

EFA- 2017 ANNUAL LECTURE

TOPIC:

**FROM THE INDIVIDUAL TO THE SOCIAL: SITUATING EFA WITHIN THE
DISCOURSE OF INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS**

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Date :

19 AUGUST, 2017

Introduction

In today's world nothing can be done all alone. We need people around who can help and guide us not only during crisis but at all times. Crisis and misunderstandings lead nowhere. They are just a sheer waste of time and energy. Individuals ought to be cordial with each other for peace to reign in our personal lives, as we relate with people and in our places of work.

Individuals who are compatible with each other often enter into a relationship. When two individuals feel comfortable in each other's company and decide to be with each other, they enter into a relationship. People must gel well for a strong and healthy relationship. Interpersonal relationships are dynamic systems that change continuously during their existence. Like living organisms, relationships have a beginning, a lifespan, and an end. They tend to grow and improve gradually, as people get to know each other and become closer emotionally, or they gradually deteriorate as people drift apart, move on with their lives and form new relationships with others.

Interpersonal relationship is a strong, deep, or close association or acquaintance between two or more people with similar tastes, aspirations and interests in life that may range in duration from brief to enduring. The context can and may vary from [family](#) or [kinship](#) relations, [friendship](#), [marriage](#), relations with associates, [workplaces](#), [clubs](#), neighborhood to [places of worship](#). (Samter, B. 2009).

Types of interpersonal relationship:

1. **Friendship:** Friendship is an unconditional interpersonal relationship which individuals enter into voluntarily. It is a relationship where there are no formalities and individuals enjoy each other's presence. This kind of interpersonal relationship can be between:
 - a man and a woman
 - a man and a man
 - a woman and woman

Must have in friendship:

Transparency is the most essential factor for a stable friendship. Do not hide things from your friends. Be honest to them.

Guidance: Guide them whenever required. Never give them any wrong suggestions or advice.

Feelings like ego, jealousy, hatred, anger should not exist in friendship.

The entire relationship of friendship revolves around trust and give and take. This is because no relationship can be one sided and same goes with friendship. Try to do as much as you can for your friends.

2. **Love:** An interpersonal relationship characterized by passion, intimacy, trust and respect is called love. Individuals in a romantic relationship are deeply attached to each other and share a special bond.

Must have in a loving relationship:

Two partners must trust each other in this relationship.

A sense of respect and mutual admiration is essential.

Partners must reciprocate each other's feelings for the charm to stay in the relationship for a longer period of time as is the case with marriage.

3. **Platonic Relationship:** A relationship between two individuals without any feelings or sexual desire for each other is called a platonic relationship. In such a relationship, a man and a woman are just friends without mixing love with friendship. Platonic relationships might end in romantic relationships with both the partners developing mutual love and falling for each other.
4. **Family Relationship:** Individuals related by blood or marriage are said to form a family.
5. **Professional Relationship (Work Relationship):** Individuals working together in the same organization are said to share a professional relationship. Individuals sharing a professional relationship are called colleagues. Colleagues may or may not like each other.

Interpersonal Relationship Development

Every relationship needs time to grow. One needs time to come really close to someone and trust him/her. Miracles do not happen in a single day. One needs to be patient enough to understand the other person for the relationship to grow. Various models have been proposed in the field of interpersonal relationship development. These models suggest how relationship grows between friends, partners, couples, colleagues and so on. These models are explained below:

Knapp's Relationship Escalation Model

According to Knapp's relationship escalation model, every relationship goes through the following stages:

Every relationship begins with a stage where two individuals not knowing each other before meet and instantly get attracted to each other. In this **first stage** of interpersonal relationship, both participants try their best to create an everlasting first impression on the other person. Individuals show their best side to mark the beginning of a relationship. In this stage, physical appearance, grooming, manners and etiquette play an essential role as individuals do not know

each other much. George Levinger (1983: 315-359), a psychologist, describes this stage as the **acquaintance stage**. This stage entails getting familiar with each other. Becoming acquainted depends on previous relationships, physical proximity, first impressions, and a variety of other factors.

