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# **Gender differences in family communication**

**(summary)**

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## **Gender differences in family communication**

The postulate according to which the family is considered the basic cell of society has entered for a substantial period of time in the usual language, being present and readily observable in the common sense. The processes, phenomena and facts, whose generating source is represented by interrelations and interactions developed and maintained permanently in the family dimension, have been a constant issue for sociological research, and communication is a vital process that structures family relations, a process that can be imagined as a real family dimension. By interpersonal communication, social actors mutually share their thoughts, ideas, emotions, beliefs and most intimate feelings, interacting, knowing each other and developing emotional relations and relationships that are the condition sine qua non of social life as a whole.

But both gender issues and family are under the influence of social dynamics in general, so we found it necessary to start my thesis by drawing the new tensions and challenges the contemporary family faces with, paying particular attention to the dynamics of family roles, then trying to outline the gender issues by synthetically reviewing their main approaches. We then developed the theoretical aspect of the paper, highlighting the multiple implications of the concept of communication, focusing on the interpersonal dimension of it and going up to the individual level - by tackling the particular issue of the communication style.

The extension of the theoretical aspect of the thesis was produced by launching an intricate discussion on the relationship between gender and communication, succeeding, we think, to create a fairly eloquent image to address gender differences and similarities in communication as the covered literature reveals. We dedicated the last theoretical chapter to approaching gender in couple communication, this representing the reflective essence of our thesis, not only because it suggests a number of ways to improve couple communication, but mainly because it focuses most reference studies and theories used in undertaking the research.

The covered literature highlights the existence of some gender differences and similarities in interpersonal group communication, but also in couple communication. But the results so far are largely inconsistent, many of the identified differences still being controversy issues currently.

The second part of the thesis deals with describing the research we have undertaken on gender similarities and differences in couples, starting with its early shaping, then moving progressively through specifying its methodological issues and concluding with the

presentation and interpretation of the results and conclusions that were imposed, taking into account the assumption of inquiry boundaries. We started from the premise, provided by pulse palpation of social reality, according to which gender differences that constitute the existence basis of stereotypes and prejudices in this regard, may not result in different communication styles, but they may at least result in different perceptions whose intensity and implications we wanted to understand from the point of view of the questioned social actors' reports.

I take the responsibility for the theoretical and methodological handicap of the thesis, as a result of a weak representation of approaching the topic in Romanian and European sociology. That is why theoretical models of reference, and many of the methodological issues, have been drawn from Anglo-Saxon sociology, especially from American sociology, where gender and family communication enjoyed the greatest attention. But this sensitive position may be seen as a benefit of research, in terms of sounding valence and opening of new directions for future investigations. Also, the lack of some actual replicable models from addressing the topic in the immediate reality has stimulated creativity, flexibility and the emergence of research.

Overall, we wanted the present attempt to offer more information to make a positive contribution to understanding from a psychosocial perspective of a fundamental dimension of family life, that is, couple communication dimension, especially its dynamics under gender incidence.

## **1. Conceptual specifications**

### **Family**

Taking into account the role, importance and continuing increase of the alternative family forms presence (single parent families, gay families, cohabiting couples) in society, some sociologists have even suggested that it would be more effective if we abandon the concept of 'family', focusing attention on the study of social interrelationships created and maintained by sexual relations (Ritzer, 1994).

Hence, in literature we can talk about defining a family rather than about a definition of family. We encounter several synthetic definitions that only have an indicative value, with a poor validity of content and many limitations. It is better then not to talk about the definition of family, but about defining the family by bringing into discussion its characteristics and functions, taking into account that they are not presented completely and exclusively in any society or culture (Iluț, 2005).



The meaning of *gender* is asserted in the eighth decade of the last century, coming to emphasize the discussion movement on the differences between men and women in the area of psychosociocultural (Iluț, 2006).

Today sociologists distinguish clearly between the concept of sex, which denominates biological attributes, and gender - in English *gender* - indicating psychological and sociocultural characteristics. Although the vocabulary of Francophone sociology promotes increasingly stronger the term of "gender", Anglo-Saxon and American literature still requires the use of the term "gender" to designate an attribute or a set of attributes that express social differentiation between the two sexes, replacing in this respect, in sociological scientific terminology, the classic concept of "sex", to which it has the advantage of emphasizing the need to separate social differences from biological differences (Gilles, 1998).

### **Communication**

We may continue by reviewing a wide variety of definitions available in the literature, in which various authors, social scientists, mathematicians, managers have built so many definitions that can not be said there is a standard definition that can work universally.

Communication has been defined in several ways depending on the different perceptions people have about it. The term "communication" comes from the Latin word *communis* which means *putting together*. Ghanekar (1998), stated that, at a general level, communication refers to putting together, sharing information, ideas, facts, opinions, attitudes, and their common understanding - in essence, human communication is the transmission of information with the same meaning (apud. Giri, 2004).

Among the dimensions of communication, our attempt has concerned interpersonal communication, which refers to the exchange of messages that is carried by social actors in order to build common meanings. Although in the late 1970s, the study of interpersonal communication was already considered an important interest dimension of communication in the USA, rivalling with the dimension of mass communication in Europe, Asia or South America, the topic has attracted little interest from psychology, sociology or anthropology (Knapp, Miller, Fudge, 1994).

### **Communication style**

The concept of *communication style* has been since ancient times a topic of interest. In general, communication style refers to how people perceive themselves in interaction and communication with others, said Norton (1983, p.11), who attempted a brief definition of communication style saying that this is "the way one verbally, nonverbally and paraverbally interacts to signal how literal meaning should be taken, interpreted, filtered, or understood."

## **Gender and interpersonal communication**

In the early 90's, Tannen (1990) bluntly states that social actors have different conversational styles, so that when people from different parts of the country, or different ethnic groups, or having different social class membership, get to interact communicatively, there is a high probability that the meanings of the words they exchange are not fully understood.

In Western culture has become a truism that men and women differ greatly in terms of modalities of communication and interaction with others. This is demonstrated by the immense popularity of J. Gray's book (1992) in which women and men were placed allegorically as coming from different planets, Mars and Venus, having different communication patterns.

The beginning of research on gender variables in communication can be identified in studies in which researchers have included sex membership as a category to determine if it affects a particular dimension of communication research subject. Most of these studies, however, have treated sex membership as an accidental feature and not as an area of prime interest research (apud. Giri, 2004). More importantly, is that these studies were conducted in the spirit of the paradigm that women and men are different, so that these differences have made their presence felt in the investigated reality (Pearson, West and Turner, 1995).

Some theorists of communication have worked to construct a theoretical background to organize the scientific literature related to sex and communication. Hart and his colleagues developed the concept of *rhetorical sensitivity* (Hart, Burks, 1972; Hart, Carlson, Eadie, 1980), defining the rhetoric sensitive social actor as one who sees himself as a flexible person able to adapt himself effectively to situational and environmental changes. Other researchers have agreed on the importance of communication competence which involves elements of adaptability and flexibility (Bochner, Kelly, 1974; Chegala, 1981, Duran, 1992).

In the past thirty years, researchers have attempted to examine gender differences in communication. In the first wave of research a number of differences have been identified, then, it has been deepened to the direction of their inventory until 1975 when Bem (1975) introduced in specialized literature the concept of androgynous (androgyny) to denominate internalization of both male and female characteristics, thus creating obstacles to traditional categorization of the distinction between male and female. In Bem's perspective, each social actor has a dose of masculinity and femininity which are more or less pronounced.

