

***Reconstruction of Autonomy in Transactional analysis:  
From classical Transactional analysis to a Social constructionist  
perspective on Autonomy in partnership***

**Proefschrift**

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### Abstract

The goal of the study was to rethink the transactional analysis concept of personal autonomy through the prism of social constructionism. The research material was generated and collected from multiple sources: focus groups with the clients, statistical data, semi-structured interviews with couples, as well as a survey among therapists. Deconstruction and critical analyses of the dominant transactional analysis interpretations of autonomy, informed by research results, were performed with an aim to contribute to the relativization of the autonomy/script dichotomy, as well as the autonomy/symbiosis dichotomy. Interpretative analysis of the interview content was performed in collaboration with both the assistant researcher and the participants themselves. It was based on multiple theoretical platforms and introduced relational alternatives to personal autonomy. Partnership, as a minimal social unit, was the chosen context for constructionist inquiry. Eight Serbian heterosexual couples provided a specific practical context and grounding for the inquiry. The research pointed out that a specific quality of partnership reality is reflected on the process of determining and defining the concepts that are discussed in the context of partnership. The research results provided a broad and in-depth insight into qualitative differences that are occurring during the process of generating meanings of the autonomy as a concept, among couples satisfied with their relationship, as opposed to couples who exhibited dissatisfaction with their relationship. Those differences were demonstrated throughout the research process in terms of partnership roles, gender roles and power distribution between partners, as well as their influence on the interpretative process. Throughout the research, special attention was given to identifying and understanding therapeutic elements of the research interviewing process.

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### Situating Dissertation Problem and Inquiry

“There is a time for scientific method and a time for intuition – the one brings with it more certainty, the other offers more possibilities; the two together are the only basis for creative thinking”.

*Eric Berne*

The study is a result of a, roughly speaking, critical reconsideration of certain humanistic premises and assumptions that stand behind the construction of personality as a concept. The inquiry was situated in the context of family and **partnership**. Humanism, as applied to psychotherapy and counseling, is recognized by critics as blind optimism in human progress and potentials. Theoretically, all those potentials are embedded in the essential, indivisible and sovereign self as the central figure of analyses (Richer, 1992).

Generally speaking, throughout the inquiry I question why people would non-questionably accept pan-anthropocentric interpretations of the “personality”. The question is how people will, from this point of view, maintain the allegedly natural form of non-repressive and free inner life, ruled by a “complete consciousness and a complete experience of oneself”, without discrimination and repression in the name of humanistic value principles? Could it be that *personal autonomy*, as a principle that provides a significant number of family counselors and humanistic psychotherapists in Serbia with a direction in their practice, is in fact unsubstantiated generalization, insensitive to context? If we are not learning from our clients about “autonomy”, then are we, perhaps, depriving our clients of the initiative and space for free interpretation and further revelations? Given the contingencies of language, we prefer to treat autonomy, self-creation, human solidarity and justice in itself as valuable, while



assuming that they are justified or connected by some order beyond time and context (Allen & Allen, 2005, p. 400).

In this study, my specific aim was to **rethink** the humanistic approach of Transactional Analysis (TA) through the prism of social constructionism, particularly regarding the concept of **personal autonomy**. The problem behind the presented issues is related to underestimating, and often a complete neglect, of factors broader than a personal script in psychotherapeutic practice. Those factors, for example, include dominant cultural narratives that greatly influence the shaping of partnership dynamics, the emergence and development of problems among partners and/or the production of the very conditions for experienced partnership satisfaction. The dissertation project builds on previous similar TA researches on partnership, later on discussed in detail.

The aim of this dissertation is to learn about the meaning and importance of personal autonomy between partners, as well as between couples. In the course of the inquiry process, I also aimed to learn about the finer structure of the relationship dynamic in order to gain insight into the **qualitative differences** in functioning of relationships where partners express satisfaction, as opposed to relationships where individuals exhibit dissatisfaction with their partner, as well as with their relationship. The observational studies of client behavior in couple therapy sessions show that successful couples are demonstrating “a higher level of experiencing”, i.e. a greater emotional involvement and self-description, in the session and more autonomous and affiliative actions, i.e. more acceptance and less hostility and coercion (as cited in Johnson & Greenberg, 1988, pp. 175-183). On the other hand, partner satisfaction and optimal functioning of the relationship can be identified, in practice, even where there is no “autonomy” as understood through the prism of the transactional analysis theory.

The dissertation's agenda includes two intertwined primary goals:

1) **The first goal** is to inquire into the dynamics of a partnership for the purpose of learning how the concept of autonomy is constructed in relation to partnership satisfaction, gender roles and power issues.

