

The affective sphere of spouses with high or low relationship satisfaction

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: As a major interpersonal relationship in human life, marriage greatly influences the psycho-physical condition of both husband and wife. Given increasing divorce rates, however, it is crucial for prophylaxis and therapy to identify factors that impact marriage quality.

Purpose: To describe how relationship satisfaction relates to a positive affective shift.

Materials and methods: Two hundred married couples were grouped as having either high or low relationship satisfaction and evaluated by taking the Good Marriage Questionnaire. Each couple's

affective sphere was measured using the semantic differential.

Results: Wives and husbands with higher relationship satisfaction are characterized by a stronger positive affective shift than those with lower relationship satisfaction.

Conclusions: A positive affective shift cultivates favourable conditions for relationship satisfaction, which encourages spouses to develop and improve the quality of their marriage.

Key words: Psychotransgressionism, positive affective shift, relationship satisfaction

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INTRODUCTION

Man's attitude towards the reality around him depends first and foremost on his psyche. Perception of space, ways of thinking, and emotions have a significant impact on contacts with others especially close interpersonal relations, a high quality of which is always desirable [1]. This is particularly true of marriages, which people enter into in good faith with a view of future happiness, and become closer by solving the inevitable everyday conflicts, or bring emotional discomfort into their relationship by ignoring them, which leads to a drop in their life satisfaction [2]. The mechanisms of creating, sustaining and development of close interpersonal relations are explained in various ways depending on the theoretical framework. The biological approach seeks to explain human behaviour in genes, the brain and nervous system [3], as well as the internal processes of the hormonal system [4]. In the psychodynamic view, behaviour is determined by uncontrolled urges, which induce arousal, which is perceived as a desire leading to behaviours which alleviate stress. In interpersonal contacts, one desires pleasure and avoids pain [5].

According to the behavioural approach, the environment determines human behaviour, which should be understood can be predicted and even controlled [6]. In the humanistic approach, humans are active agents, good by nature, who have the ability to make choices and whose main goal is to increase and fulfil their potential while respecting others and their wellbeing [7]. The cognitive concept, based on many study paradigms, focuses on cognition and the mechanisms of information gathering, coding, storage, interpretation, and expression in human life [8]. The quality of interpersonal contacts is the result of constant cognitive processes, the conditions and dynamics of which are still being discovered [9]. The evolutionary approach focuses on the adaptive value of behaviour and mind in the perspective of the passage of millions of years, as a route to human survival in the physical and social environment through forming close interpersonal relations, among others [10].

Psychotransgressionism, developed by J. Koziellecki, is a new concept of the human psyche and a new explanation of interpersonal relations, which focuses on development and change. Koziellecki explains the functioning of the human psychological structure based on the concept of borders and their transgressions, of protective and transgressive behaviours, and proposes a new network theory of personality [11].

People have a tendency to draw borders in their lives, which they transgress according to a culturally sanctioned ritual, to change their existence [12]. According to A. H. Maslow, by striving to fulfil the highest need of self-realization

one is freed from the pressures of one's environment to realize one's own plan for life [13]. The process of human development is presented in similar terms by Grzywak-Kaczyńska [14], who makes note of how people are personally involved in their own development, which expands the bounds of realization of developmental needs which dominate biological needs. She notices that a normal child shows, from the earliest age, developmental tendencies as constantly striving to go beyond its current state. In view of the logos theory, based on Frankl, man has the mental ability to live in three temporal dimensions at once, to intellectually and emotionally process oneself and one's surroundings and to go beyond these conditions [15].

One needs certain material, intellectual, and spiritual values to function in the world. A shortage of these values disturbs homeostasis and leads one to taking protective steps. In marriage these steps will be connected with everyday activities, such as increased professional activity, which provides financial means for supporting family plans, or participation in intellectual and cultural activities. Putting these into practice helps one maintain physical and mental health, improves self-confidence and adaptability. However, it does not allow one to transform one's reality, to topple old structures and build new ones; it does not lead to the forming of one's personality [16]. Transgressive behaviours on the other hand are connected with expansion, creativity, increased control, and have some common features which make them specific and homogenous. These are behaviours which transgress a person's current achievements and enrich the individual "being" and "having" with what was previously transcendent to the individual. Risk is an innate feature of transgressive behaviours, and they may end in failure [17]. However, transgressive behaviours create more potential occasions to know oneself and one's spouse and better understand one's reality. In marriage, it opens the way to making better use of the acquired competence in recognising difficulties, searching for their causes, and attempting to overcome them, bringing joy to the couple, which brings them closer together. J. Koziellecki speaks of an affective shift [18], which accompanies transgressive behaviours and creates an emotional climate conducive to improving a relationship. What helps take successful transgressive steps is higher potential strength of the psychons creating the network structures of the couple's personalities and stronger connections between them. This helps them create effectively functioning networks in the constantly changing reality of married life. To put it simply, personality is a network of five fairly permanent and equally important components called psychons: cognitive (CP), instrumental (IP), motivational (MP), emotional (EP), and personal

(PP). It influences the direction of one’s life, its uniqueness and coherence, constancy in various situations and at various times. Within the psychons and between them, there are connections allowing information and energy to flow, which allows the personality to function as a whole with identity and the ability to interact with the environment, especially enter into close interpersonal relations, the quality of which directly influences one’s quality of life.