The studies and research on gender and communication undertaken by the end of last century are full of contradictions, due, at least in part, to researchers that have used different

methodologies and theoretical constructs as platform to launch their own views and perspectives on the problem.

Over time, many studies have revealed gender differences in terms of communication competence. *Communication competence* should not be confused with language skills that relate to the speaker's ability to express, to produce grammatically correct clauses and sentences. The study of conversational interaction obliges sociolinguists to analyze communication in a variety of situations, so it is almost impossible that the analysis be restricted to grammar accuracy. The concept of *communication competence* was first used by Hymes (1972) who asserted that it is essential that the study of communication should include the analysis of linguistic and social factors.

Communicational competence brings into question the social factors involved in language, its basic dimensions being *turn-taking*, *conversational styles* and *asymmetries*.

*Turn-taking* refers to the structure of conversation, to the ways in which participants are involved in conversation. There are simple turn-takings, such as when a speaker asks a question and gets an answer after completing to address the question, or more complex turn-takings such as irregularities in turn-taking, overlaps and interruptions - an overlap occurs when a participant to the conversation begins to speak while the other still has a few words to say, so that his own speech overlaps on the end of the other's speech; interruptions are in fact violations of turn-taking rules, occurring when a participant to the conversation interferes before another one to finish his speech.

Gender differences in conversation turn-taking lie in the fact that women attach a greater part of their speeches to the attempt to stimulate answers, having in their conversations several failed interventions (interrupted or ignored), while men have four times longer speeches.

*Conversational styles* include verbosity, minimal responses, ambiguous phrases, emphatic interrogative phrases, questions, imperatives, coarse language and compliments. Verbosity refers to the amount of speech, the gender difference being that men talk more than women in most situations. The assumption that women talk more derives from the fact that women prefer to discuss more personal topics, subjects considered by men as less important. Minimal responses are those indicating the level of attention paid into a conversation of those who listen to that who speaks, research showing that women use them more than men.

Ambiguous phrases and emphatic interrogative phrases are the so-called 'mild language'. Ambiguous phrases are linguistic forms used in conversations to express the

degree of certainty or uncertainty of those who talk in connection to what they say. It seems that women use more ambiguous phrases in their speech than men do.

Emphatic interrogative phrases are linguistic forms associated in conversations with the intention of the speaker, research showing that the assumption that women use more emphatic interrogative phrases than men is unsubstantiated. Women use more questions than men in their speeches, this probably deriving from the need for women to maintain conversation. Imperatives are present in several forms, men preferring strong, direct imperatives more, and women using mitigated and suggestive imperatives more.

In what coarse language is concerned, researchers have not yet been able to confirm or refute the presumption that it is a characteristic of male speech. Finally, studies so far show that women give and receive more compliments, complementing each other on physical appearance, while men rarely compliment each other, only referring to skills or turn-takings.

Asymmetries bring into discussion the issue of communication between men and women, emphasizing the fact that in conversations conducted in gender-based groups, understanding the conversation background is essential, women tending to pay attention to *how is being said*, men paying attention to *what is being said*.

## **2. Family dynamics and gender issues**

### **2.1. The contemporary family: tensions and challenges**

Family is part of a world subject to continuous social and economic transformation, a rapidly changing world so that it must bear some changes. Social changes and liberalization of everyday life has given young people more options in terms of marital behaviour. Besides, the age of the first marriage for women has increased because of their involvement in higher education or employment, respectively of their career commitment (Iluț, 2005).

One can talk about a transition of marital roles from traditional to egalitarian model. There are a number of studies which, analyzing the changes, conclude that marital roles have become more egalitarian. At the same time, other researchers claim that there is no significant change in the distribution of family roles. Although women have ever more assumed the role of co-producer once with labour market integration, division of labour in the household is still traditional and the dominant role of the man "head of family" is still valid (Kimmel, 2004).

## 2.2. Explanatory perspectives on gender differences

Explaining gender differences must start from addressing another universal phenomenon: gender inequality – universal inequality between men and women. So if we talk about gender, we talk implicitly about hierarchy, power and inequality, and not just about differences.

An important advantage of the biological perspective on gender differences is that the suggested theories are sustained by objective scientific facts, so the arguments are persuasive. All biological explanations essentially state that women and men seem two different beings, showing an overall conceptual trend that social arguments between men and women - gender inequality - appears to derive directly from the natural differences between the sexes. The biological perspective provides several answers to the basic issues of studying gender: differences between men and women and social inequalities. However, the great difficulty of the biological perspective is just extrapolating from biological to social differences – can genetic programming really control every decision of each individual?

Although many aspects of Freud's view have been criticized, and some even turned out not to be as grounded as they seemed at first, we can not disregard a number of obvious valences of Freudian perspective on gender identity and sexuality. We note that for the first time gender identity and sexuality are considered psychological achievements, being dissociated from biology. Freud's theories have had a significant impact on contemporary studies on the relationship between gender identity, sexual behaviour and sexual orientation (Kimmel, 2004).

Ethnographic and evolutionary research reveals the diversity of intercultural construction of gender and, at the same time, there are common issues, such as the fact that in all societies there are differences between women and men, and that in all societies various forms of male domination are developed. Anthropologists have tried to perceive the relationship between universalism of gender differences and gender inequalities existing in human societies, investigating either on isolated communities, where women hold positions of power, or on rituals, beliefs and habits that tend to increase or reduce gender inequalities.

What shows beyond any doubt that rigorous study of gender, regardless of perspective, is that gender stereotypes, although they may differ in form, are present and are socially felt in all cultures and human societies, regardless of time and space, so they acquire a universal cultural character.

The sociological and psychosocial approach of gender differences, which put gender in relation to the concepts of *differentiation*, *power* and *inequality* insists more on the topic of gender stereotypes, trying to highlight the circular causality which occurs between

stereotyping and socialization: the prescribed social role (male or female) by stereotyped collective representations, determine a specific socializing and educational content, and hence a certain personality profile (Iluț, 2006).

The theory of sex roles, developed once with the work and research of sociologists who wished to establish a social need for masculinity and femininity, talks about instrumental roles – characterized by rationality, autonomy and competitiveness, and about expressive roles – defined by tenderness and care for next generation socialization. Thus, to become a man or woman is a process that meets the need of society that individuals should take some specific places within it (Kimmel, 2004).

Sociological understanding of gender issues suggests approaching this complex topic not only by reporting it to the concepts of differences, power and inequality, the social constructionism explaining the differences as a natural consequence of domination. We emphasize once again the main dimensions of gender sociological analysis: identity, interaction and institution. Studying them and the interactions between them seeks to explain gender differences inequalities.

By specific analysis in addressing gender issues, sociology seems to be the only social science that is able to perceive both real differences between men and women and differences that seem real but are not so. Therefore, the sociological perspective can better understand how the gender is a product rather than a cause of inequality.

As shown in intercultural studies, it appears that any meaningful analysis of gender issues should start from the idea that specific gender roles have a number of causes related to a historical and anthropological context which is common to the development of universal human society - the importance of physical force to ensure daily living, slow technological progress, the rigidity of social culture - and at the same time should seek to explore ways and mechanisms through which stereotypes and prejudices succeed to maintain themselves in modern and postmodern societies, characterized by cultural flexibility, increased technological progress or multiple social changes.

### **3. Gender and couple communication**

Gender inequality is not just a social fact, it is a phenomenon that occurs, develops through interaction, which means that it builds itself within micro social, at interactional level. Thus, interaction becomes an important unit of analysis for observing the ways in which gender stereotypes are developed and reflected in the social structure. There run more beliefs related to gender-based communication, assuming that women are more expressive, more sensitive and more concerned with the development of intimacy in communication,

while men are more dominant, more centred on approaching the matters and preoccupied with maintenance and acquisition of status and independence. If these stereotypes are constantly maintained through interaction, then the social structure will reflect these differences.

