

CHAPTER 1

SIGNIFICANCE OF GENDER DIFFERENCES IN THE FUNCTIONING OF PARTNERS IN A RELATIONSHIP

Summary

Over a long period of time, the importance of gender differences in respect of intimate relationships' functioning has been omitted by a great number of researchers (Faulkner, Davey, Davey, 2005). It was not until the occurrence of social changes triggered out by the feminist movement, changes in education system and the job market, when the interest in gender as an important attribute of a human intensified leading to an increased number of studies over this notion. The early research over the significance of gender focused mainly on its essential conditionings deeming its immutability and biological determination. Only in later years the important impact of environment and socialization on the shaping of gender seemed to be recognised.

Key words: partners, close relation, gender differences

INTRODUCTION

The modern reference literature sees gender mainly as a biopsychosocial construct rather than as being purely determined by biology. Researchers (Faulkner et al., 2005) emphasize the necessity to take the gender factor into consideration when conducting studies on interpersonal relations due to its significance not only for a broader understanding of the dyad functioning but

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also for creating therapeutic programmes for couples aimed at increasing the quality of their lives (Harwas-Napierała, 2001).

Hereunder, I am going to present a review of chosen research deeming the significance of gender differences for the functioning of partners with special regard to attachment style, dependence on the partner, perceived support, interpersonal conflict and the depth of the relationship. These factors are strong predicates of current behaviour with regards to one's partner which may be important from the perspective of the permanence of the relationship (Gurung, Sarason, Sarason, 1997). Underlying these measures is also their beneficial role in promoting and developing physical and psychical well-being, coping stressful, difficult and crisis situations. Moreover, researchers indicate that attachment, dependence, perceived support as well as the commitment to the relationship and the level of conflicts generated in it forecast the regulation manner of social functioning of a human e.g. in case of loneliness, anxiety, depression or low self-esteem (Verhofstadt et al., 2006; Bornstein, Languirand, 2003; Mikulincer, Shaver, 2007).

GENDER DIFFERENCES IN THE SCOPE OF ATTACHMENT STYLE AND FUNCTIONING OF A RELATIONSHIP

Contemporary researchers into intimate relationships relatively converge on the claim that the functioning of intimate relationships is not only determined by different attachment patterns represented by particular partners but also correlates with gender (Collins, Read, 1990; Brennan, Shaver, 1995). The initial research into attachment styles reflecting the tricategorical division introduced by Hazan and Shaver (1987) did not acknowledge significant gender differences with regards to attachment styles. Their results indicated that both women and men may reveal a secure and extra-secure attachment which was concordant with the research conducted by Ainsworth (1978) who did not recognise any differentiation in attachment styles in infants with regards to their gender. Later analyses of the four categories of attachment style based on the model of oneself and the model of other people revealed the existence of differences between men and women (Bartholomew, Horowitz, 1991). It turned out that men are more prone to display an avoidant style of attachment whereas women tend to more inclined to the anxious style (Scharfe, Bartholomew, 1994; Brennan, Shaver, 1995). Feeney (1999) stated that, comparing to men, women more frequently

display anxious-preoccupied attachment most often in a form of an avoidant style.

Polish research into the styles of attachment also recognised certain differences between women and men. Plopa (2005) and Kuczyńska (2001) proved that avoidant attachment style is more characteristic of men than women, whereas women more often present anxious-ambivalent style.

The researchers also analysed the role of gender in determining the correlations between attachment and the functioning of a relationship. Significant differences between men and women were most visible with regards to extra-secure patterns of attachment and minimal differences occurred in case of secure style (Feeney, Noller, 1996).

Similar is the research of du Plessis, Clarke and Woolley (2007), who dealt with conceptualization of attachment, the influence of relational models on the perception of conflict and its possible solutions which also revealed differences between genders. Men who had displayed a more secure attachment to their parents similarly revealed more positive behaviour when solving conflicts than women presenting the same type of attachment. In a situation when the secure attachment of both men and women to their parents had been weak, their conflict-solving skills were also poor. Identical correlations were observed with regards to attachment to one's life partner. Equally men and women displayed more positive behaviour when solving problems providing that their attachment to partners was secure. However, a low level of secure partner attachment in women resulted in less frequent positive conflict solutions than it was in men.

The significance of gender differences and attachment in scope of conflict situations was also studied by Feeney (2002). She acknowledged that partners' attachment anxiety, both in men and women, plays a considerable role in explaining conflict behaviour among couples going on dates as well as marriages. It is especially significant in case of female partners. Feeney also proved that the highest level of satisfaction in a relationship was obtained when men revealed low attachment anxiety, similarly to women.

