, and just to improve the quality of marriage. Flourished life substantially shaped by purpose or humanitarian ideals that typically include goodness in it. The goodness is abstract and sometimes not entirely achievable, but humans can actively achieve it. Goodness tends to be non-definitive and non-final formulation for goodness is a final dream or a final goal established the culture and history, consequently goodness is the subject of ongoing debate and reinterpretation. It is not surprising that there are many kinds of knowledge, justice, or how to achieve goodness. According to Fowers&Owenz (2010), a goal is the formulation of the relative clear goodness and they stated that a goal is an indicator of the existence of goodness in a flourished conjugal relationship. Based on these descriptions, the tentative conclusion is that flourished marriage can only be achieved through virtue or goodness in marital activities and marital objectives.

Closing

Marital flourishing as a quality concept of marriage indicates that qualified marriage reflected in the lives of the individuals in it. A good marriage is not just shown by the subjective happiness or satisfaction of husband or wife. More than that, a good marriage can only be achieved if the couple each has virtue or good traits such as loyalty, generosity, compassionate, fair. In addition they are acting in a good way, mutually enjoyable and grow with one another. They consistently and regularly connect to each other, act in ways that are morally accepted to achieve common goals in marriage. Thus the qualified marriage will be achieved. A marriage is not merely to satisfy spouses, but also enabling each to be able to express good traits, do good things to each other in a good life.

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