2) **The second goal** is a generative reinterpretation of TA concept of autonomy with relation to social constructionism, supported by what I have learned from the couples.

The secondary goal of dissertation is a theoretical elaboration that will support the development of an integrative approach in TA that incorporates the social constructionism perspective as illustrated in the methodological and epistemological grounding of this study.

More generally speaking, the dissertation aims to create a bridge between TA and social constructionism theories and practices, creating a description of TA as having some of the components of social constructionism.

By combining several methodological approaches from the qualitative methodology spectrum, this dissertation strives to produce answers to the general research question that can be summarized as follows: Does humanistic principle of personal autonomy, communicated within therapeutic sessions, offer a necessary minimum of difference in experience, the difference that makes a difference according to Bateson (1972), once observed in the context of partnership? In other words, with this dissertation I aim to question whether hypotheses on the couple dynamics, constructed in a Transactional Analysis (hereafter TA) framework, inform practitioners and make them more perceptive of the context? If not, does it narrow the domain of comprehension and appreciation for client's interpretations of autonomy or script under certain conditions?

Without the pretension of trying to express the full meaning of this thesis in the first several pages and through several static explanations of a dynamic process, such as

research into partnership, I will still mention a few reasons why I believe that getting into a dialogue with the following text and the results of the study could be worthwhile.

### *Autonomy under Question?*

“Why is the examination of the concept of **autonomy** the topic of this dissertation?” one might ask. Summarizing the position of humanistic theorists Rowan (1988) asserts that there is no free society without the free individual, and no free individual that is a slave to his past. There are many differences among various humanistic therapeutic modalities, largely in stressing particular elements in the meanings of terms. Despite these significant differences, the most frequently referred to are spontaneity, authenticity, autonomy and the ability to reason sensibly and accept emotions and experiences. A famous maxim of the founder of the Transactional Analysis Eric Berne, that there may be “no hope for the human race, but there is hope for individual members of it”, encapsulates the ideological position and practical implication inherent to this approach (Berne, 1964/1998). In other words, the maxim is commonly understood as, *you are good for the others as much as you are good for yourself*. Such claims reflect the fundamental values of individualism, represented in the practice of humanism, and more concretely, TA couple and family therapy. Were we to use the same enthusiasm that the stated opinion carries to observe the dynamics of a dysfunctional family or couple, we could as well come to a certain conclusion. There is no reason to expect a radical change in relations as long as an individual manages to win a piece of happiness within an unhealthy system... Or else, happily leave it. And indeed, one of the best-sold recipes for mental hygiene in the Western culture is something that could be called a guide towards *how to* become the superheroes of our own microcosmic worlds, liberated from the constraints of responsibility and ethics (Berger, 1980).

The dominant model for mental health calls for autonomy, making conscious and free choices, knowing one's urges as well as values, openness and honesty towards the self and others. For example, if we are to apply the contemporary definition of mental health and well-being consistently, we could say that this profile depicts an individual who has the capacity for unilateral action in relation to the social world to which the individual belongs. In other words, the man of humanism has the power to initiate change of his surroundings while exhibiting immunity to feedback induced change (Mellor & Andrewartha, 1980).

It is difficult to fail to notice the irony contained in this homocentric depiction of the peak of **individuation** that displays the yardstick of psychological well-being. The irony especially becomes visible at the time when this thesis is being written. Our lives are marked by a global economic crisis in which stability, certainty and the power of individualistic ambitions crumble, leaving the stage open to solidarity, collective reasoning and government interventions within the "free market economy".

On the other hand, feminist theories of difference and otherness recognize the concept of autonomy as a specific historical, social and cultural ideal that is accepted as the universal norm (Graumann & Gergen, 1996). Not only does such a norm reject the existence of internal differentiation within the subject, but it also masks the specificity of the meaning of this concept. This meaning stands behind the universality status, and then powerfully represses or erases the different others (Butler, 1990).

Richer (1992) makes provocative assertions, interpreting the humanist manifesto of freedom, potentials and actualization as a basis for a new racism, the racism of self-control. (p.111). Adorno (1973), in his *Negative Dialectics*, says on this subject matter: "The more freedom an individual attributes to himself, the greater his responsibility becomes; the responsibility that can never be confirmed in reality as practice, rarely gives a person an opportunity to achieve complete autonomy" (as cited in Kvale, 1992, p. 111.).

All in all, it transpires that behaviorism, which so dedicatedly strives to understand and predict the regularities in human behavior, is not the scientific practice that will, more than others, lead to the production of obedient citizens. A guilt-filled, law-abiding individual becomes the product of humanism.