The **second stage** entails individuals trying to know each other more. They share their likes and dislikes and also try to find out about the other person's interests. This stage is characterized by extensive meetings and phone calls so that individuals get to check their compatibility level. Commonly known as the **Build-up stage**, this is a stage in which people begin to trust and care about each other. The need for intimacy, compatibility and factors such as common background and goals will influence whether or not interaction continues. Either of the two cases listed below are likely to arise at the build-up stage:

Case 1 - Individuals are not compatible with each other.

Result - Individuals do not take the relationship forward and decide to end it for a better future.

Case - 2 Individuals are compatible with each other

Result - Individuals decide to continue the relationship

The **third stage is the continuation stage**. Here individuals make regular efforts to strengthen their relationship. People make commitments and prepare themselves for a long term relationship. This stage follows a mutual commitment to quite a strong and close long-term friendship or even marriage. It is generally a long and relatively stable period of relationship because continued growth and development will occur during this time. Mutual trust is important for sustaining the relationship.

The **fourth stage is the stagnation stage**. The stagnation stage of interpersonal relationship development is often characterized by individuals avoiding each other and not interacting much. At this stage, individuals are no longer interested in each other and physical intimacy also decreases. People may decide to walk away from the relationship and opt for mutual separation.

It is important to note that in course of relating with others, conflict and misunderstanding sometimes occur. This tends to happen because we are not perfect. If the appropriate measure is not taken to resolve conflicts and misunderstanding, the relationship may suffer from deterioration. Not all relationships deteriorate, but some relationships may tend towards boredom, resentment, and dissatisfaction. Sometimes, individuals in relationships change by communicating less and avoiding self-disclosure. Loss of trust and betrayals may take place as the downward spiral continues, eventually ending the relationship. Alternately, the participants in a relationship may find some ways to resolve the problems by re-establishing trust and believing in one another.

The final stage which is **the ending stage** marks the end of the relationship, either by breakups, death, or by spatial separation for quite some time and severing all existing ties of friendship.

Important recipes for Interpersonal relationship Development

- Effective and regular communication between partners
- Trust
- Care
- Loyalty
- Understanding
- Respect for each other

A relationship does not survive if any of the above is missing. Such relationship will continue to deteriorate in the face of destructive habits such as disrespect, contempt, envy, grudge/keeping malice, impatience, insincerity, anger, pride, nagging and retaliation. They are destructive because according to Jacob Ayantayo, 'they have sinister effects on the people having them and the person these people relate with both at the private and public levels' (Ayantayo, J.K. 2014)

Importance of interpersonal relationship

Human beings are innately social and are shaped by their experiences with others. There are multiple perspectives to understand this inherent motivation to interact with others. Some of these motivations are examined below:

The Need to Belong: According to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, human beings need to feel love (sexual/nonsexual) and acceptance from social groups (family, peer groups, colleagues). In fact, the need to belong is so innately ingrained that it may be strong enough to overcome physiological and safety needs, such as children's attachment to abusive parents or staying in abusive marital relationships. Such examples illustrate the extent to which the psycho-biological drive to belong is entrenched.

Social exchange: Another way to appreciate the importance of relationships is in terms of a reward framework. This perspective suggests that engaging in relationships is highly rewarding in both tangible and intangible ways. The concept fits into a larger theory of social exchange. This theory is based on the idea that relationships develop as a result of cost-benefit analysis. Individuals seek out rewards in interactions with others and are willing to pay a cost for said rewards. In the best-case scenario, rewards will exceed costs, producing a net gain.

Relational self: Relationships are also important because it helps the individual to develop a sense of relational self. The relational self is the part of an individual's self-concept that consists of the feelings and beliefs that one has regarding oneself that develops based on interactions with others (Anderson and Chen, 2002: 619). In other words, one's emotions and behaviors are shaped by prior relationships. Thus, relational self-theory posits that prior and existing relationships influence one's emotions and behaviors in interactions with new individuals, particularly those individuals that remind him or her of others in his or her life. Studies have shown that exposure to someone who resembles a significant other activates specific self-beliefs, changing how one

thinks about oneself in the moment more so than exposure to someone who does not resemble one's significant other (Hinkley and Anderson, 1996: 1279).