Research on gender and interactions show that there is individual and situational variability of gender differences in interpersonal communication. Women and men are equally able to display both male and female communication styles in interaction, styles that are dependent, at least to some extent, on assumed gender identity, status, role and interaction goals (Aries, 1996).

Stereotypes and expectations that actors take responsibility for have the power to become self-fulfilling prophecies, so that women and men come to develop subsumed to stereotypes behaviours, which are then enhanced, maintained and considered as essential differences between women and men. Moreover, these differences may be a silent justification for the existing social order and the structural arrangements of a society that is supposed to be responsible for these differences (West, Zimmerman, 1987).

There is plenty of research indicating that language reflects gender differences, emphasizing that many features of interpersonal communication - verbal or nonverbal – expressing a male dominant society. These studies are however open to criticism aimed at the definition of certain forms of speech - a certain speech analysed in different contexts may reflect more or less dominance or difference (Tannen, 1994).

Tannen (1990) argues that women use a language of relationship and intimacy while men use a language of status and independence, therefore, communication between men and women can be regarded as intercultural, in which different conversational styles are developed, one specifically for women, on the one hand, and another specifically for men, on the other hand. Tannen (1990) made a classic gender difference when he suggested the concepts of *rappport-talk* and *report-talk*.

The author therefore claims that women feel more comfortable in communication in their private space, while men are more comfortable in communication in public places. For most women, the goal of communication is to create a link, to develop relationships with other / others, focusing on similarities and common experiences. Therefore women tend to feel comfortable in communication when at home or in places where they feel at home, practicing communicating in a more intimate, private, with one or at most a few people they feel close to.

For most men, however, communication has the main purpose to help them assert their independence and to negotiate or to maintain their status within a social hierarchy. This

goal is achieved showcasing the knowledge and information, demonstrating skills and taking over the forefront in discussions and conversations using the dominant verbalization - stories, jokes, anecdotes. From childhood, says Tannen (1990), men learn to use language as a means to obtain and maintain attention, so they feel more comfortable in public communication – when they are in groups with people they know less.

Even though many books that enjoy reputation in public dispose of a series of distinct gender differences in communication, then offering various ways to overcome them; other is the situation in the literature where a large part of studies conducted on the topic of sex differentiations and gender issues indicate that under a more comprehensive analysis, it is possible that between men and women to be more similarities than differences in terms of communication within intimate relationships.

Although there are some differences, they are not substantial enough to conclude that the two categories of gender are significantly different. Many of the so-called gender differences handled in gender literature are derived from errors committed in the field studies carried out - errors related to the inability to subjects' accurate recall, or to the influence of social desirability effect - when the questioned subject says something taking into account what he believes he is being expected to state, and less what he really thinks. Reporting the situation to the gender differences we refer to the fact that men and women tend to report what they think should say, as men and women, in terms of social stereotypes rather than what they truly believe about the issue under discussion. Research undertaken on communication between men and women in intimate relationships shows that there are more similarities than differences. Many of the differences derive from contexts involving household chores (Canary Emmers-Sommer 1997).

#### **4. Gender differences and similarities in young couples' communication. Own research findings**

##### **4.1. Shaping the investigational approach**

##### **4.1.1. The strategy of investigational approach: a multiphase research and case study**

Analyzing the various methodologies employed by researchers in addressing the family, one can identify the existence of several optimal strategies which, individually or in combination, may increase, by their adoption, the chances of success of our research. To achieve our approach, we combined aspects of *multiphase research strategy* (gradually reducing the initial sample, so, on increasingly smaller samples, we applied methods of



increasing depth) with specific dimensions of the *case study* (which involves intense and complex study of a small number of families on a longer period of time) in our attempt to meet the goal and the objectives of our approach. The group studied is discussed here as a whole, from a unified perspective, the case study recommending the application of various techniques such as document analysis, open interviews (individual or group), participatory observation, etc ... keeping us centered on following a specific dimension, as we are concerned, communication (Iluț, 2005). It is recommended to choose the case study especially when investigating the development of a phenomenon in its context in real life, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly delineated. (Yin, 2005).

Mooting the problem of generalization and theoretization, we wanted to achieve a *multiple case study*. Therefore, we investigated several cases in the same research approach, aiming to pursue the common notes, the similarities or the major dissonance regarding gender structuring of communication process. Naturally, this involved the use of both *theoretical sampling*, and especially of *comparison* (Iluț, 2005).

The purpose of this research, deriving from the subject proposed for approach is to identify and describe gender differences and similarities in couple communication in public and private space, directing research towards a series of general interrogations, made after Aries' recommendations (1996) who suggested five key questions that must be considered when gender differences are addressed in conversational interactions:

- a) How different are the conversational styles of women and men? How great are these differences?
- b) It is possible that variables such as social roles or status to be responsible for the perceived differences between men and women?
- c) To what extent gender differences depend on situational context of interaction?
- d) To what extent do stereotypes affect perceptions and evaluations of participants to the conversation?
- e) Are the correct meanings assigned to the studied behaviours by analysis?

### **The field of research**

The field of research was represented by young families existing in Alba Iulia, each young family representing a case, a unit of analysis, and each of the partners a subject to be questioned. Higher educational level (university degree or graduating from college), subjects' young age (18-35 years old), living together for at least a year and urban residence were a few features that have given homogeneity to the studied population.

#### 4.1.2. Selecting data sources: theoretical sampling

The specifics of *theoretical sampling* is given in particular by the fact that the decisions that determine the choice and composition of all sampled cases, are adopted during the development process of interpretation and data collection, aspect that stimulates the sensitivity and importance of creativity in research (Iluț, 2005).

Theoretical sampling, based on the emergence of concepts relevant to developing the theory, is intended, therefore to improve opportunities to compare events, facts and situations which lead to the ways in which the established categories vary in their properties and dimensions parameters (Mucchielli, 2002). The fundamental principle of theoretical sampling is the *gradual selection of cases* involving the selection of cases and clusters of cases according to specific criteria relating to its content (Yin, 2005).

Naturally, representativity is a universal goal of all sociological research, whether it is a quantitative approach, or a qualitative one, however it is important to note that this latter perspective aims to achieve the *representation of concepts*, and not the representation of interviewed subjects. Using theoretical sampling type, suggestively called "the snowball", which implies that each subject in the sample to induce the following which is included, starting from a small group of families (units of study), we compiled a *theoretical sample* of 144 subjects representing 72 young families who were questioned by applying the *Couples' Gender-based Communication Questionnaire*. This initial sample was reduced in a second phase of research to 21 units of study addressed by *open individual interview* method, selecting those units of study where there were recorded significant differences in the responses of the couple partners in the previous phase. Willing to identify situational specific influence on gender differences and similarities in communication, we decided to operate a second sample structure in three contrasting groups: *families with children, families without children, expecting families*.

Finally, on a small number of units of between which there was a degree of familiarity and closeness, we conducted three series of group interviews with an experimental nature, where we watched both the formation of opinions on topics suggested by group interactions, and the perception and measurement of gender differences and similarities in terms of *communicational competence* in public space (meetings between familiar people, in familiar locations), targeting the three dimension of it: *Turn-taking, Conversational Styles and Asymmetries*.