A similar idea is also espoused by Foucault (1998) when he recognizes the effect of power on the level of immediate quotidian reality. This form of power categorizes an individual by labeling him/her through their individuality, attributing each their own identity, imposing on them the law of truth which has to be recognized from within, as well as from without, by others. “I feel, therefore I exist”! It is a form of power which turns individuals into subjects. There are two meanings of the word “subject”: a subject of another, through control and dependence; and a subject to oneself through attachment to one’s own identity, or awareness of self-cognizance. Both meanings reveal the effect of power which subjects and defines the very subject (as cited in Stojnov, 2008, p. 208-226).

Gergen (1991), a leading social constructionist, discusses about being autonomous, authentic, consistent, or “one’s own”, in the traditional sense of these terms in a time of a flooding flow of information and a frequency of social contacts to the level of saturation. In fact, he speaks of an absence of spontaneity and authenticity, and even freedom in the multiphrenic personality of contemporary life. To go against the grain, or against the dominant forms of life, always requires a special effort and focus and becomes a task on its own, and very frequently a futile one. Gergen further claims that there is neither a way out of the network of social relations, nor a continued process of communication to which a person belongs. Social impact and cultural formation are inevitable givens (p.49).

**Therefore, in order to understand an individual or a couple, the individual alone is insufficient as a unit of analysis.** An individual never stands in isolation, even when choosing “independence”. Fooled by the capacity for metacommunication that is particular to

man, we frequently forget the social coordinates that define our existence, preferences and choices, both professional, but also partner and family ones (Boden & Zimmerman, 1991).

Widening the picture to the level of complex social-political or cultural-historical analysis, leads to a better understanding of what happens at any one of the mentioned micro plans. We can observe this not only through the systematic conceptual analysis of a single author, but also through multi-perspective field research on the subject of different versions of partnership, autonomy, and even happiness (Shotter, 2004).

*All that can be talked about is true*, asserts the position of postmodern philosophy. For that reason, every voice that can be heard in this thesis illuminates a particle of the truth and is equally important to the understanding of the problematized subject matter in question.

Seen through the eyes of a systemic constructionist, it is even utterly irrelevant to search for the “true statement” as the interpretation of a specific concept (Fergus & Reid, 2002). Relevance derives from the practical potential of individual assumptions for a concrete client in a concrete situational constellation.

Just like in Nietzsche’s perspectivism, there is no absolute truth, provided that the “absolute truth” means there is truth outside all perspectives. In other words, there is no privileged perspective! According to Nietzsche, logic, truth and reality are but useful heuristic devices and clever deceptions, but by no means the standards of life nor the direct guidelines for action. Statements about the truth can be evaluated only within a perspective, as they simply lose their meaning outside of it (Nietzsche, 2003/1887).

Thinking along these lines brings us to one of the open questions in psychotherapeutic research that this study touches upon, namely *using concepts semantically and pragmatically*.

Cross-cultural comparative studies of psychotherapeutic practice, especially in cases of family and couple therapy work, often reveal the existence of ideological and value

misalignments. The misalignment in question is between the conceptual apparatus, which dominates psychotherapeutic discourse, and the meaning, understanding and application of the same concepts in the life of a client (Witt-Kower & Warnes, 1974).

Take for instance the view of autonomy. Let's compare the literal meanings of autonomy between two culturally specific compendiums of terms, on the one hand those stated in the Webster Dictionary (1993) and, on the other hand, a Serbian thesaurus (Ćosić et al., 2008, p.30). The interpretative breadth of the concept of autonomy in conventional Anglo-Saxon language use is more encompassing than the prescribed interpretation of the same concept in the spirit of the Serbian language. Namely, in English, the possibilities of interpretation range from general attributes such as independence, freedom, self-directedness, integrity, over political qualities of local governments, decentralization, to philosophical implications of reason prevailing in the domain of the moral. Possession of moral freedom is opposed to heteromorality, and finally biological analogies such as independent development, responsiveness, and reactivity of parts of an organism in relation to the body as a whole organism.

In the spirit of the Serbian language, as well as in the local practice that the dissertation focuses on, the concept of autonomy is associated with the following adjectives, or attributes: free, individual, independent, self-sufficient, unrestrained, sovereign, unfettered, unconstrained, self-governing and self-reliant. The nouns that describe autonomy are: individuality, independence, self-sufficiency, freedom, self-reliance, separation, sovereignty, individualism, self-rule, self-government, distinctiveness. All of the stated meanings, more or less, primarily refer to qualities and traits of an individual who has attained autonomy as an attribute. This is the individual whom different manifestations of the same quality are reflected in, depending on the context in which autonomy is expressed. This can refer to

politics, morals, psychological strength, relation toward social environment, position towards the other and the like.