The aim of the research is to attempt to find psychological factors which modify the quality of relations in a marriage, from the point of view of psychotransgressionism. As this is only the preliminary stage of research, the focus is on only one psychon – emotional – with the assumption that there is a correlation between marriage satisfaction and the spouses’ affective sphere. Analysis conducted thus far suggests the following research hypotheses:

H1: Wives with greater marriage satisfaction are characterised by a higher affective shift than those with lower relationship satisfaction.

H2: Husbands with greater marriage satisfaction are characterised by a higher affective shift than those with lower relationship satisfaction.

Research based on the theory of psychotransgressionism is exploratory, allowing to delineate possible directions of further, more

detailed, studies concerning factors influencing the quality of marital relations.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The married couples in the study and the tools used for assessing their marriage satisfaction and affective sphere were selected in connection with the theoretical operational assumption of the main ideas of psychotransgressionism.

Two hundred couples took part in the study. They were in their first formal relationship for at least 5 years, had higher or secondary education, were professionally active, and had children in their care. These criteria were followed to make the research group uniform, and to minimize the influence of factors other than the controlled independent variable – relationship satisfaction – on the subjects’ affective sphere. Based on the results of the Good Marriage Questionnaire [19], groups were selected of 100 wives and 100 husbands with higher relationship satisfaction and 100 wives and 100 husbands with lower relationship satisfaction.

Detailed data on the surveyed spouse types, based on arithmetic means, are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Characteristics of the spouses.

Selected characteristics		Types of spouses			
		WH (n=100)	WL (n=100)	HH (n=100)	HL (n=100)
Relationship satisfaction		142.6	117.8	140.4	118.1
Age		36.1	36.7	37.5	37.8
Married for		11.9 years	12.9 years	12.2 years	12.6 years
Education	Higher	86 (86%)	76 (76%)	74 (74%)	73 (73%)
	Secondary	14 (14%)	24 (24%)	26 (26%)	27 (27%)
Number of children	One	37 (37%)	35 (35%)	30 (30%)	43 (43%)
	Two	39 (39%)	56 (56%)	50 (50%)	43 (43%)
	Three	18 (18%)	9 (9%)	15 (15%)	13 (13%)
	Four	4 (4%)	-	3 (3%)	1 (1%)
	Five	2 (2%)	-	2 (2%)	-
WH – wives with higher relationship satisfaction; WL – wives with lower relationship satisfaction; HH – husbands with higher relationship satisfaction; HL – husbands with lower relationship satisfaction					

The subjects’ affective sphere was assessed using semantic differential [20], which allowed the spouses to express their personal emotional connotations in relation to 12 concepts connected with four spheres of their life: general wellbeing (e.g. health), family of origin (e.g. mother), current family (e.g. child), and work (e.g.

salary). The subjects were asked to assess on a seven point scale (between two extremes such as hot and cold) how they feel about these concepts. To avoid automatic answering (all positive or all negative), the direction of the scale was reversed for every other item: positive – negative, negative-positive [21]. The seven-point scale was interpreted

as follows: an answer in the middle range denoted neutral emotional connotations, an answer in one of the three positions at the side of the positive descriptor (e.g. warm) was an expression of a positive affective shift and an answer in one of the three positions at the side of the negative descriptor (e.g. cold) expressed a negative affective shift. The sum of selected associations for each concept was the basis for assessing whether there was a general positive or negative affective shift or a neutral state.

The results were processed using SPSS 21.0 PL for Windows. The Mann-Whitney U test was used to compare groups of spouses with higher and lower relationship satisfaction [22].

RESULTS

Wives with higher and lower relationship satisfaction were significantly different in terms of their affective sphere (Table 2). Positive emotional connotations of wives with higher relationship satisfaction were significantly stronger than in the case of wives with lower relationship satisfaction ($p < 0.001$). At the same time negative emotional connotations of wives with higher relationship satisfaction were significantly weaker than those of wives with lower relationship satisfaction ($p < 0.000$). There was a similar trend in neutral connotations ($p < 0.022$).

