

# THE ROLE OF COUNSELING IN THE CASE OF COUPLES WHO HAVE DYSFUNCTIONAL RELATIONSHIPS

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**Abstract:** The practical applicability of our research consists of the intervention part through counseling in the case of couples who have dysfunctional relationships. From our group of subjects, a number of 42 subjects have been framed in the category of dysfunctional relationships, either because of a low satisfaction in the relationship, or because of some deficit attachment styles. Our subjects entered in an individual and couple counseling program which took 3 months with a frequency of 2 sessions per week, every session of 2 hours.

**Key words:** intervention, counseling, couple, dysfunctional relationships, attachment.

## Introduction

A frequent opinion in our occidental culture is that romantic love consists of one of the most often used criteria for establishing a marriage or a similar relationship.

Referring to the quality and amplitude of human capacities to love, many authors, from whom R. Michael (2002), notices that self love is the landed premise to the love of the other, because you cannot offer someone something you yourself cannot cumulate in your soul thesaurus.

Steinberg (1988) suggests a three-cornered theory of love, which implies: engagement, intimacy and passion. According to this author, the quality of love depends on the weight of each ingredient from these three already mentioned. Of course, the most invincible love is that which synthesizes, at high altitudes these components. Questionless is that love can outlast only between equals, who does not manifest the tendency to „take hostage and who learnt to love themselves and cherish their inner souls.” (P. Ferrini, 2000, p 37). A lasting conjugal love looks like a delicate flower, which requests to be fed and protected through the attentive effort of both partners, or in other words, it is their common creation.

Doubtless the harmony of a couple is conditioned by the way the partners know how to meet each other, and vibe together in the sexual plan as well. A wise attitude towards sexuality exhorts us to challenge the extremes, the underestimation, but the overestimation of sexual relations as well in the economy of a couple. The aggressive and vulgar sexuality, which is often sold so often by mass-media, as a result of a sexual revolution, comes along with many multiple negative consequences, in the social plan and in the individual plan as well.

The background of a couple is not a heavenly space, without any tensions and misapprehensions, and the legalisation of a relationship does not make sure contract, which can guarantee a common future. As years go by, the partners succeed in knowing their whole geography, and routine is an unsated pinhole, it destroys as much as possible the alive texture of the couple.

The danger to the integrity of a couple is represented by the loss of freedom, regardless that this can affect only one of the partners or both of them. „ The most beautiful relation between two people, observes A. Nuta (2001, p.136), is the relation between two liberties, and a meeting lasts the same as a liberty takes.” In other words, they are not siamese twins, which means that they have the right to have an extra life to their marriage such as: their interests, their friends etc. Of course, the permission of several moments of taking a deep breath is conditioned by some moral limits, because without these moral limits it could go in an negative liberty. Going on with the theme of freedom in a couple Kahlil Gibran (2000, p.19) recommends: „ Stay together, but not so close, because the temple columns are raised at a certain distance, and the oak and cypress do not grow at the shade of each other.”

In reality the majority of partners in a couple promote the psychology of external control, which means that every tendency one has to pilot the other and to constantly throw the guilt upon the other for all the disfunctions present in the couple. Developing this theme W. Glasser (2000), the founder of The Institute of Therapy in Relations (1967), pleads for the change of external control with the election theory, as an imperative for the conserving of the vitality of a couple. In the consonance with this theory, from these 10 axioms which contaminates, the one that really detaches itself like a very important lead is the assuredness that you can only control your own life.

Doubtless, the negative cheers are contaminated in the interior of a family. This is why, they have to be maintained in control, that means not to throw them on the other with the same ease with which the radioactive junk is discharged.

Results that any attempt of correction in a couple can advert the theory of election, which allows the commutation of negotiation with constraint, empathy with encouragement.