Analyzing the role of attachment in supportive behaviour of men and women, Simpson, Rholes and Nelligan (1992) spotted significant gender differences. It appears that women with secure attachment had a tendency to seeking support in a situation of increased anxiety and treating their partners as a source of consolation. On the contrary, women who revealed avoidant attachment style were less prone to seek support in their partners and withdrew from relationships both physically and emotionally even though the level of their anxiety increased. Men with secure attachment offered more support when their partners displayed a high level of anxiety unlike men representing avoidant attachment style. Similar outcome was obtained by Simpson et al. (1992). Their

research confirmed that securely attached men were able to provide more support for their partners than men whose attachment was extra-secure.

Polish researchers – Cieślak and Wajnbergier (2006) studying the relationship between support and attachment observed that only the style of attachment of husbands accounted for an intensification of social support given to their partners and the strength of the support they declared to their partners (wives). Securely attached husbands also perceived more support obtained from their wives than husbands characterised by insecure attachment.

Tryjarska (2012) devoted one of her research to explaining the correlation between closeness and satisfaction of a relationship between people representing different styles of attachment. It appeared that the style of attachment represented by men contributes to revealing intrusiveness towards women. Men characterised by anxious-ambivalent and anxious-preoccupied attachment style were more intrusive, i.e. interfering in psychic, attributing their own emotional states to the other person and possessive than men displaying secure (trustful) attachment. What was also significant was the perception of oneself and others in forecasting closeness and intrusiveness. The more negative image of oneself and positive of others in women the more intrusive they proved towards men. Respectively, more negative image of oneself and others in men resulted in their higher intrusiveness towards wives.

The outcomes of the presented research reveal the existence of differences between women and men with regards to attachment which are significant for the course of their relationship including intimate relations. It was empirically stated that in case of men, their functioning in a relationship is significantly determined by avoidant attachment style (Hazan, Shaver, 1987; Kuczyńska, 2001; Plopa, 2005b), dismissive attachment style (Scharfe, Bartholomew, 1994; Brennan, Shaver, 1995) and a low level of comfort in closeness (Collins, Read, 1990). It was also found that the functioning of women in an intimate relationship is significantly related to the strength of the anxious-ambivalent style of attachment (Hazan, Shaver, 1987) and strong fear from rejection with respect to anxiety about the relationship (Collins, Read, 1990). The differences between men and women with regards to attachment account for different ways of perceiving and functioning of the relationship between partners. Therefore, taking the role of gender into consideration when conducting research into dyadic interactions may contribute to the understanding of the nature of their relationship.

Gender differences in the scope of dependence and their conditionings

The etiology of dependence emphasizes the role of the quality of care given to a child in the shaping of dependence features which reveal later on in adult life. Supportive, responsive and available carers contribute to a development of healthy dependence in their children in contrast with parents who are distanced, rejective and authoritative. Their children reveal features of excessive dependence or destructive detachment (Ainsworth et al., 1978; Bartholomew, Horowitz, 1991; Alonso-Arbiol, Lowyck et al., 2008; Bornstein, Languirand, 2003). These early-childhood experiences of a relationship with the carer shape their mental representations of oneself and others and, therefore, the expectations for future interpersonal relations (Blatt, Homann, 1992; Bornstein, 1992). Socialization practices concerning gender roles contribute to the representation of dependence features. Research in this field prove that it is girls rather than boys who reveal a higher level of dependence (Spence, Helmreich, 1978, in Bornstein, 1992). Cultural factors may influence the level of dependence as girls are encouraged to reveal it while boys are expected to suppress the need for dependence. In reality, men and women are characterised by an equal level of dependence while its expression is a function of generally acknowledged socialization practices related to gender roles. In a situation when the traditional gender roles are abandoned the results concerning the level of dependence vary. The research conducted by Birtchnell and Kennard (1983) as well as Ojh and Singh (1985 in Bornstein, 1992) proved that women who abandon their socially attributed roles may display a lower level of dependence unlike men who withdraw from the traditional tasks. They reveal a higher need for dependence. Therefore, the expression of the needs for dependence is a function of the degree to which men and women attribute themselves with the traditional gender roles. B. Wojciszke (2005) in his book devoted to love quotes research which proved that women are characterised by a higher level of seeking support (a manifestation of dependence). He claims that women are more eager to seek and to give support than men. Furthermore, women are more interested in maintaining the relationship and committed to it. The author associates it with the women's need to confide, express their experiences, problems etc.

