**Nonviolent communication in interpersonal relationships**  
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**Abstract** According to the Theory of Choice by Glasser there are seven ‘caring habits’ for creating and maintaining relationships as a replacement for the usual ‘seven cruel habits’ of the psychology of external control. ‘Cruel habits’ disconnect people, encourage aggressive communication and result in mental illness, violence, school failure, abuse, mobbing, bullying and others. Disconnection between people can turn in connection with the help of non-violent communication. Nonviolent communication has four components: observation, feelings, needs and appeal. Skills for managing conflicts are extremely important aspect within the process of interpersonal communication.

This study identifies the principles of Theory of Choice in interpersonal communication within the partnership and describes a feeling of satisfaction by interpersonal communication in the relationship as well as defines the patterns that impair quality relationship. The study sample are 15 couples in intimate relationship and depth semi-structured interviews are conducted where partners are interviewed separately one after the other. Implementation of interpersonal communication into the framework of the theory of choice resulted with the increased accuracy. Results of this study provide a better insight into the possibility of efficient application of choice theories in interpersonal processes, which can help teachers, parents, and educators to develop quality interpersonal communication skills and non-violent communication with children as well as stimulate high-quality communication habits in the very beginning of the development of social skills.

***Keywords:*** *Theory of choice, non-violent communication, interpersonal communication, communication habits and patterns*

**Introduction**  
 Interpersonal communication was investigated by many scientists among them Thibaut and Kelley (1952) The Communication Theory of Social Exchange; Heider (1958) founder of Attribution theory and expanded version of the Balance theory; Argyle (1994) The Psychology of Interpersonal Behavior. Reardon (1998/20) puts persuasion in the focus of research and interpersonal communication is defined as communication, interaction of two or more persons face to face with the possibility of obtaining immediate (as opposed to deferred) feedback.

Relationships have an extremely important role in the life of every individual. All people within relationships get various kinds of incentives, from getting sympathy, understanding, information, encouragement and many other messages that affect the creation of the image of one’s self. When asked what gives meaning to our life, Klinger (1977) found that almost all respondents indicated relationships with friends, parents, siblings, partners or children. Most of them mentioned the importance of being loved and needed.

Rosenberg (2006) argues that interpersonal communication is the key of connecting people and bringing them together. Essence of a good relationship is in non-violent communication which includes four components: observation, feelings, needs and appeal. The process of the communication consists of two parts: honest expression of one’s self through four mentioned areas and empathic receiving through these four areas. Nonviolent communication leads to the transformation of the way we express ourselves and hear others, directs us to honest and clear expression and at the same leads to paying attention to each other with respect and empathy. (Rosenberg, Marshall 2006/24-25).

According to the Theory of choice by Glasser (2000) interpersonal communication becomes mutual by meeting participants and learning about them. Therefore, interpersonal communication is developed with a better mutual introduction of partners. Accordingly, this study will analyze partnerships, specifically their interactions and ways of interpersonal communication according to the Theory of choice by William Glasser.

**Theory of Choice by William Glasser**

Early in life everyone encounters people who not only discovered what is good for them, but unfortunately discovered what is good for other people, too. Armed with this discovery and following a thousands of years old tradition that dominated people’s opinion, they feel an obligation to try to force others to do what they "know" that is right. One’s resistance to this force is the largest source of human suffering. The Theory of Choice is the challenge to this ancient tradition that was founded on the principle of "I know what is good for you" because it tries to answer the question people spent a lifetime trying to answer: ‘How can we be free to live the way that we want and still get along with people who are important to us in life?’ (Glasser, 2000/3).

Glasser’s Theory of Choice is based on human behavior (action) explaining that almost all behavior is chosen and that we are driven by our genes to satisfy five basic needs: survival, need for love and belonging, need for power, fun and freedom. Although all these needs are important, in practice the most important one that is highlighted is the need for love and belonging as satisfying the needs by which we achieve closeness and connection to the people we care about.