Also, there is a wise evidence in life, that the members of a marriage should actively intervene in a correct time to de-energise any conflict. As J Dopson (1994) mentions that the succeed in such intervention is conditioned by the intelligent

choose of the right moment, the adequate space and the method applied. In a concrete way, the optimum time is when the partner is in a good cheer, for example, not when he comes home after work. As for the space, it must be in a good one, outside home and obviously without their own kids. But, the most efficient method is the dialogue, an affectionate one, the initiator must not mention any of the disfunctions of the other but just mention their own desires and problems.

Unfortunately, often, when these tendencies of helping the couple do not work they come to the point of divorce. The partners realize that, as the American psychologist P. Kauk (1995, p.27), the penitentiary key attached to the others ring."

The request of therapy comes from the desire of escaping the cognitive chaos, resulted from an insufficient function of structured history. The therapist will be able to adopt an individual, couple, family approach to each case, according to the real practice of the situation. In these therapist approaches, the use of analogic methods are of a huge importance, this is because the aspects of history functions to a level of „over-consciousness". Two of these techniques are in a particular way used to explore systematically the cognitive absolute: „The systemic sculptures" (Caille, 1995) and „the systemic game of the goose" (Caille and Rey 1995). These are used at every level of affiliation, but they will be outlined as a reference to the absolute cognitive of the couple.

To the majority of these cases the application of these techniques take us to correct results, except for the situation when one of the partners wants to divulge the specific character of the couple relation.

The satisfaction in a couple relation is a complex aspect which is based on some main principal features, but which is influenced by the level of general satisfaction/insatisfaction of the subject. The insatisfaction for the life conditions, social and economic, the absence of a job or other eveniments can influence the general insatisfaction, for life in general, and in special towards the partner. Most often the partners in a couple are responsible for the insatisfaction of the other that contributes to a general level of discontent.

Through the individual and couple counseling, it is desired that the self esteem of the subjects should grow, as a result of a good perception of the image which the partners have of themselves. The participation to discussions, the analyse of the couple problems, the discussion of the main negative behaviour and most of all the change of self esteem and its growth.

## **Research results**

The practical applicability of our research consists of the intervention part through counseling, the case of couples who have difunctional relations. Our subjects, a number of 42, all having difunctional problems, either because of a low level of satisfaction in the couple, or because of several deficit attachment styles.

We assessed for the level of satisfaction in a relationship a valoric scale with 5 classes: very good, good, medium, weak, very weak and all the subjects who have

been in the categories of medium level and weak level were included for the intervention.

Also, the subjects should show one of the attachment styles as: anxious, avoidance, prepossessed.

In order to illustrate better the progress of our subjects as a result of the counseling program, as a practical use in our work, we will present in the following the obtained results of the subjects in three scales, in comparison, before and after the intervention.

Table no. 1 and figure no. 1 synthesizes the comparative results for the satisfaction in the couple relationship.

The comparative presentation of the results at the beginning and the end of the program of intervention shows the positive effect that counseling had over our subjects. In general, the result to these three scales have registered ameliorations towards a stable relation based on a sure attachment.

**Tabel no.1 The comparative results to the Scale of satisfaction in a relation at the beginning and the end of the counseling**

<b>Satisfaction in a relationship</b>	<b>beginning</b>	<b>end</b>
<b>Very good (1-16 points)</b>	0	2
<b>Good (17-33 points)</b>	0	5
<b>Up medium (34-50 points)</b>	0	27
<b>Below medium (50-66 points)</b>	17	8
<b>Weak (67-83 points)</b>	15	0
<b>Very weak (84-100 points)</b>	10	0
<b>Total</b>	42	42

At the beginning of the program of counseling we did not have any of the 42 subject who could be positioned at the first three levels, after the end of the program we have 2 subjects with a very good satisfaction, 5 with a good satisfaction, and 17 with a medium satisfaction, and only 8 with a below medium and neither one in the last two valoric groups (low satisfaction and very low).