We can assume that the stated denotative, literary meanings of the autonomy concept already map the referential framework of clients before they become familiar with the specialized interpretations of autonomy in psychotherapy.

When it comes to theoretical assumptions, the assumptions that humanistic-oriented psychotherapeutic practice and other therapeutic modalities are based on, translating them from one language to another cannot be done fully, without a surplus of meaning (Anderson & Goolishian, 1988). On top of this, introducing theory into counseling and psychotherapeutic work, based on beliefs interpreted without a context they came from, puts us face to face with all the dangers of **ideology, dogmatism, and stigmatization** (Laing & Esterson, 1970).

The general theoretical grounding of the methodological approach applied to this research derives from the social constructionism epistemology. Constructionism views humans as active participants in the discursive creation of a *sensus communis* world of meanings, as well as in the creation, exchange, negotiation and finally establishment of a social and cultural, sensory and interpretative repertoire through everyday spoken and ritual practice (Burr, 1995/2001).

The knowledge and information about the world which stem from interpersonal interactions carry proscriptions for certain activities and have certain consequences. The assertion that the objects of psychology are products of social or individual discursive constructions does not mean that their effects are not “realistic”. It also does not mean that they cannot be approached from a “scientific standpoint”, if you take the scientific standpoint as simply one way of constructing the world. Collective or individual constructions are anchored in social, cultural, linguistic, historical and discursive conventions, so that even if



they change, they do not do so overnight, and can thus be observed and studied (Milenkovic, 2002). Apart from that, socialization is never completely successful, so there will always be idiosyncratic variations in the way the social universe is understood.

The postmodern era in psychology begins where the “center” and general knowledge stop being important, the self is decentered and the practical knowledge becomes emphasized. If postmodernism is equated with “decentralization”, then the humanistic and capitalist notions of selfhood or subjectivity will, of necessity, be called into question. Postmodern currents in psychology, in sync with epistemology of social constructionism, propose a new view of humankind. New relational perspective is different from the individualistic explanations of personality dynamic based on the positivistic research methods that have dominated the social sciences since the 1960s.

Modernism is inextricably linked to the idea of unity and universality or what Lyotard (1988/1979) terms metanarratives. Lyotard's conceptions by which he explains the exploratory aspects of postmodern knowledge are: the crisis of legitimacy, the rejection of "grand narratives", choosing the model of discord and heterogeneity, and not of accord and systemic totality, seeing cultural practices as crossed language games with changeable rules and players. The postmodern challenge to the great modernist narrative made possible the multiplicity of limited and heterogeneous language games, i.e. forms of action and life styles.

As has been stated, the contemporary decentered understanding of the world introduces the idea of diversity and multiperspectivity into the range of dimensions, based on which we evaluate the validity of scientific discoveries. The new methodology encourages paradoxes, opens new issues, and seeks multiple answers instead of unambiguous results or solutions. Instead of the traditional criteria for evaluating the validity of the empirical studies' conclusion, such as hypothetical or construct validity, predictive validity, reliability, neutrality, empirical validity and others, qualitative methodology is increasingly present

within critical studies in psychology. It introduces into the discourse of scientific methodology parameters such as the context of validity, ecological or pragmatic validity as the new criteria for evaluating the validity of theoretical explanations (Neisser, 1976). In other words, deduction, induction, prediction and control are overturned by the activities of discovery, comprehension, association, intuition, hermeneutics and interpretation of the meanings of subjective experience, as part of the total matrix of social meaning. I here quote Shotter (2008), who believes that accepting a more personal attitude towards science changes not only the theoretical ideas of its purpose, but it also changes its practice: “Science can no longer be practiced by experts alone, nor can the results, once obtained, be handed over to pedagogues, lawyers etc., for such results do not exist. The prescriptions it gives cannot be used as prescriptions for action, as they are merely mutual or intersubjective understandings” (p.40).

It must be stressed that, unlike in objectivism, the important aspect of the alternative constructionist paradigm, from Bateson to Gergen, is the observer participation in the observed phenomena (Bateson, 1972; Von Foerster, 2003; Gergen, 2009). Scientific perception as an active process always includes interpretation in the context of the observer’s interpretative scheme. The paradigm shift requires psychotherapists to become self-reflective and to communicate from the reflective stance. This means that they are to make explicit their ability to contemplate their own interpretations of social, psychophysical phenomena they are relating to. The concepts “subjective” and “objective”, as separate categories of learning, are untenable. When the learner or researcher participates in what is being learned, the knowledge is personal, as every act of observation is led by theory (Poper, 1973).

For that reason, the researcher's narrative, for instance both my role in the conversation with the interviewees and my evaluative positioning and rationale for methodological choices are included and made explicit in the discussion of the dissertation with the goal of contextualizing and relativizing the claims that I have made about the interviewees.