The theory offers seven ‘caring habits’ such as: supporting, encouraging, listening, acceptance, belief, respect and compliance. They are used to create and maintain relationships as a replacement for the usual seven ‘cruel habits’ (psychology of external control) which are: criticizing, blaming, complaining, nagging, threatening, punishing, bribing or rewarding to control. Whenever ‘cruel’ habits are used in some relationship it is important to know that they destroy the possibility of one or both people to find satisfaction in this relationship that results in people being unrelated with those they want to be close to. The disconnection is the source of almost all human problems, such as mental illness, addiction, violence, crime, school failure, abuse of partners and children and others.

When interpreting human behavior the Theory of Choice starts from the belief that people are directly motivated by small images or observations for which they believe will bring them to meet their needs. Small images through which one best satisfies the needs are stored in a special place in the memory that is called world of quality.

Everything a person perceives or receives from the outside world is information. All our important behaviors that are related to our needs are chosen. Therefore, only the behavior over which one has control of is one’s own behavior. When someone does what one was asked, it is done by one’s choice. All behaviors are complete and consist of four components. Two of these, activity and opinion, are managed directly. The other two, feelings and physiology cannot be chosen because they are always the result of what one does or thinks, which means that they are managed indirectly by choosing the activity and way of thinking. Since behavior is always made up of these four components, the Theory of Choice interprets it as the overall behavior.

Ten axioms of the Theory of Choice that describe the interpersonal communication the best:  
1 Only behavior that a person can control is his/her own behavior.  
2 All a person can give to another person is an information.  
3 All the long-term psychological problems are the ones of the relationship.  
4 A problematic relationship is always a part of one’s present life.  
5 What happened in the past is entirely related to what a person is today. But the basic

needs can be met only today, right now, and a person can plan how to continue to

meet the needs in the future.  
6 The needs can be satisfied only by satisfying the images a person has in the own world

of quality.  
7 All a person does is behavior (action).  
8 Each of one’s behavior is complete and consists of four components: activities,

thinking, feeling and physiology.  
9 Each overall behavior is chosen, but a person has direct control only over components

of activities and opinions. The feelings and physiology can be indirectly controlled by

what a person chooses to do and think.  
10 Each overall behavior is described in verbs and named after the most recognizable

part.

**The Purpose of Research**

Communication patterns within the partnership, their chosen behavior, work on the harmonization and negotiation, communication compatibility and satisfaction with current relationship was investigated. Also, the (un)conscious application of the principles of Theory of Choice was researched as how it contributes the satisfaction in the relationship. Basic questions that are answered in this study are what interpersonal communication in partnerships looks like, whether the principles of Theory of Choice are used consciously or unconsciously and whether this contributes to increase the feeling of satisfaction within the relationship.

The aim of the research is to recognize the principles of Theory of Choice in interpersonal communication in an intimate relationship, and discover what is a feeling of satisfaction in interpersonal communication within the current relationship as well as to describe the communication patterns that damage the quality of relationship.

**Sample and Research Instrument**

Total of 15 couples (30 subjects) in relationship (marriage, common law marriage, life-partnership) that is older than one year were selected. To maximize objectivity, partners in the relationship participated in the study separately, one after the other. Four of the couples were married, nine of them couples in heterosexual unmarried relationship and two couples were in a homosexual partnership. The respondents were between 30 and 40 years of age except one couple that were 62 and 63 years old.

Semi-structured interview to gain a deeper insight into the communication habits in interpersonal communication was used in this survey. Mentioned research was conducted in the form of interview with predetermined topics. The advantage of interviews for this kind of research is that it is open enough for the subject to express personal opinion, vision and perception. In addition, the technique of in-depth interview enables gathering detailed information, as the identification of specific emotions.Did you mean: [Kao instrument istraživanja korišten je polustrukturirani intervju za stjecanje ***detaljnog*** uvida u komunikacijske navike u interpersonalnoj komunikaciji. Polustrukturirani intervju provodi se u obliku razgovora prema unaprijed utvrđenim temama. Prednost intervjua za ovakvo istraživanje jest činjenica da je dovoljno otvoren da ispitaniku omogućava osobno izražavanje mišljenja, vizije i percepcije. Uz to, tehnika dubinskog intervjua omogućava uspostavljanje detaljnih informacija, kao što je primjerice identificiranje specifične emocije.](javascript:void(0))

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Semi-structured interview contained questions from several areas within the Theory of Choice: communication and relationship, compliance of needs, ‘caring’ and ‘cruel’ habits, world of quality and small images, behavior.