Sampling off time was marked by the achievement of *theoretical saturation* of the categories that were identified during the research development - the point where data analysis has shown that the social actors' reports can not bring anything significantly new

within the revealed categories, confining themselves to the repetition of already presented concepts. We recall that in qualitative approach data validity refers to *quantity*, *density* and *detail* of the collected information, and not to the number of investigated subjects (Mucchielli, 2002).

As a result of theoretical sampling, our population was composed according to age in a segment of 40.3% subjects between 31-35 years old, 29.9% subjects between 26-30 years old and 29.9 subjects between 20-25 years old. The proportions depending on age shows that the average age of subjects was 28.9 years old - the average age for men was 29.8 years old and the average age for women was 28 years old.

An important aspect in our population was the presence or absence of children in the units of study covered. Distribution of couples in our population, according to the presence of children, shows that of the 72 units of analysis addressed in our approach, we had 46 couples without children and 26 couples with one child or more.

If we follow the distribution of our units of analysis according to the marital status, of all 72 couples approached, we had 30 married couples and 42 unmarried couples, where partners preferred cohabitation.

#### **4.1.3. Conducting the research – data collecting stages**

##### **1. The Couples' Gender-Based Communication Questionnaire**

To obtain a statistical picture of the subjects' perceptions on gender differences and similarities in couple communication, we applied The Couples' Gender-Based Communication Questionnaire, a tool taken from Ekstein and Goldman's research (2001) where it was successfully used to address couple communication.

We asked both partners, who together formed each unit of analysis, to describe and evaluate, through items in the questionnaire, both their own attitudes and communicative behaviours and those of their partner. The items focused on three behaviour dimensions and communicative attitudes as they are derived from the specialized literature that is the theoretical basis of our research: *men communicative behaviours*, *women communicative behaviours*, *communicative behaviours common to men and women* (Annex 1: Table A).

After applying the questionnaire described above, we performed a first analysis of the provided information, at the level of the units of study comparing the agreements and disagreements present in couple partners' responses to the questionnaire, relating them to the main theories that summarizes research on the issues of gender differences in communication and noting areas where there are most striking agreements and disagreements, as these are topics for individual interviews which are open, deep, being applied in the second phase of the stage deployment of data collection.

In evaluating the questionnaires, the followed principle was not only that of identifying to what extent men display female communication s but also to what extent women display men communicative behaviours, because we assumed that it is possible that both sexes to employ and to combine in their communication style communicative behaviours from both categories. Our goal was closely follow the communicative behaviours trends and patterns within each unit of analysis (couple) - of each interviewed subject and their partner, being especially concerned of recording, as accurately as possible, for both partners the *perception of self* and the *perception of the other*.

## **2. Open individual interview**

Following the principle of gradual reduction of the sample, specific to multiphase research strategy, after analysing the questionnaires we proceeded to reducing the initial theoretical sample, choosing 21 units of study where agreements and disagreements between partners had the highest values, an aspect indicating the presence of gender similarities and differences in communication. We applied 42 open individual interviews, using an interview guide.

A second stage of data collection followed, open individual interviews were conducted on thematic dimensions represented by the main areas of agreement and disagreement recorded and summarized after applying questionnaires, to create the deep understanding premises of the theme to be investigated - we chose this type of quality interview, as it is well known that this is the basic technique of data collection in qualitative approach, and as it facilitates the more accurate achievement of comparison of significances, meanings and concepts arising from respondents' statements, who are encouraged to provide open answers, unrestricted from aprioristic choices, proposed by the researcher.

## **3. Group interview**

In our study we followed however, by group interviews to perform a microexperiment, where, through stimulating group discussions, to pursue then by analyzing conversational content, to identify gender similarities and differences in Communicational Competence in public space (meetings between familiar people in familiar locations). We conducted 9 group interviews - 3 groups were composed only of women (single-sex female groups - 6 participants), 3 only of men (single-sex male group - 6 participants), and finally three mixed groups (where there were 10 participants, 5 men and 5 women).

Altogether, we had to analyze 9 group conversations - we then grouped the conversations to compile materials for analysis in the form of general discussions: *women discussion*, *men discussion* and *mixed discussion*. We therefore undertook 3 series of group interviews (focus groups), each series of 3 group interviews (single-sex-female, single-sex-

male and mixed), whose role was to observe, record and analyze gender differences in terms of communicational competence on its fundamental dimensions – *turn-taking*, *communication style*.

Many researchers have noticed the influence of age (Helfrich, 1979, Blum-Kulka, 1997) and of social status (Labovic, 1972, Bernstein, 1990) on language use, so we thought that age and social status differences between participants to focus groups will substantially affect the interactions between them, so, to create the prerequisites of making comparisons between the groups studied, we decided to preselect the participants having about the same age and social status (Wardhaugh, 1995; Mesthrie et. al. 2000), on this occasion, marking the target population of our approach: married or cohabiting youth aged 25-35, from urban area, having higher education, who have lived and managed a household together with their couple partner for at least three years.

#### **4. Observation**

I also used the observation in the process of data collection, as a form of collection, in order to improve the dimensions followed in interviews, highlighting topics of discussions for them. As we mentioned, benefiting from the direct involvement in the social environment of young population segment in Alba Iulia, especially during my higher education studies, for about four years, we had the opportunity to be often in the position of direct observer of the development of young couples' interpersonal communication process, both in public and private space. Observations gathered on these occasions created the basis of on a personal awareness about aspects of this phenomenon which is the subject of my research, using them to optimize the rendering of pursued features (Mucchielli, 2002).

Particularly important was the information provided by observation during the group interviews, where we wanted to collect data about the manifestation of *Asymmetries* in the communication group, which is the third important dimension of Communicational Competence one of the key issues covered by our approach - *asymmetries* bring the issue of communication between men and women highlighting the fact that in conversations conducted in gender-based groups, understanding conversation background is essential, women tending to be careful to *how is being said*, men paying attention to *what is being said*.

#### **4.2. Gender-based young couples' communication**

##### **4.2.1. Reconfiguration of male and female style – submergence of mixed style**

As previously stated, we started our investigation from communicative behaviours distribution model in reference literature (Annex 1: Table A). Next, we will summarize the

analysis situation of gender differences and similarities in communicative behaviour in our filed of research, structured in two dimensions: we follow the distribution of communicative behaviours in our study population, according to subjects' gender. (Appendix 1: Table B); we follow the distribution of behaviours analyzed in the reality of the units of study, of the investigated couples (Annex 1: Table C).

Analyzing data provided by Couples' Gender-based Communication Questionnaire, we wanted to identify the extent to which each communicative behaviour (men, women or mixed) reported in reference literature are reflected and manifested both in our population, but also in our units of study. Perception of self and perception of the other were also taken into account for a better understanding of results, but also to identify possible areas of conflict in couple communication in our filed of research.

From 33 communicative behaviours, the situation of many of our population is uncertain, that is, more than half of our population, both at an overall level and at the reality of the units of analysis, does not assume some certain communicative behaviours from all three styles addressed.