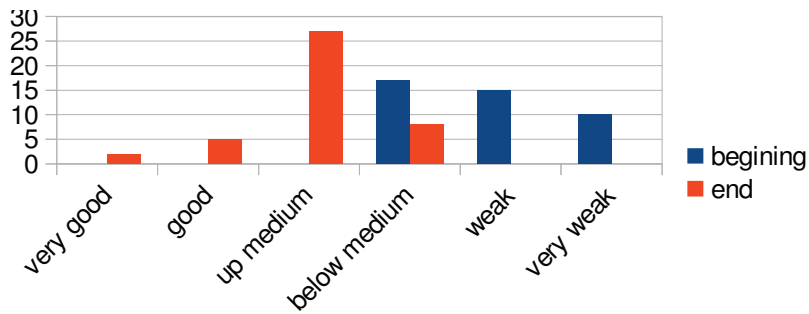


Figure no.1 Comparative results at the Satisfaction Scale in a relation at the beginning and end of the counseling

All of the 42 subject included in the counseling program have benefits, this proved by the fact that many couples have been included at the first classes of satisfaction after the program. For the rest of 8 subjects who have been resulted in a medium level of satisfaction, in this case it either needs to be continued the counseling or, in this case it is not about the other partner but a general insatisfaction of one of the

The satisfaction in a couple relation is a complex aspect which is based on some main principal features, but which is influenced by the level of general satisfaction/insatisfaction of the subject. The insatisfaction for the life conditions, social and economic, the absence of a job or other eveniments can influence the general insatisfaction, for life in general, and in special towards the partner. Most often the partners in a couple are responsible for the insatisfaction of the other that contributes to a general level of dicontent.partners which affects the couple.

In this way, the relation of a couple can be damaged, even if intially was about an assured attachement, but in the progress it changed with the influences of several external factors which took the relation to some alternations of the values system, to the change of priorities or even to saturation or the desire of change.

The comparative results at the beginning and the end of counseling are represented in the following table no. 2 and illustrated in figure no. 2, for the referref scale to the self-esteem.

For the Self esteem it is obtained the comparative distribution almost balanced with that of satisfaction in a couple relation.

**Table no.2 The comparative results for the Sef Esteem Scale at the beginning and the eng of counseling**

Satisfaction in a relationship	beginning	end
Very good (1-16 points)	0	8
Good (17-33 points)	0	12
Up medium (34-50 points)	0	17
Below medium (50-66 points)	13	85
Weak (67-83 points)	17	0
Very weak (84-100 points)	12	0
Total	42	42

At the beginning of the counseling program, the answers of the subjects, were concentrated in the last three valoric groups (below medium, week and very week), at the end of the program the answers go to the first categories ( up medium, good and very good).

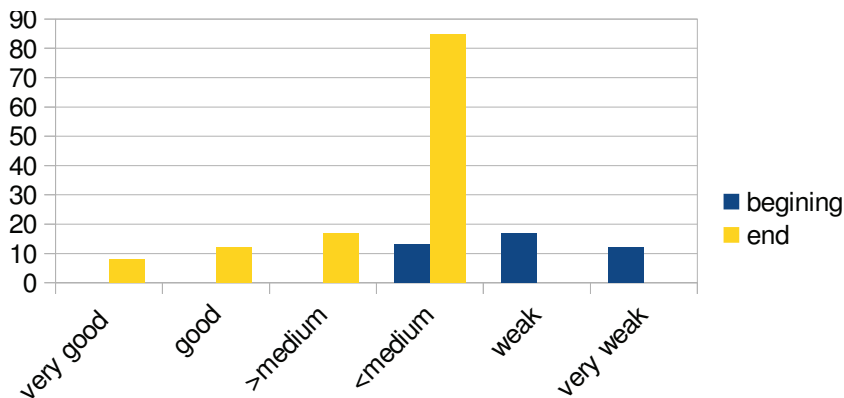


Figure no. 2 The comparative results for the Sef Esteem Scale at the beginning and the eng of counseling.

Thus, we have 8 subjects of whom self esteem is very good, 12 subjects with a good self esteem and 17 subjects with a medium self esteem. It remains a number of 5 subjects who represent a below medium, but we don not have any other subject in the categories of very week and weak.

