PSIWORLD 2014

The educational level and the style of in-couple communication

Ruxandra Gherghinescu, Simona Maria Glăveanu*

*Institute of Philosophy and Psychology, Romanian Academy, Cal. 13 September no 13, Bucharest 060711, Romania
bDepartment of Psychology, Ecological University, Bd Vasile Milea no.1G, Bucharest 061341, Romania

Abstract

Starting from a series of studies that have shown the importance of marital communication for the harmony and stability of the couple, but also from researches proving the influence of the socio-cultural environment on the interactional conduct, the objective of this study is to investigate the marital verbal communication in the first 2 years of marriage, relative to the partners’ educational level. The results of this study (N=98) show that the educational level of the two partners is one of the mediator factors of the verbal communication.

© 2015 The Authors. Published by Elsevier Ltd. This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/).

Keywords: educational level; conjugal communication; conflict; conciliation; rational negotiation.

1. Introduction

There are numerous studies in the specialized literature showing that many couples fail to effectively solve difficult situations occurring in their marital life due to communication problems (Robinson, 2012; McKay, Davis & Fanning, 2009; Notarius & Markman, 1994).

Socio-cultural environment takes its toll on people's communicative peculiarities in terms of education and values acquired both in the families of origin of the members of the couple, and in the further development environment of the individual – depending on the level of education and social climate in which he/she lives (Guerrero, Andersen & Afifi, 2007; Moser, 1993; Zimbardo, 1985). These values, taken over from family or from socio-professional environment, define the individual’s personality and determine his/her conduct in all aspects of life, including in terms of communication style. The communication style of the person in the marital environment consists of all the

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +0-4076-264-3155
E-mail address: simona.glaveanu@yahoo.com
form and content stable and steady features of the verbal communication adopted by each partner in the message emitting and receiving process (Glăveanu, 2010). This style once built and reinforced by the other partner, is in relation to many variables, such as personality factors, socio-cultural factors and interactional factors, which impact the harmony/ disharmony of the couple.

2. Objectives and Hypotheses

2.1. Objectives

Starting from a series of studies that have shown the importance of marital communication for the harmony and stability of the couple (Robinson, 2012; Wright, 2000; Swedenborg, 1999), but also from researches proving the influence of the socio-cultural environment on the interactional conduct (Ashton, 2007; Swedenborg, 1999; Moser, 1993; Zimbardo, 1985), the objective of this study is to investigate the marital verbal communication in the first 2 years of marriage, relative to the partners’ educational level.

2.2. Hypothesis

The investigative process was guided by the following hypothesis:

- There is a significant relationship between the communicational style mainly used by partners during the first 2 years of marriage and their educational level.

2.3. Participants

The research subjects were 98 persons that had been married for less than two years (age M=36.4, SD=15.28). 35 of them have a low (primary) educational level, 32 a medium (secondary) educational level and 31 a high educational level (university and post-university graduates).

2.4. Instruments

The communicational style of the subjects was identified using the Conjugal Communicational Style Questionnaire (CCSQ), developed by Glăveanu (2010). Based on empirical studies, the CCSQ was not based on a specific typology, therefore including conceptual sequences from several authors (Semmelroth, 2005; Tzeng, 1993; Power & Hutchinson, 1979).

CCSQ has 35 items distributed in four dimensions:

- Conjugal listening – takes the forms of efficient (active) listening, defective (passive) listening or non-listening. Efficient conjugal listening involves the ability of each partner to pay attention to what the other one says, avoid interrupting him/her, focus on what he/she hears without thinking to something else (another topic, preparing the answer, judging the other for the affirmations); to stimulate the other to continue by watching him/her in the eye in order to provide him/her with feedback; to ask clarifying questions and reformulate what he/she heard to test if he/she understood correctly. Defective or passive listening refers to the tendency of a partner to not being attentive to what the other is saying (pretending to be listening, but actually thinking about something else), but continuing to watch the other in the eye to stimulate him/her to continue. Non-listening is about one or both partners showing the tendency to refuse to be attentive to what the other one says (by interrupting all the time, even in case of very important discussions); failing to stimulate the other to continue the discussion, but rather the opposite (preventing even the start of a conversation by using an authoritarian tone).
- The Conjugal communication takes the forms of honest efficient/inefficient communication or the form of lack of honest conjugal communication. Honest efficient conjugal communication implies the ability of each partner to share thoughts, sentiments and discontents in a friendly manner, finding the right moment, without judging the
other one for the same; to immediately share successes and failures; to communicate all that he/she is thinking about without fear of criticism; to be able to admit mistakes, to be responsive to what the other one thinks, feels or wants, without sacrificing personal dignity or harming the dignity of the other one. Inefficient honest communication is found when one partner openly expresses, in an authoritarian tone, his/her criticism, discontents, thoughts, negative feelings and unmet desires, causing the other one to feel guilty and failing to understand him/her; fails to admit he/she was wrong and fails to regret what he/she said, causing disputes. Lack of honest conjugal communication is manifested by the fact that one partner does not share with the other one his/her desires, feelings, successes, thoughts and discontents, waiting for the other one to realize by himself/herself; only discusses the essential matters for the marriage; tends to express only those desires and feelings which he/she suspects would be in line with the partner’s expectations.

- The level of conjugal agreement represents the degree of similarity of opinions, the negotiation about opposite opinions (without manifesting aggressiveness) in order to achieve a common point of view which would be beneficial for both partners, thus avoiding the occurrence and expansion of couple disputes.
- Conjugal reciprocal influence refers to the fact that the partner sending a verbal message causes positive or negative changes in the thoughts, feelings and behaviour of the listening partner, being in his/her turn influenced by the answer offered by the other. Conjugal influence allows for marital accommodation (and hence the informal stability) or, on the contrary, leads to marital instability.

The scaling of the items was done by assigning numbers from 1 to 3 to the levels to which the subjects were characterized by the listed conducts; the final score of the questionnaire was between 35 and 115 and three conjugal communicational styles were identified: 1) oriented towards conflict and disapproval, 2) oriented towards conciliation, and 3) oriented towards rational negotiation.

The existence of several dimensions having certain autonomy in the evaluation of the investigated construct allowed the elaboration of distinct standards for each of the four dimensions of the questionnaire.

The item analysis revealed the difficulty coefficient of the items (between 0.4 and 0.7) and their discrimination coefficient (between 0.25 and 0.56). The exploratory analysis revealed the communality (0.5 and 0.68), the saturation (over 0.4) and the degree of sample adequacy (KMO coefficient=0.64).

The psychometric qualities of the questionnaire (fidelity and validity) were revealed as follows: for the internal consistency the calculation of the Cronbach alpha coefficient revealed statistically acceptable values (the lowest=0.75, the highest=0.81); the content validity was mostly ensured by extracting behavior samples from the results of the qualitative research and by using expert analysis (ten experts evaluated the relevance of the items for the investigated construct).

The CCSQ was validated with the Romantic Partner Conflict Scale (Zacchilli, Hendrick & Hendrick, 2012) (r between 0.5 and 0.8; level 0.05, bilateral).

3. Results

The investigation of the relation between the educational level of the partners and the conjugal communicational style was accomplished by applying the Chi-Square test (association variant).

The data revealed the following: 57.6% of the partners that had a low level of education used a conjugal communicational style oriented towards conflict and disapproval, 27.3% used a style oriented towards rational negotiation and only 15.7% used a style oriented towards conciliation; the partners with a medium educational level predominantly applied a conjugal communicational style oriented towards conciliation (52.5%), only 29.2% using a style oriented towards rational negotiation and 18.3% using a style oriented towards conflict and disapproval; most of the partners with a high level of education used a conjugal communication style oriented towards rational negotiation (67.4%), 21% used a style oriented towards conflict and disapproval and 11.6% – one oriented towards conciliation.