Planned time of the interview was about 60 minutes per respondent. The interviews were transcribed in word format. After reading the interview the thematic framework was set in accordance with the defined areas tested in the interview and the data were put in the table to present clearer results.

**Research Hypotheses**

The main hypothesis: Application of the Theory of Choice in interpersonal communication contributes to the satisfaction in the partnership.

Auxiliary hypotheses:  
1 Couples have a positive perception of interpersonal communication in relation.  
2 Couples consider their needs match to each other.  
3 Couples think they use ‘caring’ habits, but not ‘cruel’ habits.  
4 Partners want to change the behavior of each other in accordance with their own

world of quality.

**Method of Data Analysis**

Data were analyzed through thematic framework analysis. Thematic framework analysis is a method of identifying, analyzing and reporting on certain patterns within the data, and may include interpretation of various aspects of research topics (Braun, Clarke, 2006; Ajduković, Urbanc, 2011). This approach was chosen because literature in the field of interpersonal communication already recognizes specific topics that may represent a framework for collecting and analyzing qualitative material, while the method also allows the generation of new topics. The framework analysis allows systematic and conducting analysis according to a predetermined schedule.

**Results and Discussion**

H1: *Couples have a positive perception of interpersonal communication in relation* - is accepted because the majority of respondents confirmed that they have a positive perception.  
 In most (11 couples), the experience of the relationship is not significantly different, and in a small number of couples (4 of them) the experience of the relationship is significantly different. Couples that did not show significant difference in the perception of relations, the difference is mainly reflected in the feeling that they have when they are with partner, what is the definition of relationship by Glasser. In his works he explains that the relationship is a process of meeting one’s own needs with someone. Likewise, respondents with little difference in the perception of relations generally say the following sentences: With her I feel good and everything seems to be in place, although she can be strict sometimes (I 2), I feel nice, there are days when I feel that it goes to a better or worse, but I must say that I am satisfied (I 28).

Those with a greater difference in the perception of relations said: I lost myself, that is what I really miss in relationship and I do not know what to do about it (I 30), Sometimes I'm tired of explaining, because it seems to me she does not understand (I 21 ). It turned out that most of the respondents’ perception of relations experience through behavior of partners and they often state that the relationship would be better if the partner would act the specific way. The respondent I 13 said: If he was more at home and helped around with the baby, of course that we would have a better relationship.

Research has shown that the majority of respondents have a different view of the relationship in the present moment, comparing to the other partner in the couple.  
 H2: *Couples find that their needs match to each other*. - is accepted because most needs at couples are in accordance with the fact that in most cases needs assessment does not differ more than one. The rank correlations were found: survival ρ = 0.969; power ρ = 0.926; love ρ = 0.983; freedom ρ = 0.921; entertainment ρ = 0.941.

H3: Couples think they use ‘caring’ habits, but not ‘cruel’ habits. - is partly accepted because the results show that despite the confirmed use of ‘caring’, the respondents presented the use of ‘cruel’ habits. All respondents agree that by the use of ‘caring’ habits they feel the progress of relationship and contribution to their satisfaction. From earlier mentioned ‘caring’ habits, respondents in interpersonal communication (Table 1) most commonly used listening and belief. As well these are the ones pointed out as the most desirable trait in a partner.

Table 1 Use of 'caring' habits among patners

Data in Table 2 show that from the list of ‘cruel’ habits respondents mostly used criticizing, complaining and nagging, no one uses punishment, while only 6% of respondents declared themselves to use bribery or rewarding to control.  
The respondents confirmed that by the use of ‘cruel’ habits they try to change the other person, believing that this will enhance the satisfaction, however, the majority of respondents recognized that behavioral changes in other do not occur or occur rarely. Most respondents also pointed out that they do not feel good in conflicts and when used ‘cruel’ habits.