Among men communicative behaviours (Annex 1: Table A), in our research we confirmed a preference for *practical problem-solving approach of couple life problems or of household, the diminished practice of revealing emotions and feelings by nonverbal communication and focusing the attention more on information content than on the emotional-affective one in the discussions in two*, some of the other men communicative behaviours, in our research, *belonging to mixed behaviours area*, such as *having and maintaining a good self-image or focusing the discussions on pragmatic aspects of couple life*. We have obtained uncertain results on:

- *Owning a private space in the living area of the house;*
- *The spirit of competition and the tendency to be imposing on the couple partner;*
- *The importance of having the last word in couple communication;*
- *Gender Differences and similarities in nonverbal communication – the smile;*
- *The inability to correctly interpret body language.*

Among women communicative behaviours (Appendix 1: Table A), in our research we only confirmed the *predominance of reactions and emotional responses in couple communication and reliance on intuition in understanding partner's speech*. To our surprise, *giving the forefront in discussions in two and playing a passive role* proved to be a men communicative behaviour in the filed we investigated, like *the tendency of avoiding conflicts with the couple partner* which is a communicative behaviour mostly assumed by men at the level of general population. But most women communicative behaviours, such as

*maintaining eye contact during discussions in two, verbalization of feelings and emotions towards the intimate partner, providing feedback in couple communication, the greater attention given to obtaining the couple partner's appreciation but also others' appreciation in making decisions about the choice of clothes, ability to "read" the partner's nonverbal language or touch initiation in getting close to the other, proved to be found in the large area of mixed behaviours.*

Among women communicative behaviours (Appendix 1: Table A), we obtained uncertain results in terms of *using words and expressions that reflect insecurity*;

Among the communicative behaviours that are integrated in reference literature to the mixed communication style (Annex 1: Table A), there were confirmed in our study *the importance attached to giving a special time for discussions in two; evaluating the couple partner's behaviours by reference to gender stereotypes; evaluating the negative influence of concealing information or keeping secrets on the quality of couple communication; physical distancing from the partner when experiencing certain negative emotions, feelings, and states.* We had the surprise to find that *the concern with the issue of physical attractiveness* is a women communicative behaviour in our population. We recorded a series of mixed behaviours whose position is uncertain, meaning that their expression is not perceived by many of our population:

- *Being ironic with the couple partner in public;*
- *The feeling of dissatisfaction with the appreciation expressed by the couple partner;*
- *Difficulties experienced in finding an appropriate time and a suitable location to discuss with the couple partner about problems, important issues about the relationship;*
- *Difficulties in revealing deep, intimate feelings and emotions, to the couple partner; difficulties experienced on an individual level in the conduct of negotiation process and decision making;*
- *Using hard, hostile expressions, or trivial words in communicating with the partner.*

Regarding this last communicative behaviour, at both levels of analysis, we observed a tendency for women to own it more strongly than men.

Analyzing data and information provided by our subjects through the Couples' Gender-based Communication Questionnaire, showed us at the level of the general research population a male style by which men develop a preference for approaching pragmatic issues in couple communication, they hardly reveal their deep emotions and feelings towards the couple partner through nonverbal language (gestures, facial expressions, body movements), and focus their attention more on the information content

of the discussions in two rather than on the emotional content. In addition, they seem to prefer to give the forefront of communication with the couple partner and to avoid conflicts with her whenever possible. We noticed that at the level of the units of study, some of communicative behaviours are mixed - as is to avoid conflicts with the partner whenever possible or focus attention on the information content of communication, to the detriment of emotional content, behaviours which, in the couple, are also assumed by women, not only by men, thus becoming mixed communicative behaviours.

The situation is more obvious in *women communication style*, where both at an overall level of population and at the reality of the units of analysis, we concluded that women are more concerned with the problem of their physical attractiveness, are used to provide more emotional responses and reactions communication with their partners and rely more on intuition than on logic in interpreting and analyzing the other's speech.

The mixed style of communication is more complex, both men and women, integrating into their communicative repertoire behaviours such as giving time to discuss important issues concerning the relationship with each other, evaluating some of the partner's behaviours by relating them to gender stereotypes; evaluating the negative influence of keeping secrets or hiding information has on the quality of communication; physical distancing from the couple partner when experiencing some negative emotions; having a very good self-image; focusing discussions in two on pragmatic issues; a preference to address the issues as directly as possible; maintaining eye contact in communication with the partner; verbalizing intimate feelings and emotions; providing feedback; the importance attached to obtaining partner's appreciation and others appreciations in choosing clothes; ability to read the partner's nonverbal language.

#### **4.2.2. Perception of the importance of communication in couple relationship satisfaction**

There are more similarities than differences in the representation of family communication role and function - the basic function is to ensure the couple's cohesion, and relationship stability and balance. Moreover, communication becomes an umbrella concept under which other important values such as loyalty, trust, or respect are maintained and reinforced. Another common point is the practice of diplomacy with discretion when information is harmful to the other. It seems that women attach more importance than men to emotional dimension in communication, to which they subordinate the dimension of self disclosure. Even though men acknowledge the importance of the emotional dimension in couple communication, they hardly practice self-disclosure, focusing on the physical manifestation. The most important is that all



questioned subjects assess communication as being a vital factor in achieving a successful relationship.

#### **4.2.3. Representation of gender differences**

Men have a more traditional perspective on gender differences. Women are seen as "weak sex" because of their sensitivity, fear and acceptance of the situation in life to be supported. Women, surprisingly, recognize these differences, considering that men are more balanced, more practical and more focused on the material dimension of life, but less inhibited in terms of emotional expressivity. Traditional perspective is reflected in some of the women who accepted to play second fiddle in leading their family life. Noticing the perceptions of gender differences in communication, highlighted the fact that men consider themselves to be more self-controlled in expressing emotions and feelings in communication, focusing more on rational in communication with their partner, are more direct, emphasising the communication role in solving problems. Women are viewed as consensus-oriented, more extroverted, but still more subtle and indirect.

In a lesser extent, we also studied the perception of family roles and found that both men and women believe that in a family traditionally assumed roles, through socialization and rational assumed roles, through negotiation between partners: men believe that there are traditional assumed roles (the woman is more responsible for childcare and household tasks fulfilment, while the man is the mainstay of the family, responsible for making important decisions, fulfilling physical tasks and responsible for having a higher income than his wife) and rational assumed roles (sharing some tasks and activities according to their time and skills); women accept traditional roles in terms of their functional aspect (men are supposed to fulfil household tasks involving physical effort), but focusing more on the importance of rational assumed roles. We may notice in our filed of research, a combination of the traditional model of marital roles and egalitarian model. If we refer to Coleman's specifications (1984), we could rather talk about highlighting the neo-traditional or pseudo-egalitarian models, improved with the important characteristics of contemporary marriage, explicitly associated with the idea of personal involvement and open communication between partners. Based on romantic love, the ideal marriage relationship emphasizes the flexibility of roles, sharing responsibilities, the relationship having a sympathetic aspect under which man and woman are regarded as equal partners, both contributing to the same extent, to maintain the relationship and to equally share the privileges derived from physical and psychological sense of security their household offer.

Under the impact of perceived and assumed gender differences, there are similarities in conceptualizing gender-based communication styles. Women perceive men in communication as they perceive themselves - more direct and more oriented towards the pursuit of pragmatic purposes in communication. Some aspects specific to men in communication, mentioned by women, but which they do not consider important, are focusing on competitiveness in communication with others - the desire to display knowledge, to prove their points of view on the conversation topics.

Similarly, men perceive women in communication, in general, just as they perceive themselves: more indirect in approach, more careful in the selection and use of language, more oriented towards the pursuit of relational goals. Particularly interesting was the fact that women assume as communicative behaviours specific to themselves two manifestations highlighted by men perspective: *focusing on the details in communicating with others and excessive verbalization* (indiscretion, gossip, teasing).

#### **4.2.4. Controversy of female intuition**

We also approached the subject of female intuition, which we found that men perceive as a particular way of using intuition in general, based on attention to detail and thorough analysis of the facts. Women perceive it in much the same way, accepting that intuition, generally speaking, is characteristic to both sexes, but in their view there is a gender-based dimension of intuition, a specifically female dimension associated with sensitivity and deeper attention, but also with a certain analytical ability which confers an aura of paranormal, of prediction of some facts development towards a particular outcome.