## Chapter 1

### Introducing the Context of the Study

Most of the schools and modalities in psychotherapy, following the tradition of modernism, group themselves around certain hypothetical personality concepts, defining personality on a structural and dynamical level.

To be educated as a specialist – a practitioner of a specific psychotherapeutic modality, is to declare one’s work as performed according to the protocol of a certain recognized school. Thus, in a way, it is declared as doctrinaire, all under the argument of maintaining the high standards, ethics and elitism of the profession. According to Karasu (1986), a research conducted in the North America shows that the differences between therapists are the biggest at the beginning of their practice, when they are under the greatest influence of their education and the doctrine they mastered. These differences are diminished gradually as their work experience grows (as cited in Berger, 2000 p.101).

The limitations of the psychotherapy theory and the provocative nature of the problems of the people turning to them for help, pressure the therapist into doing some things that are not in the specific practice protocol. If research is to be believed, these alterations grow in frequency during the span of a therapist’s practice. The fundamental position of **eclecticism**, which offers a better understanding of clients and more satisfying therapy outcomes, is built on a different pragmatic assumption. Practice itself, in fact, insists on the solutions that are appropriate to the particular situation, client, therapist, problem, and other important and specific factors that belong to the context (James, 1987).

As Fruggeri (1992) points out, research conducted on the topic of the professional-client relationship in different intervention contexts has identified a consistent pattern according to which “the more a professional helps, the more the problem persists and

intensifies". This is associated with the clients' (a family, a couple, and individual) conviction that they are inadequate, bad, wrong (p.45).

Let me make a connection with the practice of the TA psychotherapy. During early process of the therapy, enthusiasm emerges on both side, client's and therapist's, for the method and theory which the therapist employs. The overenthusiastic attitude often leads to the negation of the significance and even reality of the client's creative contributions during their work together. In that sense, the changes effected in the client are rarely permanent since they depend on the extent of the applicability and recycling of the "borrowed" logic, i.e. the interpretive framework taken over on which the therapeutic change is based.

Therefore, research into the humanistic and dynamic models of psychotherapy, the kinds of models the Transactional Analysis exemplifies in part, must first question the domains of theoretical definitions and cultural reconsideration of the important **concepts**.

The study was conducted in Serbia, in one hand a social environment with a high potential for social distance, as well as the construction and conservation of prejudice. Thus, we must deal with the issues of the influence of social valuation of psychotherapy, the influence of the family, the culture and the social hierarchy on its acceptance by the users of the services, as well as the course and outcome of the therapy itself (Seikkula, Amkil & Eriksson, 2003). Therefore, conceptual analysis itself, however methodical and exhaustive it is, cannot offer all the answers when it comes to the pragmatic integration of conceptual implications into the everyday challenges.

As I have previously mentioned, **the problem** lying at the bottom of the posed questions and starting assumptions in this research has to do with underestimating, and often a total neglect of, **factors broader than a personal script** in psychotherapeutic practice. For example, those factors are the powerful impact of the dominant cultural narratives on the shaping of the partnership dynamics, as well as on the emergence and development of their

problems or, from another angle, on the production of the very conditions for experienced partnership satisfaction.

### *The Notion of Autonomy in the Humanistic Psychotherapy Discourse*

The psychotherapy originating from the humanistic paradigm, and other teachings as well, is practiced with clear and defined objectives which depend on the form of psychotherapy. However, they all have the same general goals such as the ubiquitous goal of **liberation and fulfilling of the potentials of one's nature**. Gestalt therapy theorists attach significance in their definitions of mental health to maturity, responsibility, self-actualization and authenticity (Perls, 1973). This goal comes first, defined as maturation and further growth of the individual, **accepting one's own responsibility** for oneself, and achieving the integratedness of personality, so that it could function successfully as a whole. Depending more and more on ourselves, we develop a sense of self-worth and we use our abilities of observing, learning and understanding more efficiently. Gestalt therapy, as well as the Transactional Analysis, has accepted the existentialist view of responsibility according to which one should be responsible for oneself at any given moment of one's existence. To be responsible means to be able to meet one's own expectations, desires and fantasies. Everyone is responsible for his/her thoughts, feelings, attitudes, desires, needs and actions (Erić, 2002). **Self-actualization** is possible only when an individual fully identifies with him/herself as an organism that is always changing and developing. **Authenticity** means the sincerity and harmony in self-expression. Autonomy can be interpreted in this light as the **power of reflection or the ability to reflect** with a view to differentiating between the desires one considers "authentically one's own" and those one considers external, i.e. taken from the outside. The key argument supporting this view is the fact that socialization is never

complete; it is always an on-going process. Personality, as a hierarchically organized structure, reaches autonomy in this view through the aforementioned **integration of the various aspects of the self**, the integration of first-order desires with the desires of a lower status, i.e. those taken from the external world.

