

PERCEPTIVE DIFFERENCES ON DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Ioana-Anisa ATUDOREI¹

Abstract: *This article analyzes the perceptive differences on domestic violence against women. These perceptive differences refer to the moral emotions that both specialists and non specialists believe that social actors should experience when they commit an abuse qualified as an act of domestic violence against women. The purpose of this research was on one side to identify the potential perceptive differences of these moral emotions, materialized as feelings of embarrassment, shame and guiltiness and on the other side to identify any perceptive differences as far as women' myths go.*

Key words: *domestic violence, "emotional blackmail", physical abuse, sexual abuse, moral emotions.*

1. Introduction

In the last three decades within general sociology a distinct branch of sociology emerged: the sociology of emotions. Moral emotions can be classified into desirable emotions and undesirable emotions, depending on the category they belong to, and regardless of the fact that they can be positive or negative.

Subsequently the next works were published: "A *Social Interactional Theory of Emotions*" (Kemper, 1978), "*Catharsis in Healing. Ritual and Drama*" (Scheff, 1979), the volumes "*Emotion, Social Theory, and Social Structure. A Macrosociological Approach*" (Barbalet, 1998) and "*Emotions in Socila Life. Critical Themes and Contemporary Issues*" (Bendelow, 1998), the works "*Feeling and Emotions. The Amsterdam Symposium*" (2004), "*The Sociology of Emotions*" (Turner, 2005). (cf. Chelcea, 2008, 11-12).

In his famous work "*Social Theory and Social Structure*" Robert Merton introduces the idea that the revealing of the unpredictable consequences of human actions represents a fundamental goal of sociology (Merton, 1936, pp. 421-436).

The concept of domestic violence goes beyond the physical and sexual violence, including also the "emotional blackmail". The emotional blackmail is a form of domestic violence that is not legally punished, but has destructive consequences on human relationships. The emotional blackmail can be defined as the form of domestic violence that precedes the physical abuse or goes along with the physical or/and with the sexual one.

Domestic violence should be analyzed from three points of view, depending on the type of abuse, because each type marks the person abused at a powerful degree.

This article's starting point was an exploratory research that was set, on one hand, on comparing the points of view of

¹ Department of Social Assistance and Communication, *Transilvania* University of Braşov.

the specialists in the social sciences, with those of non specialists regarding the moral emotions that social actors should experience when making use of domestic violence. On the other hand this research wanted to compare the perception of the specialists and the non specialists on the myths regarding violence of men against women. Also, this article wanted to analyze the professional influence on the perception of feelings experienced by fellows when they manifest domestic violence against women.

2. Contemporary social theories on emotions

- a). The drama sociology and the cultural theories stated that cultural standards are important factors that determine the type of emotions and their expression within the social context. (Clark, 1997; Goffman, 1983; Gordon 1990; Greenspan, 1988; Griffiths, 1997, 2001a; Hochschild, 1990; Thoits, 1990).
- b). The theories concerning rituals -refer to the situations when the individual empathizes with the event and gives the behavioural response that society has taught him to use when expressing his emotions. This behaviour has the role to increase the adhesion to the group exposed to the ritual. (Durkheim 1912; Collins 2004);
- c). The symbolic interactionism theories, which are based on identities and “self-conception” as elements of adjusting behaviours, refer to the fact that individuals tend to preserve and to support “ self-conceptions” in different contexts. (*apud* Chelcea, 2008, 68).
- d). The theories of symbolic interactionism which start from psychoanalytic vision.
- e). The exchange theories – deal with the emotions from the point of view of costs and benefits that the individual perceives. The individuals make use of domestic violence to benefit from

certain advantages, to control, to dominate. It is harder for some social actors to give up a level of comfort that was part of a long-desired lifestyle. Moreover, in order to preserve the desired lifestyle they will have to make use of personal resources and this implies sacrifices, mobility, bigger efforts, therefore they make use of the violent factor which, in their perception, is a conclusive factor ever since elementary sociology. The acts of violence can be analyzed as actions with a manipulative character.

- f). Structural theories – the social hierarchy of humans can also be perceived through the individuals’ status in society. The structuralist vision is based upon the three dimensions Karl Marx identified as: wealth, prestige and power. When “the other” validates the status of the aspirant individual who is integrated in a social position, then the individual personally experiences positive emotions. It can also be perceived as feed-back, as a way through which the other strengthens the perception on his position in social hierarchy.
- g). Evolutionary theories – analyze the evolution of emotions according to “natural laws” related to biological factors that interact with socio-cultural ones (Wentworth, 1992).