Nevertheless, a great number of researchers support the idea that the level of dependence recognised both in men and women may be influenced by the methods applied to its appraisal. It appears that using self-descriptive inventories a higher level of dependence was recognised in women than in men (Birtchnell, Kennard, 1983; Bornstein, 1992). On the other hand, the use of projective tests (Greenberg, Bornstein, 1989; Shilkret, Masling, 1981) showed

that men and women are significantly similar in terms of the presented level of dependence. One of the possible explanations here may be the fact that the form of self-descriptive inventories forces respondents to give answers to questions directly indicating features, feelings and behaviour related to dependence. In this case men are less eager to reveal they need for dependence even if they recognise it. As for projective methods, it is more difficult for the respondent to distort the result of research being motivated by the need to show themselves in a more positive light or from the perspective of social expectations, stereotypes (Bornstein, 1992). The discussed results oblige to remain careful in concluding on the basis of empirical studies about the differences in the level of dependence with regards to gender (Alonso-Arbiol, Shaver, Ya'aroz, 2002).

GENDER AND THE FUNCTIONING OF PARTNERS IN A RELATIONSHIP WITH REGARDS TO PERCEIVED SUPPORT, CONFLICTS AND DEPTH OF THE RELATIONSHIP

The hereunder discussion analyzes chosen empirical evidence concerning the significance of gender for the functioning of partners in a relationship with regards to seeking social support, conflicts and the depth of their relationship.

Gender differences with regards to social support

The reference literature sees gender differences as an important determinant of support in a marital relationship. It is emphasised that women receive and give more support during their lives. They obtain more of it than men from social interactions. The marital relationship is the primary source of emotional support for men who receive it mainly from their wives. On the contrary, women not only receive supportive interactions from family but also from friends and colleagues (Gurung, Taylor, Seeman, 2003). The ability to give support is related to the process of socialization. In case of men, their ability to give support derives from the supportive competence of their families of origin. With respect to women, the supportive competence of the family of origin is not as important for the learning to provide support to relatives. It may result from cultural determinants which promote a high demand for support among women (Maki, 2004 in Hołtyń, 2013).

Other research concerning the adjustment of support between spouses allow for drawing the conclusion that they differ in their reactions to seeking support

by the partner. It has been empirically stated that women are more prone to provide emotional support and do not respond appropriately to informative support sought by their partner (Cutrona, Shaffer, Wesner, Gardner, 2007).

The research conducted by Dehle and Landers (2005) showed that character traits of women, such like diligence and emotional stability, determined their satisfaction of the support provided by their husbands. It turned out that men receive more emotional support from their wives than women from their husbands. Numerous studies revealed that the connection between support received from the partner and satisfaction of the relationship is stronger in case of women than men. For men, interpersonal skills like expressiveness and psychological maturity are better predicates of the level of satisfaction of a marital relationship and satisfaction of life (Acitelli, Antonucci, 1994). Moreover, the perceived support in a marriage is stronger related to the general well-being of women (wives) than men (husbands). Women more frequently seek various forms of support and provide support as well as use the help of others (Wrześniewski, Włodarczyk, 2004). On the other hand, men are more eager to provide behavioural support than its other manifestations, which, according to Wojciszke (2005), may result from a stronger demand for emotional expression in verbal behaviour revealed by women. Men get more satisfaction from undertaking various activities with or for the partner – which may not always be perceived as supportive by women.

The above analysis of the role of gender factor with respect to support and the recognised differences account for a thesis that different forms of supportive behaviour, different levels of demand for support and different ways of providing support for partners depend on the gender.

Gender differences with respect to interpersonal conflicts

Conflicts occurring among couples could not be properly recognised and described without considering the gender differences between the partners. Numerous research reveal significant differences in the behaviour of men and women in a conflict situation (Faulkner, Davey and Davey, 2005; Graber, Miga, Chango, Coan, 2011; Woodin, 2011).

Women are more eager to initiate discussion with their partner concerning problems in their relationship as well as they are more sensitive to events occurring in their relationship. Men, in turn, show a tendency to withdraw from negative marital interactions (Johnson, 1990). Women in the face of a conflict are oriented at expressing emotions whereas men focus on actions and seeking possible solution to the conflict.