Body - oriented psychotherapy defines the goals of treatment from the same paradigm as **the liberation of the body and mind from repressive effects**. The ultimate goal is to release life energy and direct it towards clarity, freedom, love, honesty, empathy, respect, and joy. The task of body psychotherapy is to help one reach one's emotions and to verbalize and articulate them, to move from an alienated character structure towards fully experienced communication and contact (Erić, 2002).

Humanism prioritizes certain aspects of the psyche, namely will and cognition above all, thus neglecting historical and cultural influences and characterizations of man. For this reason, Dworkin defines autonomy more precisely as "procedural independence" of reflection and the **capacity for a critical analysis of the socialization process** and recognizing parental and peer influences on the formation of desires, attitudes and convictions. As long as our wishes and preferences are not a product of illegitimate external influences, and we do not either deny or reject the existence of these external influences, we are autonomous (Dworkin, 1988). In this way we can view socialization through a negative dialectic as a process opposite to autonomy, but at the same time as a process preceding and determining it. Philosophers of the feminist school pose a question at this point, if indeed this is the case, whether it would be interesting to find out which socialization processes do not undermine but rather support the development of autonomy (Mackenzie, Stoljar, 2000). To arrive at some answers to this question, autonomy as ability or power of an individual is replaced with definitions of autonomy as an acquired, learnt skill of reflection through which the activities of **self-discovery, self-directiveness and self-defining** are applied. Therefore,

the product of socialization is self-actualization i.e. attaining the dynamic integrated self, without an imprinted standard in the fundament of this genesis. A gender difference should be duly noted in the presence level and the application of the mentioned activities of self-actualization. Self-discovery through the rearing process becomes a capacity characteristic of women, whereas self-directiveness and self-defining are constructed as male strengths.

Discussing the autonomy characteristic of women, Diana Meyers (1987) does not go beyond “episodic autonomy” in her description and conclusions, beyond demonstrating one’s own autonomous powers in a limited number of situations and circumstances (pp. 619-628).

However, all the enumerated capacities lack the substantive and moral dimensions. When we introduce these aspects of the traditional notion of autonomy into the discourse, we get the following elements which form the foundation of autonomy: self-respect, self-trust, self-confidence, and self-evaluation, with a moral aspect to it, i.e. acting from the ability of distinguishing between good and bad. Within the same train of thought, it is assumed that **self-respect and self-confidence** are a necessary condition of autonomy (Dillon, 1992 & Govier, 1993). If this is so, it is clear to what extent oppression and even socialization can intervene in the development and shaping of the achieved degree of autonomy.

From a historical viewpoint, perhaps the most influential theoretical contribution to a widespread notion of autonomy as a core construct in understanding and evaluating the degree of personal maturity comes from the analytic theory of Karl Gustav Jung (2000/1993). Admittedly, the original interpretation is more about process, direction, an eternal personal aspiration, rather than a specific point in the development or an attained state of mind. What collective knowledge essentially refers to are the inherent resources of the personality, which are the basis for its primitive identity. Therefore, the developmental goals and the strength of personality are reflected in the degree of individuation, i.e. the building of an original, unique identity. The entire long process of maturation is characterized by the liberation from the



previous unconscious identity, whether it belongs to the traditional community or the contemporary family. The task of the individual as a conscious subject is forming into a suitable personality with a recognizable psychological and spiritual profile, based on certain inherited and acquired traits (pp.147-161). I underscore this because Jung's analytic theory, in some of its concepts could heralded humanism in psychology. Personality is but a seed in the child, which only develops gradually throughout life. Personality represents the highest achievement of the inborn uniqueness of a specific living being. Jung further says that personality is the work of the greatest life's courage, an absolute confirmation of individual existence and of the most successful adaptation to universal givenness, with the greatest possible **freedom of own decision-making**. From the social-psychological viewpoint, "the individualist" appears as a specific type. At the very least, it has the potential to move between a number of available worlds, and has intentionally and consciously built its personality (the Self) from the raw material provided by the abundance of available identities. Although they belong to different paradigms of human nature, the analytic theory and the classical transactional analysis share a number of assumptions. One of them has to do with seeing intuition as a psychological function equal in value to cognition. A tentative conclusion is possible that Berne built his characteristic trust in the intuitive power of psychotherapists, as well as people in general, under the influence of the analytic theory. These original Berne's teachings give support to the search for relational alternatives to the individualist concepts of autonomy. You might wonder how exactly? Autonomy within the Kantian philosophical framework reduces to the capacity for rational decision-making, i.e. the domination of the Adult ego state according to TA. Intuition is automatically relegated back to the periphery of psychological functioning, as a mental ability of a lower order - which is a contradiction to the original Berne's postulates and his confidence in the intuition of an experienced practitioner. Therefore, this dissertation fundamentally aims at showing that autonomy and intuition as

psychological traits are not antagonistic to each other. Intuitive thinking as the differentia specifica of the autonomous, “liberated” person, is a psychological skill to be held in high regard and cultivated within the psychotherapeutic experience.