3. The role of the emotions of embarrassment, shame and guiltiness on society

In this work emotions are analyzed as a result of the abuse, and, although they are emotions with a negative effect on the individual that has been using domestic violence, they are socially desirable. The desirability lies in the mental resources which determine the future actions of the individual. It is preferable that the abuser represses his negative emotions of

embarrassment, shame and guiltiness. If he doesn't, then the act is perceived as normal behaviour by the abuser and these socially reprehensible acts can be repeated.

Dryden and Yankura (1993) distinguish between "the sense of guiltiness" and "beneficial remorse", the latter leading to avoiding self punishment: "When someone has deep regrets, he admits by default that he did something wrong and looks for straightening up the situation, if he can [...] he proves that he learned from this experience and has decided to reduce as long as he can the possibility of a similar action in the future" (*apud* Chelcea, 2008, 229).

Embarrassment, shame and guiltiness are emotions learned in the process of elementary socializing. An individual who hasn't been corrected during the process of socializing and hasn't been told that he should feel these emotions as a consequence of his attitude, of his negative actions will not be able to feel them in the future either.

4. Domestic violence as a determined and determining factor

Why is violence being analyzed as a determining factor?

Sigmund Freud and Konrad Lorenz (1972) were supporting the vision according to which aggression is something inborn, like an instinct.

Albert Bandura (1986) created the *theory of social learning of aggression*. The theory states that aggression is the result of: direct learning (when the individual is recompensed or punished for his behaviour) and the observing and imitation of conduct social models from surrounding individuals. Generally, an important influence over children is brought by adults' behaviour, their way of interaction and their attitudinal decisions. According to Bandura, aggression is met and learned most often in: the family, the social

environment, mass-media (especially television - which has the ability to transmit the forms of aggression both visual and auditory, unlike the radio which presents only auditory means of transmission).

The visual impact is much stronger than the auditory one concerning the learning and reproducing gestures and behaviours.

Why is violence also being perceived as a determined factor?

The use of violence is closely linked to the theory of decision. If the hand is to take the attack position and hit someone means that the brain has to receive an impulse from the decision factor. Only after that the action is concrete.

Other factors that influence aggression are to be found in sources related more to the individual and his behavioural conduct and reactivity. Some of them consist in: the type of personality, the hostile attributive tendencies, the sex differences, frustration, the direct attack or provocation, the physical or moral pain, heat, agglomeration, alcohol and drugs, sexy and pornographic materials (Ilut, 2004, pp 172-174).

5. Methodological specifications

The research is based on a sociological investigation. I have used the unprepared written exercise technique through which the structured questionnaire has been applied. The collecting of data has been made during the month of March, 2011. The questionnaires have been filled in by the students during seminars and classes. The research was meant to identify if there are any differences between specialists and non-specialists in perceiving the moral emotions that individuals who use domestic violence are desirable to experience. The noun "specialists" refers to students from social work faculty while "non-specialists" indicates those who are situated outside sociological sciences.

By using the terms “specialization” and “non-specialization” I have made reference to the knowledge and influence students have gained due to the field of study chosen by them, which is a determining factor in changing and influencing their perception and attitude regarding a social phenomenon.

The population sample was an *ad libitum* one and it was formed out of 80 students. The “specialists” sample, according to the sex variable, was formed out of 36 female students and 4 male ones. The “non-specialists” sample consisted of 28 female students and 12 male ones. The “specialists” were students from the 1st and 2nd year from a socio-humanistic branch while the “non-specialists” were students of same age belonging to engineering and technical faculties.

Students are on average 20 years and 11 months old. The sample is not representative for the socio-professional category of students who study in Brasov but it allows to identify the differences between perceptions.

The questionnaire consisted of 8 items from the Artemis program which was founded by the “Women against Violence” Association. These items were actually statements and myths regarding male violence against women. Domestic violence, according to the way of manifestation, has been grouped with terms such as emotional blackmail, physical violence or sexual violence. The moral emotions have been classified, according to the intensity of individual’s feelings resulted from domestic violence, in: embarrassment, shame and guiltiness.

The subjects were asked to mark with the symbol “X” the answer which they thought would describe best the feeling that the abuser should have in the respective situation.

The cases in which the abuser uses domestic violence have been exemplified with the help of the following statements:

- The abuser who resorts to emotional blackmail;
- The abuser who resorts to physical violence;
- The abuser who resorts to sexual violence.

6. Presenting the research data

The specialists have appreciated that the frequency of moral emotions of an abuser who resorts to emotional blackmailing was: 3 for embarrassment, 9 for shame and 28 for guiltiness. For the non-specialists the frequency was: 9 for embarrassment, 17 for shame and 14 for guiltiness.

The frequency, in specialists’ case, of an abuser who resorts to physical violence was: 2 for embarrassment, 4 for shame, 34 for guiltiness. Non-specialists have appreciated the frequency as follows: 6 for embarrassment, 10 for shame and 24 for guiltiness.