#### **4.2.5. Versatility of communication style**

There are important gender similarities in the formation and manifestation of communication styles. Regardless of gender, the questioned social actors' reports have highlighted the importance of context (the background for communication development, the degree of familiarity of the interlocutors, personality factors). Within official environments, or in situations where the degree of familiarity is lower, both women and men need an accommodation period, feeling pressures, constraints, when using a more formal language. An important similarity lies in the influence of professional work on the communication style - the nature of the profession, where it involves systematic interactions with people, causes the formation of personal communication skills, making the individual to own a more flexible style, more uninhibited and to have a greater ability to adapt to various communication situations.

In the private space there are also similarities, men and women recognizing that the approached communication style lies under personality factors and changes depending on

the topics approached in conversation: there are issues where women talk more (affective-emotional aspects) and issues where men talk more. Both sexes can verbalize more, or may be more silent in private according to the presence of time or personality constraints. An interesting revealed aspect is the social actors' remark according to which, between the couple partners, a particular *communication code* is formed in time, to facilitate interaction and through which understanding the other is less dependent on oral communication.

I tried to understand, from social actors' perspective, the reasons of expressing gender-based communication in groups of friends or acquaintances, aspect which was revealed by the interviewed subjects during the course of the research, a phenomenon according to which, in groups, women and men are grouped and separated from each other, though not for long. We recorded similarities in gender perceptions regarding the explanation of this communication phenomenon: according to the questioned social actors' perceptions, it is based on a preference for certain subjects - men prefer more abstract topics, women prefer more tangible topics related to personal life relations with others. An important difference was the fact that in addition to different topics of interest, men assign to women a more pronounced competitive spirit ("enemy spy") which leads them to talk more with each other in groups - the competition is with other women, but also with other couples. But still, women do not acquire the assigned competitive motivation, rather arguing that the disclosure of personal matters to other women and in the same time, questioning them, is due to their desire to share as many common experiences.

#### **4.2.6. The influence of a child's / children's birth in couple relationship**

We found significant similarities in conceptualizing the influence of the child's / children's birth in the couple life on communication dynamics, communication is more varied for couples without children - where they approach topics such as organizing the house, commenting on daily life, future plans, the couple relationship and relationships with others - and more condensed in couples with a child / children - where the main topics are upbringing the children and childcare, family relationships, money management and organising the household.

Addressing the couples with a child / children, we noticed that both men and their partners refer to a significant change which is generated by the child's birth in relationship dynamics in general, but also in structuring communication in particular. Both men and women claim that the child's birth in a couple involves advantages and disadvantages alike, but their perception is slightly different. Representing the benefits of child's /

children's birth in a couple relationship: while men appreciate more the stimulation of the emotional-affective assets, of self-esteem (the status of parents) and of couple relationship cohesion, women attach a greater importance to other advantages - for them, the child is the achievement of relationship full age and, in the same time, the critical point in the relationship dynamics when marriage changes in family. Another important advantage for women is to stimulate the mutual-knowledge (increase of confidence in the couple partner, if he manages to meet the expectations of the father role).

There are gender differences in assessing the disadvantages where we realized that the most important sensitive issue for men is losing the forefront in their partner's attention and the decrease of physical attraction that occurs immediately after the child's birth in the relationship, but especially the significant changes in their life program (limiting the freedom of movement, the time spent in two, giving up some habits). Women share the appreciation of some disadvantages mentioned by their partners in this chapter, such as limiting the personal leisure and social life of the couple and giving up some personal habits, but for them are all accepted more easily be considered natural, inherent in acquiring the status of mother.

An amendment that emerges from our study refers to the possibility to overcome at least some of these disadvantages; this is available to couples who enjoy more or less the assistance from close relatives who can take over, even if only temporarily, a series of duties and tasks related to child upbringing and childcare.

The presence of child / children in the couple produces a series of changes to the psychosocial individual development of social actors – for men, becoming a father creates a sense of personal empowerment, which contributes to increasing self-esteem, they recognizing and stimulating altruism among personal values. Women also experience personal empowerment with becoming a "mother", but they also claim physical and mental stress and overwork, and also tension and role conflict.

The significant change which the presence of child / children produces at the communication structure, within the meaning of its pragmatics, is similarly perceived and evaluated. A significant change also in the communication contents is the child's matter with all its implications, is the central topic of discussions in two, but, particularly in the behavioural manifestations of partners in communicative conflict situations, where both men and women have a more pronounced tendency of self-control over their emotions, moderating their impulsivity and aggressive language implicitly, becoming more rational in dealing with the situation.

Disadvantages in communication are also similarly felt by women and men, who show that now have less time or no time at all for intimate discussions in two, where they used to practice self-disclosure, where the partners talked about their deepest sensibilities, emotions, feelings. As positive effects, it appears that the presence of children stimulates mutual-knowledge, understanding and enhancing the balance in couple communication, directing it mainly to pragmatic functions.

#### **4.2.7. Communication conflicts: sources, manifestations, solving strategies**

We managed to outline some general areas of conflict in family communication, from which we developed secondary lines later revealed by the interviewed social actors' reports.

*A first general area emerges on the expression of men communicative behaviour referring to the preference for practical problem solving approach - we noticed a women's tendency to perceive their partners as being almost equally interested in addressing the emotional aspects of the relationship in couple communication, while men perceive themselves as being more interested in the instrumental aspects of the relationship. We thus have the image, of a general area of potential conflict in couple communication - although women expect men to be concerned in communication with addressing the affective, emotional aspects of the relationship, they are more interested in addressing practical problems with the purpose of solving them .*

*A second general area generating conflicts has emerged on women communicative behaviour referring to the prevalence employing responses and emotional reactions in communication with the partner – the data being conferred by comparing perceptions show that, although this is a women communicative behaviour, both at an overall level of population and at the study realities, although women are perceived as being more emotional and men are perceived as being more rational in communication, women see men as being more emotional than men admit, and men see women more rational than women admit. A potential area of conflict is highlighted here at interpreting the messages in couple communication: for example, men might expect, to a greater extent, that women should provide rational answers and feedback in communication.*

*Another general conflict area we identified with regard to expressing the communicative behaviours referring to the importance of having the last word in couple communication – comparing the perceptions reveals a gender difference regarding the importance of having the last word in conversations in two, where we see that more than half of the men consider that this behaviour is not typical to them, but from women's perspective, this is applicable only for 38%. Thus, we may speak about a potential conflict*

area with regard to expressing authority and power in couple in decision-making dimension.

*Finally, the last general conflict area in couple communication is constructed on expressing the communicative behaviour of giving feedback in communication with the partner* - most women and men consider they give sufficiently well their feedback in communication with the couple partner, reason for which we have classified this communicative behaviour within the mixed communication style. However, this behaviour can generate a conflict area between the couple, as comparing the perceptions reveal that men perceive themselves as being better than their partners, while women claim the opposite. Problems may arise in the dimension of message reception, of active listening to their partners, both women and men, considering that they listen to each other enough, when in fact they overestimate themselves.

Analysing the reports offered by the questioned social actors, a gender similarity in the perception on the conflict sources in couple communication is found within couples having children, who identify two main conflict areas: *aspects related to upbringing and looking after the children and to spending their leisure*. Overall, a gender similarity is also given by identifying the relationships with extended family as a conflict source, both in couples with children, as well as the others. There are also gender differences, our subjects' reports indicating that men are more sensitive to their partners' critical attitudes, on some certain behaviours and manifestations, especially in public, as well as to the criticism on emotional-affective support they offer. Another sensitive issue for men is linked approaching the issue of financial resources management. The perception of emotional-affective support is important for women, who notice their partner's withdrawal into themselves as a sensitive aspect of couple communication, and the lack of feedback from their partner when they want it.