The key premise of TA is that *people can be autonomous*. People do not have to live their lives as prisoners of the past. They can decide what they will become as well as what they will not become, what they want and what they do not want to do, what they will feel and what they will not feel (Karpman, 1971). The purpose of TA is for clients to free themselves of old influences by joining status with the therapist, creatively planning their future and learning how to react in the situation at hand without inhibitions and restraints (James, 1988). The presumed subjectivity in TA is explained via the concept of frame of reference: our perception, attitudes and prejudices determine our reality. On the other hand, script beliefs, script motivation, contaminations, life positions, exclusions and discounts of certain resources and the like, direct and shape the perception of the world. The goal of TA counseling is, therefore, directing clients towards autonomy. Although it is a broad term saturated with meaning, the definition of autonomy in TA is very specific, even narrow up to a certain point. It is arrived at by negating everything that does not constitute a trait of an autonomous personality. At any rate, the social constructionist view is that the search for the truth of a concept or its absolute meaning is irrelevant. The relevance of an assumption or a concept comes from its practical usefulness in solving problems of specific clients in unique circumstances. Therefore, autonomy as a skill is understood to mean the absence of the listed distortions in perception, alongside with a developed capacity for **awareness** (multiperspectivity and self-reflection), **spontaneity** (creativity, flexibility, innovation through action) and **intimacy** (cooperation, empathy, recognition). In short, the management of feeling, thinking and acting of one’s own accord, but in line with “social reality”.

### *Autonomy versus Group Identity*

The perception of autonomy and authenticity in people from the Balkans, in this concrete example Serbs, is traditionally related to resisting the heritage of “the Western civilization”, before all individualism. What comes from this cultural framework is considered to be a danger to one’s own identity. The same resistance exists in relation to Islamic or Soviet culture<sup>1</sup>.

In fact, Serbian identity can be anthropologically seen as an amalgam of all aforementioned influences. Therefore, the only way for it to remain independent on the level of individual perceptions is via the very resistance towards each particular influence, cultural as well as political (Marković, 2007). Of course, according to each specific family ideology, special emphasis is placed on one or another mode of resistance.

The political scene of Serbia, such as it is, and consequently the public discourse, is defined on the basis of choosing one particular interpretation of the national, and thus also personal, identity. A similar struggle for identity is present on the level of gender and family roles.

Economically, the positions of men and women are profoundly unequal. Ownership of real estate, as well as opportunities for earning a living and employment are in the hands of a man, while taking care of the home is, even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, primarily a woman’s domain (Blagojević, 2006).

Different views of marriage as an institution in a late modern society of Serbia are also, par excellence, political issues. The way to raise children, partner relations, single parenthood, especially motherhood, the attitude towards homosexual marriage and

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<sup>1</sup>Meaning the cultural-political influence of the Ottoman Empire and the Soviet Union

relationships and the like are a reflection of family ideology, and thus also political self-determination (without suggesting this influence is linear). Men are more likely than women to determine themselves through national identity, in which women tend to follow them. Simultaneously, women are the ones more likely to feel more attached to a supranational identity, Yugoslavian as opposed to Serbian, Bosnian or Croatian (Marković, 2007). In this example one can understand that **the perception of community, individuality and autonomy differs significantly depending on gender identification and family roles.**

The main currents of psychological and philosophical thought have contributed to the fact that the very concept of autonomy is inherently connected to masculinity, i.e. inextricably linked to the ideal of the masculine character.

In other words, philosophers aiming to conceptualize autonomy have in mind the autonomous man as a paradigmatic case, which then leads on to the error of identifying masculine traits with autonomy as a general ability (Halliwell & Mousley, 2003).

Hence, contemporary philosophical interpretations of this concept must be subjected to a critical re-examination in order to eliminate the covert paradigm of masculinity hiding behind the notion of autonomy.

Let me take as an example the experience of identity. In its feminine version, identity is determined through belonging and a high degree of inclusivity, while the same psychological category is interpreted in its masculine version through separating from the other and stressing the differences and borders. The similar situation exists with the psychological understanding of autonomy as a product of what we consider to be the process of individuation. Although, the important difference compared to gender identification is that associations with autonomy per se often cause negative reactions, as I will latter illustrate with the focus group results. This is the case due to the national, religious and territorial conflicts that have broken out in the name of autonomy.