In one of their research, Faulkner, Davey and Davey (2005) were trying to find factors related to gender which may determine marital satisfaction and the way of solving conflicts. It occurred that traditional men's roles are associated with their weaker ability to express emotions which may result in symptoms of depression or decreased self-esteem leading to a decline of satisfaction of the relationship. As a consequence, men who decide to perform the traditional roles may experience a greater number of conflicts with their wives. In case of women, their attitudes towards the traditional women's roles were insignificant neither for their satisfaction of the relationship nor the appearing conflicts. Admittedly, men whose wives did not accept the roles traditionally ascribed to their gender regarding the running of a household reported a higher level of conflicts in their relationships. Research also revealed that the abilities to solve conflicts by wives allowed to forecast the intensity of conflicts perceived by husbands as well as their satisfaction of the relationship. Weaker abilities to solve conflicts in both partners were associated with a lower appraisal of their intimate relationship and a greater number of conflicts perceived by men. On the other hand, the way of solving problems by men did not constitute a determinant of the intensity of conflicts perceived by wives. The honesty in the relationship perceived by women makes a good basis for forecasting conflicts perceived by men: the lower it seemed the more conflicts perceived by husbands. Only two factors, namely depression and lower well-being of husbands, were acknowledged as predicates of the dynamics of conflicts perceived by wives. They allowed for respectively proper forecast of an increase in the number and intensity of conflicts.

Woodin (2011) proved that women have a tendency to reveal such behaviour as hostility, stress or intimacy whereas men, as indicated earlier, withdraw and focus on solving problems. Du Rocher, Schudlich, Papp and Cummings (2011) analyzed the relationship between symptoms of depression in a marriage and conflicts. They concluded that a stronger dissatisfaction of a relationship perceived by women was associated with an enraged course of marital conflicts which, in men, resulted in intensified syndromes of depression. Therefore, conflicts comprising critique, anger and threat may lead to dissatisfaction of the relationship resulting in increased risk of depression, especially among men.

The analysed research suggest that the occurring gender differences may significantly determine they way of reacting to and solving conflicts. However, finding a mutual way of solving conflicts by the members of a dyad makes an opportunity for improving the quality of their functioning in the relationship.

Gender differences with regards to the depth of the relationship

The experience of a depth of the relationship i.e. the level of commitment to the relationship is also influenced by gender differences. The authors draw on research which indicate that women are more oriented toward the relationship, focus on it and are more sensitive to events occurring in it than men (Acitelli, 1992).

Research conducted by Weigel (2008) concerning commitment in a close relationship proved that women more often calm their partners, remind about important matters, plan and create a common future prospect than men. He stated that men who engaged in the relationship only to a little extent had a tendency to depreciate their partners' attempts to support them, providing various forms of help e.g. reminding about matters concerning the couple or making plans for common future. Men with a low level of commitment also invested less in their relationships (e.g. devoted less time).

Other researchers – Le and Agnew (2003) made a similar observation that women reveal a stronger commitment to a relationship, invest more in the relationship and perceive considerably lower number of alternative relationships than men. They also acknowledged that women have a tendency to perceive their partners as more positive than the partners perceive themselves. They also reveal a greater level of empathy than men, especially in the face of a threat to the relationship. It is confirmed by Weigel (2010) who proved that women have a higher appraisal of their commitment and the commitment of their partners to a relationship and are more emphatic. Moreover, women have a stronger motivation to maintain the relationship and mutuality is their way to keep balance and trust in the relationship.

Schoebi, Karney and Bradbury (2011) analyzed two components of commitment such as the desire for a relationship to survive and the inclination to its maintaining as well as their connection with satisfaction of the relationship. The outcome of their research suggested that during the first four years of a marriage commitment and satisfaction are high for both men and women, however, women display a stronger tendency to behaviour aimed at maintaining the relationship. Moreover, women's inclinations to maintain the relationship were independent of the level of their satisfaction of the relationship. Similarly, women express a stronger desire for the relationship to survive than men. In case of men the level of satisfaction of the relationship allowed for forecasting the strength of their desire for the relationship to survive and the strength of their tendency to undertake activities aimed at maintain the relationship. This result indicates that the satisfaction of the relationship may strengthen men's

inclination to commit themselves to activities maintaining the relationship rather than just declaring their interest in the survival of the relationship.

Reassuming the above-mentioned research, one may conclude that gender differences are significant for the process of committing to a relationship and the desire to maintain it. It is mainly women who show a tendency to undertake various activities aimed at maintaining the relationship.

CONCLUSION

The undertaken analysis of empirical data clearly indicates the role of gender in the behaviour of partners in intimate relationships. Women and men differ in their functioning in a relationship with regards to perceived support, conflict and the depth of the relationship. Women show a tendency to seek support and are more eager to provide emotional support than men. They are also more oriented toward discussion in the face of conflicts unlike men, who tend to withdraw (Ryś, 1999). Additionally, women have a stronger tendency to maintain the relationship than men. Differences were also recognised with respect to the level of dependence on the partner and the intensity of particular styles of attachment.

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CHAPTER 7

YOUNG DESCENDANTS' CHOICE OF ACCULTURATION STRATEGIES IN THE CONTEXT OF FAMILY ETHNICITY

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