Interpersonal relationship suppresses egoistic tendencies in human beings thereby giving room for altruism: Human beings are naturally egoistic but when one realizes and remembers that he/she has obligations towards others the lack of fulfillment which may threaten the survival of this person himself, then there is every likelihood for the person to take other people's feelings into consideration by acting in the person's self-interest even at his own expense.

Theorizing human co-existence: Theories and Empirical research on interpersonal relationships

We can draw some insights from the works of some existentialists in our discourse on interpersonal relationship. Martin Heidegger for instance provides the means through which the *Dasein* literally 'being there' which encompasses the individuality of being, could achieve its project of authenticity by coping with certain facticities of life especially the being of others. Although Heidegger emphasizes the need for the *Dasein* to be authentic, he nevertheless allows for the consideration of others in interpersonal relation which is also a basis for multi-ethnic harmony. The *Dasein* according to Jim Unah 'is not only a being-in-the-world, he is also a being with others' (Unah, 1996:60). The implication of this is that not only is man constituted by his projects and his relations with the things which he makes use of, he is also related to others because, in the first instance, others are also beings-in-the-world just in the same manner like himself. Heidegger's main idea is that when a man appears on the scene of existence, he is immediately aware not only of objects but of other human beings as well. In other words, our existence is necessarily tied to the existence of others.

The interdependency of the *Dasein* with others is expressed by Jim Unah as follows:

The awareness of the being of others is part of the awareness of our own being and implied in it as the teacher implies the pupil and the taxi-car implies both the driver and the passenger. We discover ourselves as existing with other people and our being as being with others (Unah, 1996:60).

As *Daseins*, both at the individual and ethnic group levels, survival is only possible if and only if we recognize the importance of others not as mere objects standing that we can use in achieving our goal of survival, but as ends in themselves who are not only important but also inevitable in the realization of our goal of survival and freedom (Oyeshile, 2011: 33).

Buttressing the idea that we should see others as end in themselves and never as a means merely, Immanuel Kant, a duty ethicist, explains that we must 'always act so as to treat humanity either in your own person or in that of another, always as an end and never as a means only' (Kant, 1785:46). Because we have the qualities that can be ascribed to a person, (we are conscious, self-aware and have a developed capacity to reason), we are supremely valuable and should not be treated like objects. Kant is also of the view that people have equal moral worth or value hence it is morally unacceptable to use them *merely* for our own purposes the way we use our

objects at home. We *merely* use another person when we enter into the relationship against the person's will, exploits, degrades, humiliates and harm the person. Because people are special and have equal moral worth, they should be treated with respect. We treat others with respect when: (1) we ensure that our interactions with them are purely voluntary, (2) we ensure that our interactions with them are mutually beneficial, just and fair and (3) we ensure that we take account of their needs, desires and interests (Barcalow, 1994:145).

Kant's did not only emphasize treating people with respect, he also stressed the need to treat ourselves with respect because we too are people hence valuable. He explains that we have duties to others because they are people and also have duties to ourselves for instance the duty of self-preservation which entails cultivating one's capacities the highest of which is understanding. According to Kant, 'man has a duty to raise himself from the crude state of his nature, from his animality more and more towards humanity. He has a duty to diminish his ignorance by instruction and to correct his errors' (Kant, 1797:191). As for our duties to others, Kant insisted that when we are acting towards others, from the duties of beneficence, we must never undermine their self-respect or humiliate them for that would violate the requirement that we treat people with respect.

Lending credence to Kant's position, Confucian ethics espouses a relational conception of human persons that accentuates how a person's relationship is critical to the source of her ethical obligations and ethical growth (Ramsey, J. 2016.p235). Confucian ethics, *a la* the Heideggerian understanding of the *Dasein* and Kant's interpretation of the worth of persons, challenges the individualistic, atomistic, or egoistic participation or manifestation of the *self*. As presented in their relationality thesis, it is the transparency or the relationality of the *self* with others of its kind that guarantees the authoritative achievement of humanness (Ramsey, J. 2016. p.236). The relationality of personhood is captured in the three central theses of Confucian role ethics

- *The Constitutive thesis*: Persons are constituted by their roles and relationships;
- *The Achievement thesis*: full personhood is an achievement of *ren* (authoritative conduct, humaneness);
- *The determinative-thesis*: obligations and duties encoded in one's roles and relationships determine *ren* (*ibid*).