Table 2 Use of 'cruel' habits in percentage

H4: Partners want to change the behavior of each other in accordance with their own world of quality. - is accepted because research indicates that most respondents want to change the behavior of their partners in order to meet their needs and bring them close the small image from their world of quality.

Most people in the world of quality have two images of themselves. One is slightly idealized image while the other one is highly idealized. Although it is uncommon, from the world of quality any person except ourselves may be removed. Throwing out the own self would mean that the person does not exist.

Nearly all of the things that people choose to put into their world of quality is in some way connected with the people, because the relationship brings a lot of good feelings. What most people believe in are: religion, political beliefs or a certain way of life. Music, art, sports - anything can be a part of one's lifestyle. Glasser says that a person does not have to convince everyone into own beliefs, but it is painful in case one is not able to convince someone who is important to the one.

This research has just been confirmed the important position within the world of quality occupied by the partners as well as the large amount of needs a person successfully meets within the relationship which at the end is the definition of relationship according to Glasser. The problem occurs when a person wants to change the behavior of partner to feel better.

The theory of external control is often heard in the statements of the respondents. *If she listened to me more the relationship would be better.* (I 17), *It makes me nervous when I see she does not listen to me, and I know she can hear me.* (I 19), *I told her she cannot use such behavior (I 16), I go crazy when she doesn’t give me opportunity to express myself.* (I 30) – these are just a few examples of statements claimed by respondents, which testify about their expectations at changing the behavior of partners, as they believe that this is the only way to feel better. Although each of the respondents is aware that one can only affect the own behavior and that there is no control nor influence of others, some respondents would say that partner still change the behavior after the application of certain ‘cruel’ habits.

For example, one respondent says: *When it comes to me showing strict, she calms down*. Theory of Choice explains that everyone has the opportunity to choose and selects the behavior in accordance with their needs. Partner of the same couple, of just mentioned respondent at that moment felt that the need to belong and be loved is more important than the need for power and chose to pull in the debate. By this own decision that person worked on the relationship with the partner. The question is whether such communication access is, as well as the similar one of many other respondents, good for the long-term relationship and interpersonal communication.

On the other hand, the study indicates that compliance of world of quality extremely contributes to the feeling of satisfaction in the relationship. Respondent I 6 stated: *My wife and I are very much alike. We like similar things and have common views of the world.* Respondent I 20 said: *This is my second marriage and here I was a lot wiser. I chose a girl with whom I have a lot in common.*

Respondents that successfully juggle their different world of quality with the one of a partner, conclude that they are also satisfied with the relationship. Respondent I 5 said: *It is easy to find agreement. He prefers spending Saturday night at home, and I'd be happy to go out more. Then we agree that one weekend we stay at home and watch movies, while the other we go out with friends for a drink.* Respondent I 18 stated: *It took us some time to coordinate generally as people. Talking about our differences helped. We both adapt to a lot of things and accepted each other. We are much happier now.*  
Negotiating differences or similarities of worlds of quality in this study have proved to be a very important factor for a feeling of satisfaction in the relationship, which confirms the hypothesis stated in the paper.

**Conclusion**

In psychology there are many studies, especially the ones of human relations, communication, emotions, etc. Scientists still struggle to find the accurate and verifiable answers to complex questions about human communication.

The main hypothesis ‘Application of Theory of Choice in interpersonal communication contributes to a feeling of satisfaction in the partnership.’ - is confirmed by this study, regardless of whether respondents use principles of Theory of Choice consciously or unconsciously.

The main hypothesis is confirmed also by confirmation of the majority of auxiliary hypotheses. Besides the hypothesis H3 that is partially accepted, other auxiliary hypotheses are accepted. Couples think they use ‘caring’ habits, but they do not ‘cruel’ ones, as research has shown that it is not true.

Research of Theory of Choice by W. Glasser was conducted in Croatia and, in future research it is needed to see the results of the same in other cultures and to compare the way in which this theory is culturally conditioned or to see how these results differ and how culture affects interpersonal communication between couples.

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