Table 2. Emotional connotations of wives with higher and lower relationship satisfaction.

Type of connotation	Wives with higher relationship satisfaction (N=100)		Wives with lower relationship satisfaction (N=100)		Difference significance	
	Average rank	Sum of ranks	Average rank	Sum of ranks	Mann-Whitney U	P value
Positive	113.77	11377.00	87.23	8723.00	3673.000	0.001
Neutral	91.19	9119.00	109.81	10981.00	4069.000	0.022
Negative	85.44	8543.50	115.57	11556.50	3493500	0.000

Differences between husbands with higher and lower relationship satisfaction were observed in two kinds of studied emotional connotations (Table 3). Positive emotional connotations of husbands with higher relationship satisfaction were

significantly higher than those with lower relationship satisfaction ($p < 0.001$), while neutral connotations were significantly stronger for husbands with lower relationship satisfaction than for those with higher relationship satisfaction ($p < 0.000$).

Table 3. Emotional connotations of husbands with higher and lower relationship satisfaction.

Type of connotation	Husbands with higher relationship satisfaction (N=100)		Husbands with lower relationship satisfaction (N=100)		Difference significance	
	Average rank	Sum of ranks	Average rank	Sum of ranks	Mann-Whitney U	P value
Positive	114.36	11435.50	86.65	8664.50	3614.500	0.001
Neutral	84.02	8402.00	116.98	11698.00	3352.000	0.000
Negative	92.91	9290.50	108.10	10809.50	4240.500	n.s.

DISCUSSION

The results confirm the hypothesis that spouses with greater relationship satisfaction have a richer emotional sphere, which is expressed in a positive affective shift. In the case of wives, there was a significant difference in all three types of emotional connotations: positive, neutral, and negative; while in the case of husbands, the difference was significant in the case of positive and neutral connotations. In both cases, spouses with greater relationship satisfaction had better results.

A positive affective shift has a beneficial effect on relationship satisfaction. It creates an emotional climate improving wellbeing and satisfaction with everyday activities. If positive emotions appear more often in marriage, the brain creates specific mediators, which can prolong the state of happiness [23]. Progress in research into the human mind allowed scientists to discover significant neurological structures, which condition the appearance of positive emotional states. These include some of the structures in the midbrain, parts of the ventral striatum, and the rostral part of the

insular cortex. The differentiation of the orbitofrontal cortex (OFC) is significant for the structural and functional approach. The side-rear, phylogenetically and ontogenetically older, part of the OFC is connected more with bodily rewards (e.g. erotic), while the side-frontal part is responsible for emotional states created by socio-cultural rewards (e.g. financial) which appear at a later phylogenetic stage. In this case, these rewards come from internal motivation to show off one's skills or abilities [24]. Emotional intelligence is an example of a skill which forms a positive emotional climate and increases relationship satisfaction [25]. Unlike regular intelligence (IQ), which is an innate skill, emotional intelligence can be constantly improved by spouses, which increases its chance to positively affect relationship quality. One of the significant elements of emotional intelligence is awareness of one's own emotions, managing them, and recognising them in others [26].

Active awareness, which can be described as regular monitoring of events surrounding one's spouse, can be conducive to adequately expressing one's own emotions and recognising and appreciating the emotions of the other person in a relationship. A fresh perception and introspection, as opposed to a stereotypical view of one's spouse, decrease the number of behaviours leading to conflict, which create negative emotions and decrease relationship satisfaction [27]. Active awareness undoubtedly increases and updates self-awareness, which, according to our research, when coupled with extraversion has a positive effect on relationship satisfaction [28]. Even if the expression of emotional states experienced by a couple leads to misunderstandings, it can be motivation to seek conditions which lead to them and in consequence to updating the couple's knowledge of themselves and each other.

CONCLUSIONS

The features of the emotional sphere of wives and husbands described in this article have a significant connection to their relationship satisfaction through a positive affective shift. Spouses with greater relationship satisfaction have a significantly higher positive affective shift than those with lower relationship satisfaction. As this is only a preliminary, exploratory stage of research in the psychotransgressive approach, it would be worth exploring other psychons. In the context of our analysis of research results, one can pose the question: does relationship satisfaction cause a positive affective shift, or are spouses with a higher affective shift more satisfied with their relationship? Answering this question would be of value to prophylaxis, diagnostics, and therapy. In our research, wives and husbands were evaluated separately on their relationship satisfaction.

Perhaps, it would be desirable in the future to look at a couple together. It would be more complex in practice, but would highlight the Network co-dependence of variables in a married couple, which is closer to the ideas of psychotransgressionism.

Conflicts of interest

The author declares that he has no competing interests in the publication of the manuscript.

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