The centrality of confucian principles about ways of living is to show love and concern when relating with others. Confucianism is a study and theory of relationships especially within hierarchies (Jeff, R. 2011). Social harmony (the central goal of Confucianism) results in part from every individual knowing his or her place in the social order, and playing his or her part well. Particular duties arise from each person's particular situation in relation to others. The individual stands simultaneously in several different relationships with different people: as a junior in relation to parents and elders, and as a senior in relation to younger siblings, students, friends and others. Juniors are considered in Confucianism to owe their seniors reverence and seniors have duties of benevolence and concern towards juniors. The same is true with the husband and wife relationship where the husband needs to show benevolence towards his wife and the wife needs to respect the husband in return. This theme of mutuality still exists in East Asian cultures even to this day.

The Five Bonds are: ruler to ruled, father to son, husband to wife, elder brother to younger brother, friend to friend. Specific duties were prescribed to each of the participants in these sets of relationships. Such duties are also extended to the dead, where the living stands as sons to their deceased family. The only relationship where respect for elders isn't stressed was the friend to friend relationship, where mutual equal respect is emphasized instead. In all other relationships, high reverence is usually held for elders.

Six Principles of Confucianism

The six principles that many recognize in Confucianism are:

Ren

The respect we should accord to all living things particularly human beings. OR the sense of dignity we should give to ALL living things, especially other humans.

Li

Li is considered the principle of gain, such as why people will actively seek out personal relationships and what people gain from society as a whole. The idea is to consider what does each person, individually and as a group, gain when they interact with one another.

Yi

The moral obligation to do good. This includes the ability to know and recognize what is right and wrong, and the ability to feel what is right and wrong.

Hsiao

In this, parents should be revered, respected and honored since they created the being in question. Bringing honor to the family and revering someone who has brought honor to you.

Chih

Moral wisdom and knowledge of things that are right and wrong.

Te

The morals of authority. For example, the government has authority if it can maintain economic and social order.

Confucianism holds one in contempt, either passively or actively, for failure to uphold the cardinal moral values of *rén* and *yì*.

Closely linked to Confucian ethics is the care orientation in ethics which stresses values such as connectedness, relatedness, interrelationship and relationships. It was born as a product of an understanding about persons in a social web designed to create harmonious interactions. Since it shares some features with the traditional African communal value of everyone being his/her brother's keeper, such a positive societal value needs to be sustained. This orientation therefore emphasizes interconnections between people by portraying a social universe characterized by interrelated actors not atomic individuals. It rests on the understanding of relationships as a

response to others in their terms. It has a universal appeal not only because it emphasizes the need to cultivate our natural capacity to care for others and ourselves but also because it stresses values such as care, trust, mutual consideration, sympathy and the like. According to Nel Noddings,

We do not have to construct elaborate rationales to explain why human beings ought to treat one another as positively as our situation permits. Ethical life is not separate from and alien to the physical world. Because we human beings are in the world not mere spectators watching from outside it, our social instincts and the reflective elaboration of them are also in the world (Noddings, 1984:61).

Another theory that has many things in common with the care orientation in ethics is the Social Exchange Theory. According to this theory, feelings and emotions ought to be reciprocated for a successful and long lasting relationship. This theory was proposed by George Casper Homans in the year 1958 according to which “give and take” forms the basis of almost all relationships though their proportions might vary depending on the intensity of the relationship. In a relationship, every individual has expectations from his/her partner. A relationship without expectations is meaningless.

Relationships can never be one sided. An individual invests his time and energy in relationships only when he expects to get something out of it. There are relationships where an individual receives less than he gives. This may lead to situations where the individual starts comparing his relationship with others. Comparisons sometimes can be really dangerous as it stops individuals from putting their best into relationships. Don't always think that you would have a better relationship with someone else. Understand your partner and do as much as you can for him/her. Don't always expect the other person to do things first. Take initiative on your own and value your partner.