The data were significant at $\chi^2 (4)=85.94; p<0.005$, which meant that there was a statistically significant association for the two variables (the educational level of the partners and the conjugal communicational style), and
the size of the effect was evaluated by calculating the φ coefficient; the value φ=0.31 showed a medium level association between the two variables, according to Cohen’s grid (Perșea, 2009).

Table 1. The relation between the partners’ educational level and their conjugal communicational style

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Educational Level (EL)</th>
<th>% within EL</th>
<th>% within CCS</th>
<th>Residual</th>
<th>% within EL</th>
<th>% within CCS</th>
<th>Residual</th>
<th>% within EL</th>
<th>% within CCS</th>
<th>Residual</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>low</td>
<td>57.6</td>
<td>59.8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>15.7</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>-2.4</td>
<td>27.3</td>
<td>24.9</td>
<td>-2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>medium</td>
<td>18.3</td>
<td>17.4</td>
<td>-3.2</td>
<td>52.5</td>
<td>55.7</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>29.2</td>
<td>25.4</td>
<td>-2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>high</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>19.8</td>
<td>-1.6</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>-1.3</td>
<td>67.4</td>
<td>70.2</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. Discussion and conclusions

The results of the study show that there is a statistically significant relation between the educational level of the partners and the communicational style they use during the first two years of marriage, but the identified characteristics are limited to the research group (being made 90% of women). During the first two years of marriage, most people with a low educational level use a conjugal communicational style oriented towards conflict and disapproval, translated into failure to listen, inefficient honest communication, marital discord and lack of reciprocal influence. This style predominantly used by one or both partners may be either a factor affecting the harmony of the couple and leading to its dissolution (McKay, Fanning & Paleg, 2006; Rosenberg, 2005; Heilte & Hirsch, 2003; Swedenborg, 1999), or the expression of a lifestyle considered normal by those couples in which the partners experienced similar conducts in their families of origin.

During the first two years of marriage, most people with a medium educational level use a conjugal communicational style oriented towards conciliation, characterized by passive listening, difficult honest communication, superficial agreement and a low level of reciprocal influence. This style can lead to conflict avoidance (Robinson, 2012; Guerrero, Andersen & Afifi, 2007; Semmelroth, 2005), but the subsequent evolution of these couples depends on how they will interact and develop as well as on the conditions of marital accommodation and assimilation (Glăveanu, 2010).

Most people being in the first two years of marriage and having a high educational level use a marital communication style oriented towards rational negotiation. The use of this style is characterized by efficient listening (Salomé & Galland, 2012), honest communication (Ashton, 2007; Moser, 1994), authentic agreement and positive marital reciprocal influence, and is correlated with marital stability and harmony.

The results of this study should be extrapolated with caution as the group of subjects is small and consists mainly of women (90% of the subjects), and there are numerous variables that affect the relation between the conjugal communicational style and the educational level of the partners.

Also, the results can be used for identifying the need for couple therapy/counseling in the case of those partners that use a conjugal communicational style oriented towards conflict and disapproval or towards conciliation. Knowing the partners’ educational level and their predilection for a certain conjugal communicational style leads to the possibility of intervention through couple therapy/counseling towards the development of a style based on rational negotiation, which contributes to the couple’s stability and harmony.

The data presented in this study represent only a small part of the actual research conducted on the features of the marital communication of the couples in the first two years of marriage, where many other variables were introduced (such as the gender, the traits of personality, the level of emotional intelligence, the coping style, the existence of children and their number, the existence of children from other relationships/marriages, the age gap between the spouses, if they are in the first or the second marriage, if they live independently/with members of the extended family, the couple’s financial situation), the results going to be presented in subsequent papers.
References


Salomé, J. & Galland, S. (2012). *Si je m'écoutais... je m'entendrais*. Paris: J'ai lu.


