Mini symposium
02 - 02 - 2018

Assessment of Existential Anxiety
Vincent Van Bruggen
Development and Validation of the Existential Concerns Questionnaire (ECQ)
Minisymposium: Assessment of Existential Anxiety

*philosophy meets psychology*

*Date:* 02-02-2018

*Place:* VU university, Amsterdam; HG-08A33

*Time:* 10.30-12.30

At the occasion of the thesis defense of Vincent van Bruggen, Dimence Groep, the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam and University of Twente organize a mini-symposium on the topic of existential anxiety. Existential anxiety has long been recognized as an important human experience and has been studied from different scientific perspectives. How can people cope with the finitude of their lives and with the responsibility of making life-choices without knowing the outcome? Philosophers have written about these questions and therapies have been developed to meet the needs of people suffering from excessive forms of existential anxiety. However, empirical research on these questions has lagged behind and death anxiety has been its main focus. This symposium addresses the value of psychological methods for the understanding of existential anxiety as a broad concept. The program consists of three short lectures, each followed by a discussion.

**Registration:**
This symposium is offered to you by the Dimence Groep, VU University and University of Twente. Please register if you want to participate by sending a message to: [j.strijker@dimencegroep.nl](mailto:j.strijker@dimencegroep.nl)

**Defense of the Dissertation:**
This symposium is organised in connection with the defense of the dissertation "Assessment of Existential Anxiety" by Vincent van Bruggen. This is scheduled at 13.45 in the Aula of the Vrije Universiteit in Amsterdam, De Boelelaan 1105, Amsterdam.
Programme

10.30 Opening and introduction  
*Gerrit Glas*

10.40 Who is afraid of the existential concerns (questionnaire)?  
*Vincent van Bruggen*

Two samples of respondents, one clinical and a nonclinical, completed the newly developed existential concerns questionnaire (ECQ). Descriptive statistics are presented and the possible use of the ECQ in research and clinical practice is discussed. (20 min. and 10 min. discussion)

11.10 Existential concerns in life threatening illnesses  
*Shirly Alon*

Coping with a life-threatening illness naturally causes existential concerns, which become even more intense as death becomes imminent. When an adaptive approach is used in dealing with existential concerns, it may serve as a powerful psychological resource against despair. But, when the patient is overwhelmed, it may result in the development of existential distress. Both research and practice consider Existential distress to be the most common source of agony among people suffering from life threatening illnesses, and find it very challenging to treat. The presentation will demonstrate the main existential concerns among people coping with life threatening illnesses, as well as the differentiation between adaptive existential contemplation and existential suffering. Finally, a glance will be taken at evidence-based interventions, which are targeted to alleviate existential concerns and promote existential wellbeing. (35 min. and 15 min. discussion)

12.00 Gratitude and existential awareness  
*Ernst Bohlmeijer*

Experiencing gratitude is an important resource for mental health and flourishing relationships. But what inspires gratitude? One source of inspiration may be awareness of the finitude of life and all experiences. Ernst will present a theory about the value of gratitude and some evidence for existential awareness as a source for gratitude. (20 min. and 10 min. discussion)
Gerrit Glas is a professor of Christian Philosophy (Dooyeweerd chair) and of the philosophy of neurosciences at VU University, Amsterdam, the Netherlands. He is also psychiatrist and director of residency training in psychiatry in Dimence, Institute for Mental Health in Overijssel, the Netherlands. Among his areas of interest are concepts of anxiety, the interpretation of acts of evil and forgiveness, and philosophy of neuroscience and psychiatry.

Vincent van Bruggen (MSc) works as a health care psychologist at Mindfit, a mental health institution. He is also a lecturer at the University of Twente. In the afternoon of 02 02 2018 he will defend his PhD thesis about the development of the Existential Concerns Questionnaire.

Shirly Alon (PhD) is a medical psychologist. She works as head of psychology services at Meir Medical Center and as a researcher at Ben-Gurion University, Israel. Her research interests are psycho-oncology and palliative care, gerontology, narrative and life-review interventions.

Ernst Bohlmeijer is professor of mental health promotion at the University of Twente, the Netherlands. He has a special interest in humanistic positive psychology and therapies that contribute to sustainable mental health. His main research focuses on the development and evaluation of innovative interventions in mental health care.

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