Another theory that advocates the need for interpersonal relationship is Altruism. Coined by Auguste Comte to describe a culture of devotion to the interests of others as an action-guiding principle, Altruism could be construed as an intentional and voluntary act performed to benefit another person as the primary motivation and either without a conscious expectation of reward...or with the conscious or unconscious expectation of reward. (Feigin, S., Owens, G. et al. 2014)

Altruism, therefore, seeks to inspire a culture of service that dispenses with the notion of rights in interpersonal relationships. It agrees with Confucian role ethics that individuals are born under a load of obligation to others of every kind. Hence, relationships at all levels are good if and only if such allow for impersonal, relational duties and endure only for the interest of others. According to Comte:

Social point of view cannot tolerate the notion of rights, for such notion rests on individualism. We

are born under a load of obligations of every kind...After our birth these obligations increase or accumulate, for it is some time before we can return any service... This ["to live for others"], the definitive formula of human morality, gives a direct sanction exclusively to our instincts of benevolence, the common source of happiness and duty. [Man must serve] Humanity, whose we are entirely (Comte, A. 1852).

According to Comte, the fundamental principle of morality “is the regulative supremacy of social sympathy over the self-regarding instincts” (Brosnahan, T. 1907). It is, therefore, this kind of practice in a relationship that guarantees mutual exchange of the good for the involved parties.

All the theories analyzed above aim at having a stable social order, an idea that was emphasized by communitarians. Communitarianism is a philosophy that emphasizes the connection between the individual and the community. Its overriding philosophy is based upon the belief that a person's social identity and personality are largely molded by community relationships, with a smaller degree of development being placed on individualism. Although the community might be a family unit, communitarianism usually is understood, in the wider, philosophical sense, as a collection of interactions, among a community of people in a given place (geographical location), or among a community who share an interest or who share a history.

Communitarians criticize the image Rawls presents of humans as atomistic individuals, and stress that individuals who are well-integrated into communities are better able to reason and act in responsible ways than isolated individuals, but add that if social pressure to conform rises to high levels, it will undermine the individual self. Communitarians uphold the importance of the social realm, and communities in particular, though they differ in the extent to which their conceptions are attentive to liberty and individual rights. Even with these general similarities, communitarians, like members of many other schools of thought, differ considerably from one another.

Communitarianism rather than individualism is the more appropriate theory for describing the relationship between the individual and society. It is a theoretical perspective that seeks to lessen the focus on individual rights and increase the focus on communal responsibilities. The definition of community varies and can refer to anything from the nuclear or extended family to the political state or nation.

According to communitarianism, everything fundamental in ethics derives from communal values, the common good, social goals, traditional practices and cooperative virtues (Beauchamp and Childress, 2001:362). The focus is on communal values and relationships, general welfare, cooperation and common purpose. From the communitarian point of view therefore, one would discover that mutual isolation from other groups is not possible because at the end of the day, the identity of individuals in general and the identity of a nation in particular is grounded upon the quest for a community (Kiros 1987:57). This means that the notion of community presupposes that we don't simply gloss-over those negative factors in our intergroup/interpersonal relations but we manage and resolve them such that they do not continue to lead to destructive frictions

because of the negativity of such destructive frictions. As Kiros notes, 'human beings engaged in war are forgetful of the uncuttable human ties that constitute human bonds, brotherhood and sisterhood, love and solidarity' (Kiros, 1987: 60).

Strengthening Interpersonal relationships

Communication is said to be the basis of every interpersonal relationship. In fact effective communication is the key to a healthy and long lasting relationship. If individuals do not communicate with each other effectively, problems are bound to arise. Communication plays a vital role in reducing misunderstandings and eventually strengthens the bond among individuals. A relationship loses its meaning if individuals do not express and reciprocate their feelings through various modes of communication. If it is not always an individual's wish to talk or express his /her feelings, feelings can be expressed through nonverbal modes of communication such as bodily movements, writing, gestures, facial expressions and hand movements. One should look happy and contented for the other person to enjoy your presence. Do not always look sad and irritated. Eye movements also have an important role to play in relationships. One can make out whether you are angry, unhappy or frustrated through your eyes only.