#### **4.2.7.1. Gender similarities and differences in conflict manifestations**

A gender difference is the withdrawal attitude which occurs as communicative behaviour adopted more by men in conflicts, as minimal verbalization, the dialogue abandonment dialogue, or even leaving the conflict area. For women, excessive verbalization is the conduct adopted in conflicts as a means to release the accumulated tensions, felt on a personal level, expressed in verbally aggressive behaviour. This is also confirmed at the general population level: the use of hard, hostile or trivial expressions, in couple communication conflicts. In about half of our population where the behaviour is manifested, we recorded a significant gender difference in perceptions level according to which women assume, to a greater extent than men, the use of a harder language in

communicative conflicts, although men do not perceive this. We also noticed similarities in raising the voice, in impulsivity, being ironic with the other, but also in experiencing some negative feelings.

#### **4.2.7.2. Solving strategies**

We identified two main strategies used by investigated units of study in conflict management: *the rational approach* - where the couple partners value the mediation understood as a shared desire to achieve consensus and mutual tolerance. The main steps are the immediate approach of the problem and tackling it until exhaustion occurs. As an interesting observation here, we found that the child's birth can trigger couple orientation towards the rational strategy for conflict management; *emotional approach* - where partners manifest abandonment and withdrawal behaviour, resulting in discussion postponement. Solving is done late, either by resuming the issue discussion, either by sending them into a taboo area.

Gottman (1994) states that there can be distinguished three couple types according to the methods used for managing family conflicts: validating couple, volatile couple and avoiding couple. In our approach we have also identified the existence of these three couple types, except that we have discovered combinatorial types. In the validating couple, the partners discuss their sensitive issues immediately, they respects the different views within the conflicts, meanwhile, expressing a tendency to compromise. In the volatile couple, partners also address the sensitive issues immediately and easily, but are very emotionally expressive, persuasive, seeking to win every dispute. In the avoiding couples, the partners loathe the idea of discord, each striving to avoid potential conflicts, to please each other so that conflict interactions would not occur. When disputes can not be avoided, they usually choose to abandon the definitive solution to the disagreement issues.

### **4.3. Differences and similarities in communication in public areas – Communicational competence**

#### **Turn-taking**

In single-sex groups, men use more Interruptions and women use more Overlaps, what made us conclude that women discussions have a stronger tendency to collaborate, while men discussions are geared more towards competition. In mixed groups, women used the Overlaps most, but in men style this time, Interruptions are used as much as the simple turn-takings, increasing also the use of overlaps. There remains a slight tendency

for men to use interruptions more in turn-taking. For women, the style remains centred on the use of overlaps.

There is a gender difference in using Simple Turn-takings, meaning that women use less simple turn-takings in single-sex discussions, while in mixed discussions, we noticed a similarity in this regard.

### **Conversational style**

We recorded similarities in mixed groups in the distribution of interventions and the time engaged in discussion, although men have slightly higher scores than women. In single-sex discussions, conversations were focused around a few dominant speakers who occupied the most time in communication space, with the most interventions and the longest periods of time. Also within the mixed discussion, we had four dominant speakers, two men and two women, between which we recorded no significant differences on verbalization.

In what the minimal responses are concerned, in our research were also confirmed the observations of the previous studies, according to which women use more minimal responses than men in single-sex discussions. There were no significant differences in the use of emphatic interrogative phrases, although we found a slight tendency of women to use them more in language in single-sex groups than men. Within the mixed discussion, the differences were kept, meaning that in women speeches we recorded more minimal responses than in men speeches.

We confirmed the results indicated by previous research, women also using in our study approximately three times more ambiguous phrases than men in single-sex group conversations. The concept of *mild language*, conveyed in reference literature referring to women style in conversations, seems to support this time in our research, in the mixed discussion, women speeches recording almost twice more building emphatic interrogative phrases and ambiguous phrases than men in their speeches.

We noticed similarities in the use of questions, noting that men have used some more questions than women in single-sex discussions, although speciality studies suggest otherwise. We found similarities in the use of questions and in mixed discussions.

There were no differences in imperatives and trivial language, but only in the use of humour, where, in single-sex groups, we found that men used jokes twice more than women, noting that the initiation of jokes is more balanced between participants in men groups than in women groups. A difference from the single-sex discussions, in this chapter was manifested in the single-sex discussions where men and women have decreased the number of jokes, the scores being balanced.



The issue of asymmetries revealed gender similarities, the discussion frames being therefore equally understood by women and men, an explanatory factor here is perhaps the existing degree of familiarity between the participants in discussions.

A feature of our study is that beyond the few differences in Communicational Competence revealed single-sex discussions and in the mixed discussion, in all groups there were delineated several dominant speakers, similar in the Communicational Competence owned by them: the dominant speakers have the most interventions and spend most of the time of conducting the group discussions, they use in the Turn-taking both Interruptions and Overlaps, and have similar conversational styles concerning ambiguous phrases, emphatic interrogative phrases, questions and jokes. However a difference is maintained here, in the use of minimal responses, where women have three times more than men.

The classic gender distinction brought about by Tannen (1990) who suggested the concepts of *rappor-talk* and *report-talk*, are not confirmed in the reality we investigated. The author claims that women feel more comfortable to communicate in private, while men are more comfortable to communicate in public. For most women, the purpose of communication is to create a connection, to develop relationships with the other / others, focusing on similarities and common experiences. Therefore, women tend to feel comfortable in communication when at home or in places where they feel at home, practicing communication in a more intimate, private manner, with one, or at most a few people they feel close to. For most men, however, communication has the main purpose to help them claim their independence and to negotiate, or to maintain their status within a social hierarchy. This purpose is achieved showcasing knowledge and information, demonstrating skills and taking over the forefront in discussions and conversations using the dominant verbalization - stories, jokes, anecdotes.

This distinction can also be brought about in our field of study, but under the amendment that the adoption and expression of *rappor-talk* and *report-talk* by men and women is under situational paradigm - there are *contextual factors* that influence the social actors' communication styles. The degree of intimacy and familiarity with interlocutors, for example, determines verbalization and communication style adopted in the public space. Temperament, personality or nature of the profession, also play an important role - where social actor's profession specific nature requires the practise of some communicative skills (journalism, public relations, sales), being integrated in couple communication style. Situational specific nature of the couple, plays an important

role as partners within the partners' available time - where one works intensively with a difficult schedule, regardless of their gender, it is expressed less verbally in private.

Differences in the involvement of women and men in different contexts must be explained rather in terms of different cultural expectations about women's and men's abilities, taking account of their areas of competence, in relation to specific factors affecting these expectations in particular situations.

#### **4.4. Meanings and limitations of research**

We take responsibility for a number of limitations of the thesis, starting with the theoretical basis brought into discussion, where the lack of research on the specific topic from the field of Romanian sociology leads to the most of presented approaches and theories to have been brought from the Anglo-Saxon scientific area.

In our investigation, the concepts of women communicative behaviours, men communicative behaviours of and mixed communicative behaviours were intensively brought about. We remind here that there has not yet been substantiated a very clear scientific standpoint on what is clearly *male* or *female* in communication. The research of gender influence in communication is still at an early stage and is subject to cultural, political and social pressures, that should not be underestimated. Also, there still are discussions on communicative behaviours and attitudes considered to be reflected in what we call *mixed communication style* - that combines male and female communicative features and characteristics - although it is more and more emerged in specialized literature that both men and women show a combination of male and female communicative behaviours in their communicative repertoire (Ekstein and Goldman, 2001).