As for the abuser who resorts to sexual violence the frequency resulted from the specialists was: 0 for embarrassment, 0 for shame, 40 for guiltiness. The non-specialists counted 2 for embarrassment, 5 for shame and 33 for guiltiness.

From the total number of students (40 specialists and 40 non-specialists) the answers to the questions/myths regarding men violence against women were:

1. Abusers (men) have seen/learned this from their fathers:

Specialists		Nonspecialists	
Yes	No	Yes	No
32	8	14	16

2. Men who abuse their wives are mostly gipsies:

Specialists		Nonspecialists	
Yes	No	Yes	No
23	17	31	9

3. Some women feel attracted to men who abuse them:

Specialists		Nonspecialists	
Yes	No	Yes	No
0	40	6	34

4. Men find it hard to express their feelings:

Specialists		Nonspecialists	
Yes	No	Yes	No
4	36	16	24

5. Women invoke the abuse as a reason for abandoning the relation:

Specialists		Nonspecialists	
Yes	No	Yes	No
3	47	12	28

6. An aggressive man cannot control his predisposition for aggression:

Specialists		Nonspecialists	
Yes	No	Yes	No
8	32	23	17

7. The fury makes men lose their control:

Specialists		Nonspecialists	
Yes	No	Yes	No
3	37	29	11

8. Women provoke men:

Specialists		Nonspecialists	
Yes	No	Yes	No
6	34	18	22

7. Conclusions

As the results of the research show, there are significant differences between the opinions of specialists and non-specialists

concerning the moral emotions which are to be felt by the abusers.

It is also shown that specialists underline that guiltiness and shame are more likely to be the emotions of an abuser for all

three forms of violence while non-specialists have not so categorical opinions about this.

An explanation given to the fact that the two population samples (students) had different opinions is represented by their instruction level and knowledge which have been reflected by the researches they have participated to. Through all these "the specialists" had more opportunities of analyzing the social reprehensible phenomena, which changed their perspective.

Research showed that the higher the level of training on the phenomenon rises, the more intense and more severe becomes the moral emotion experienced by the respondents, meaning that it goes from feelings of embarrassment in the beginning and it ends with feelings of guiltiness.

Concerning the myths on domestic violence against women, there are well defined differences which can be explained using the same arguments presented in the case of moral emotions on the abuse.

References

1. Bandura, A.: *Social learning theory*. Englewood Cliffs, Prentice Hall, New Jersey. 1977.
2. Barbalet, J. M.: *Emotion, Social Theory, and Social Structure. A Macrosociological Approach*. Cambridge. Cambridge University Press, 2001.
3. Bendelow, G. (ed). (1998). *Emotions in Social Life. Critical Themes and Contemporary Issues*. Londra: Routledge.
4. Chelcea, S.: *Shame and guilt in public places*. Bucharest. Humanitas Publishing House, 2008.
5. Clark, C.: *Misery and Company: Sympathy in Everyday Life*. Chicago. University of Chicago Press, 1997.
6. Durkheim, É.: *The elementary forms of religious life*. Iaşi. Polirom Publishing House, 1995.
7. Goffman, E.: *The Interaction order*. American Sociological Review, 1983, 48, 1, 1-17.
8. Gordon, S. L.: *Social structural effects on emotions*. In Rosenberg, M., Turner, R. H. (eds.): *Social Psychology. Sociological Perspectives* New York. Basic Books. 1990 pp. 562-592.
9. Greenspan, P.: *Emotions and reasons: An Inquiry into Emotional Justification*. New York. Routledge. 1988.
10. Griffiths, P. E.: *What Emotions Really Are: The problem of Psychological*, 1997.
11. Griffiths, P. E.: *Emotion and the problem of psychological categories*. In Kaznaik, A. W. (ED.): *Emotions, Qualia and Consciousness*. 2001, pp. 28-41.
12. Hochschild, A. R.: *Emotion work, feeling rules, and social structure*. The American Journal of Sociology, 1979, 85, 3, 551-575.
13. Iluţ, P.: *Values, attitudes and social behaviours*. Iaşi. Polirom Publishing House, 2004.
14. Kemper, Th. D.: *A social Interactional Theory of Emotions*. New York. Wiley. 1978.
15. Merton, R. K.: *The Unanticipated Consequences of Purposive Social Action*. In Merton, R. K.: *Social Theory and Social Structure*. 1936, pp. 421-436.
16. Scheff, Th. J.: *Chatarsis in Healing, Ritual, and Drama*. Berkeley. University of California Press. 1979.
17. Thoits, P. A.: *Emotional deviance: Research agendas*. In Kemper, T. D. (ed.): *Research Agendas in the Sociology of Emotions*. 1990, Albany. State University of New York Press, pp. 180-203.