Positive psychologists have explored what makes existing relationships flourish and what skills can be taught to partners to enhance their existing and future personal relationships. Social skills approach posits that individuals differ in their communication skills and this has implications for their relationships. Relationships in which partners possess and enact relevant communication skills are more satisfying and stable than relationships in which partners lack appropriate communication skills (Samter, 2009).

Taking care of your tone and pitch: Make sure you are not too loud or too soft because being too loud might hurt the other person. Speak softly in a convincing way. The other person must be able to understand what you intend to communicate.

Choice of words is important in relationships. Think twice before you speak. Remember one wrong word can change the meaning of an entire conversation. The other person might misinterpret you and end the relationship. Be crisp. Express your feelings clearly. Do not try to confuse the other person. Being straightforward helps you in relationships.

Regular interaction: An individual must interact with the other person regularly for the relationship to grow. Speaking over the phone and sending text messages are ways of communicating and staying in touch especially in long distance relationships where individuals hardly meet. Individuals can also communicate through emails. If you do not have the time to call your partner regularly, send him/her a mail. This will make the other person feel happy and important.

Emails are also an effective mode of communication at workplaces. For better relations at workplaces, try to communicate through written modes of communication. Be careful about the

mail body and make sure they are self-explanatory. Using capital letters in emails is considered to be rude and loud. Do not share any information with any of your fellow workers verbally. Send your colleague a mail and do keep your boss in the loop. All the related employees must be marked a cc as well. If discussed orally, the other person might refuse later on, creating problems for you.

Be polite not rude. Never ever shout on your partner even if he has done something wrong. Discuss issues and try to sort out your differences amicably. Abusing, fighting and criticizing negatively affect the relationship and in adverse cases might end it as well. Being rude is a crime in relationships.

Be a patient listener. Try to patiently listen to and understand the other person's point of view as well. Unless you listen carefully, you will never be able to communicate effectively.

Managing Conflicts in Interpersonal Relationships

A state of disagreement among individuals is referred to as conflict. When two individuals have different opinions and neither of the two is willing to compromise, conflict arises. Conflict also arises when individuals find it difficult to reach mutually acceptable solutions and fight over petty issues. Differences in attitude, mindsets and perceptions give rise to conflicts at various levels of interpersonal relationships. No one ever has gained anything out of conflicts. Conflict must be avoided as it leads to negativity and destroys relationships.

According to Knapp's Relationship Termination Model, a relationship ends when individuals do not communicate with each other effectively. Misunderstandings and confusions consequently arise leading to unnecessary conflicts.

There should be no place for ego and jealousy in relationships. One needs to be forgiving for the relationship to grow. The stagnating stage of interpersonal relationship development is often characterized by individuals avoiding each other and not interacting much. At this stage, individuals are no longer interested in each other and physical intimacy also decreases. People decide to move on from the relationship and opt for mutual separation.

Because conflicts play an important role in ending relationships, it must be controlled at the initial stages so as to expect the best out of individuals.

- **Learn to forgive easily.** In situations of conflict, allow the other person to come first and all other personal interests should take a backseat. Fighting with the other person on petty issues is childish. Be mature. Do not take things to heart all the time. Sometimes you let go issues that are controversial and are likely to bring about conflict
- **Learn to respect one another.** Treat the other person with respect. In fact, people should be treated as members of your extended family. Ignoring minor issues helps in avoiding conflicts in interpersonal relationship. Try to understand the other person's point of view as well.

- **Learn to control your emotions and think before you speak when conflict arises.** Try as much as possible to avoid hurting people. There are several other ways to express your displeasure. Do not overreact when angry. Stay calm and composed.
- **Avoid transferring aggression.** Be polite when conflict arises. Do not make others your object of attack. A simple smile goes a long way in managing conflicts and strengthening interpersonal relationships.
- **Evaluate issues carefully.** This reduces the chances of errors and eventually manages conflicts amongst individuals. Do not jump to conclusions. It is always better to sort out differences amicably rather than fighting and destroying relationships. Voice your concerns at any available opportunity and try to reach a conclusion mutually acceptable to one another. Do not always see your own personal interests as more important.

Conclusion

Because our happiness lie in the happiness of others, let us make people happy, show them love and by so doing, we will get our happiness and love in return.

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