Naturally, we implicitly assume the limits of qualitative approach, especially the approaches based on case study - of which the most prominent would be the absence of any possibility of generalizing the results - but, at the same time, we believe that we managed to bring a positive contribution by bringing into discussion, although in a narrow perspective, the emmic perspective of the studied phenomenon - the "inside" understanding of the phenomenon, as shown in the involved social actors' reports.

Of course, the family reality in general, and the dimension of couple communication, in particular, is much more complex and we do not even claim to generalize the image identified by us in the investigated area, acknowledging the limits of the qualitative approach used in this study, which, although allowed us the "inside" description of the

phenomenon, through the reports of those directly involved in its processuality, can not provide enough support to withstand the rigors of the results generability.

The lack of substantial resources to allow us to interview a larger number of cases, also restricted the valences of our investigation. Poor representation of specialized literature on the approached subject, persuaded me to express an excess of caution in the propounded study, focusing on a specific case - young, urban, with higher education. The reporting theoretical background is indebted to Anglo-Saxon sociology, predominantly to the American sociology.

What we have achieved is a picture of gender differences and similarities in couple communication at a certain time and in a specific and confined background, enough to draw attention and provide a starting point for deeper further investigations.

Even though the advanced statistical processing is not appropriate to our investigational approach nature, which aimed to give a widest description of the phenomenon and understanding it in terms of emotions, feelings, the involved social actors' representations, yet we worked with a relatively homogeneous population. There would be required to extend the study by taking into account the couples included in other age groups, even in rural areas of residence, and integrating different levels of education. The comparison is essential to further understanding of the phenomenon. Effervescent social dynamics would also be taken into account - couples residing in large cities to be included in the analysis, because the social constraints and pressures of life are different there.

A tender issue in the present study was also conferred by the degree of familiarity existing between the questioned subjects in the final phase of research - group interviews - which made it impossible to explore the operational dimensions of the concept of communicational competence, as well as complementing or use of imperatives or trivial or taboo language.

The propounded thesis presents meanings not only for the interested researchers in addressing gender in couple communication, but also for the social actors who live and produce the studied phenomenon. The offered results and conclusions are therefore of great interest to further understanding of the phenomenon in the common consciousness, the first step being their return especially to the units representing our population.

Any approach that addresses the topic of gender in communication is welcome in Romanian sociology, in which the studies and research on macro-social phenomena are prevailing, the micro-social area being less represented. The lack of specialized scientific Romanian literature on gender issues in family communication can not be covered by a

single study, nor do we have this claim, but we believe that at least we managed to open a direction of bidding research for social sciences researchers from Romania, who undoubtedly, will deepen and develop the knowledge of this phenomenon type and in the current Romanian society, by further approaches.

The use of understanding this phenomenon is only obvious if we refer to a concept essential to everyday social life: *Understanding*. Developing effective communication strategies in the family is welcome since the family group members aim at increasing satisfaction to commitment and to stability of family relations.

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## ANNEX

Table A: Distribution of communicative behaviours in specialized literature

<b>Men communicative behaviours</b>	<b>Women communicative behaviours</b>	<b>Mixed communicative behaviours</b>
Preference for practical problem-solving approach	Maintaining eye contact in communication with partner in couple communication	Time allocated to discuss important issues related to couple life
Owning a private space in the living area of the house	Practicing verbalization to disclose intimate, deep feelings	Concern with the issue of physical attractiveness
Spirit of competition and tendency to be imposing on the couple partner	Tendency to avoid conflicts and disputes with the partner	Being ironic with the couple partner in public
Tendency to focus their attention more on the information content in the discussions in two, placing in the background the emotional-affective dimension behind the words	Prevalence of reactions and emotional responses	Feeling of dissatisfaction with the appreciation expressed by the couple partner
Having a good self-image	Using words and expressions that reflect insecurity	Evaluating some of the partner's behaviours by relating them to gender stereotypes
Preference to address the issues as directly as possible	Providing feedback in couple communication	Using hard, hostile expressions, or trivial words in communicating with the partner
Importance of having the last word in couple communication	Reliance on intuition in understanding the partner's speech	Evaluating the influence of keeping secrets from their partner on the quality of couple communication
Focusing the discussions in two on pragmatic aspects, of practical interest	Greater attention given to obtaining the couple partner's appreciation but also others' appreciation in making decisions about the choice of clothes	Difficulties experienced in finding an appropriate time and a suitable location to discuss with the couple partner about problems, important issues about the relationship
Reduced frequency of smile in communication with their partner	Ability to "read" the nonverbal language	Difficulties in revealing deep, intimate feelings and emotions, to the couple partner
Diminished practise of communicating emotions through nonverbal language	Touch initiation in getting close to their partner	Difficulties experienced on an individual level in the conduct of negotiation process and decision making
Inability to correctly interpret nonverbal language	Tendency to give the forefront in discussions in two and play a passive role	Physical distancing from the partner when experiencing negative emotions

Table B: Distribution of communicative behaviours in the field of research

<b>Men communicative behaviours</b>	<b>Women communicative behaviours</b>	<b>Mixed communicative behaviours</b>
Preference for practical problem-solving approach	Concern with the issue of physical attractiveness	Time allocated to discuss important issues related to couple life
Diminished practise of communicating emotions through nonverbal language	Prevalence of reactions and emotional responses in couple communication	Evaluating some of the partner's behaviours by relating them to gender stereotypes
Tendency to give the forefront in discussions in two and play a passive role	Reliance on intuition in understanding the partner's speech	Evaluating the influence of keeping secrets from their partner on the quality of couple communication
Tendency to focus their attention more on the information content than on emotional-affective one in the discussions in two		Physical distancing from the partner when experiencing negative emotions
Tendency to avoid conflicts and disputes with their partner		Concern with maintaining a good self-image
		Focusing the discussions in two on pragmatic aspects, of practical interest
		Preference to address the issues as directly as possible
		Maintaining eye contact with the partner in couple communication
		Practicing verbalization to disclose intimate, deep feelings
		Providing feedback in couple communication
		Greater attention given to obtaining the couple partner's appreciation but also others' appreciation in making decisions about the choice of clothes
		Ability to "read" the non-verbal language
		Touch initiation in getting physically close to their partner

Table C: Distribution of communicative behaviours in the units of analysis

Men communicative behaviours	Women communicative behaviours	Mixed communicative behaviours
Preference for practical problem-solving approach	Concern with the issue of physical attractiveness	Time allocated to discuss important issues related to couple life
Diminished practise of communicating emotions through nonverbal language	Prevalence of reactions and emotional responses in couple communication	Evaluating some of the partner's behaviours by relating them to gender stereotypes
Tendency to give the forefront in discussions in two and play a passive role	Reliance on intuition in understanding the partner's speech	Evaluating the influence of keeping secrets from their partner on the quality of couple communication
		Physical distancing from the partner when experiencing negative emotions
		Concern with maintaining a good self-image
		Focusing the discussions in two on pragmatic aspects, of practical interest
		Preference to address the issues as directly as possible
		Maintaining eye contact with partner in couple communication
		Practicing verbalization to disclose intimate, deep feelings
		Providing feedback in couple communication
		Greater attention given to obtaining the couple partner's appreciation but also others' appreciation in making decisions about the choice of clothes
		Ability to "read" the nonverbal language
		Tendency to avoid conflicts and disputes with the partner