Through the individual and couple counseling, it desired that the self esteem of the subjects should grow, as a result of a good perception of the image which the partners have of themselves. The participation to discussions, the analyse of the couple problems, the discussion of the main negative behaviour and most of all the change of self esteem and its growth.

In the moment when the subjects saw each other and realised that the pther partner appreciates them, and that they are valued by him, they improved their way of seeing themselves and it diminished the negative evaluations.

From the professional literature it is known that the attachement is built gradually going through several stages and it is marked by the qualities of the interractions between the two partners. Also it has been observed that the nature of the attachment relations which a person has from his childhood continues to have an influence in the capacity of forming intimate relations in adolescence and adult period.

The attachment style refers to specific types of experimantaion of couple relations. A good attachement style is represented by confort offered by intimacy and the ability to depend on the partener, while the avoidant style is formed by a fear of identity and high dependence on self. These persons have an anxious attacheent and are described by gelosy, they permanently need to be very close to their partner.

**Table 3. The comparative styles of attachmenet before and after the intervention**

<b>Attachemenet styles</b>	<b>initial</b>	<b>final</b>
<b>Assured style of attachment</b>	0	37
<b>Anxious style of attachment</b>	22	2
<b>Avoidance style of attachment</b>	9	2
<b>Prepossessed style of attachment</b>	11	1
<b>Total</b>	42	42

We consider the attachment with the most important factor upon the relation of a couple. This is why an assured attachment based on mutual trust of acceptance and toleration, on understanding and discussions between the partners to be the most adequate style for a couple relation of long duration.

If we take into consideration the dates of the proffessional literature, the assured attachment style is characterized by confort, offered by intimacy and independence and presents a model of a positive thing of self and others. The persons with a style of avoidance, they avoid intimacy, fearing that they would lose their autonomy and independence.

Our subjects modified their attachment style, which is possible at the adult age as Bowlby affirmed in 1982 (apud. Crowell and Treboux, 1995).

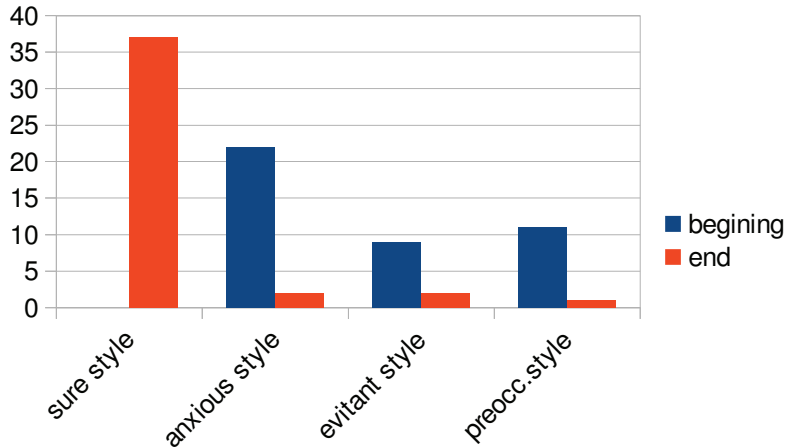


Figure no. 3 Comparative styles of attachment before and after the intervention

The subjects with an anxious style had the most important role in our investigation. Through the alternation of self esteem and of satisfaction in a couple, it could be realised the change of attachment style: the anxiety declines for the fear of not losing the partner or being hurt. The counseling helped them assure the fact that these fears had no real reasons. After they had several discussion with the therapist and with the partner.

At the end of the intervention program a number of 37 from the 42 of subjects with attachment problems have now an assured attachment, knowing that this attitude will help the future of the couple. There has been left only 2 subjects who present anxious attachment style, 2 avoidance style and one propossessed style.

The attachment system can be defined as a motivational system of control which has the main objectiv the promotion of the security in the background of a couple. (Santrock, 2002)

The obtained results and success show that our program highlights the fact that these subjects really had the need of a counsellor for the consolidation of a relationship. Tracking down the disfunctional attachment could prevent many divorce cases, by including these couples in a program of counselling.

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