### *Different Partnership Roles Represented in the Dominant Models of Serbian Family*

Let me return again to the context of psychotherapy. Faced with the open invitation to autonomy, interpreted in the spirit of the Western-originating humanism, clients during psychotherapy not infrequently feel despair, impotence, a wave of self-accusatory emotions, or else bitterness, resignation or the rage of the constrained.

From my experience as a therapist, I deduced that a closed dialogue between the psychotherapy protocol, clients (context) and therapists leads to a situation where the position of the client, in certain cases, could be viewed quite narrowly. This can simultaneously impoverish his or her resources, as well as capabilities. One of two reactions usually happens, and that is: self-accusation and a depressed mood, or rejection of the therapist as incompetent to understand the client as special and different.

From the position of a woman, adhering to the idea of autonomy in partnership, without taking into consideration the existing social-economic differences, in fact means taking over a recipe for essential inequality. In order to make the inferior party equal with the dominant one, their empowerment is needed, sometimes even through greater rights. Without that, we get an unfair match, a race horse versus a pony. Therefore, for the idea of autonomy to even have any transforming potential at all, one should operate with several versions of autonomy which are in accordance with the cultural and gender specifics and context, as the feminism-oriented family theorists warn us (Jones, 1993).

“Self-sacrificing matriarchate” is the myth which 80 per cent of families with children in the 21<sup>st</sup> century live by as their family “reality” (Blagojević, 2006). These are the families where both partners believe that the happiness and success of their children is in direct proportion to their mother’s self-denial and selfless giving. The average Serbian woman, her degree of education notwithstanding, builds her authority on the basis of the

“sacrificing” for a child cult. Her career becomes her home and she herself the invisible center of power. The relational stability and affirmation built on these foundations are more threatened by conflict with the older female authority within the family (i.e. mother-in-law), than facing infidelity (Gudac Dodić, 2008).

One can notice that in the Serbian cultural landscape exists an enormous gap between the position and role of women on the macro and micro levels, i.e. a disparity between the collective attitude about the role of the wife and mother and her actual position. This could be one of the reasons why in research polls women describe themselves as dissatisfied with the marital relationship more frequently than men.

The relationship between the father and the children is traditionally mediated, so the quality of this relationship and the degree of a father’s care depends, before all, on the quality of the partner relationship. The same applies to household chores. Less than 5 per cent of male examinees are involved in the current household maintenance. This distribution of chores satisfies almost two thirds of questioned men and less than a third of women (Blagojević, 2006).

During the last decade, a decade of economic and social recovery, Serbia has recorded a higher divorce rate. The most endangered age group is that between 35 and 45 years, with the length of the marriage between 5 and 7 years, with no children or a single child (Gudac Dodić, 2008). The most frequent reason stated in this group is “infidelity” and that is marked as a historical change compared to previous times. As the number of children and years of marriage increase, the risk of a divorce decreases. The decision to end a marriage, just like the decision to start one, is influenced by numerous factors, such as previous partner experiences, mutual history, certain family values, education, social and material status and others.

For a thorough theoretical deconstruction of autonomy in line with the actualities of the contemporary Serbian couple, it is sensible to take into account the specificities of the partnership, by the exploration of meaning in a specific social, political, and economic context (Parker, 1999). Assuming the discrepancy between the definition of autonomy from the classical TA perspective and the meaning of this concept in the context of partnership, I stand behind this opinion.

First, before deconstructing the theory that supports the personal autonomy principle, I will begin by looking at the philosophical groundings of TA.

## Chapter 2

### Transactional Analysis – the Genealogy

#### *Antecedent Theoretical Influences on Transactional Analysis*

Transactional Analysis originated under the influence of psychoanalysis, but also behaviorism and existential psychology. The very word ‘analysis’ reveals an archeological approach to man, a focus on what is beyond the immediately given, but still contained in it.

Just as it is the case with the psychoanalytic dream analysis, Freudian slips or the pathology of everyday life, the analysis itself is seldom its own purpose.

The goal of transactional analysis is the confrontation and correction of unsatisfactory forms of behavior through the practice of new options via an elaborate and agreed upon reinforcement plan. The priority focus is on symptom control, the same as in cognitive-behavioral therapy. The only difference is that after the symptoms control is accomplished by client, and proven to be stable in a various social situations, what follows is a thorough analysis of the possible causes to the problematic symptoms and behavior.

What causes TA to approach existential psychology is upholding individual responsibility, freedom of choice and autonomy as a developmental goal. An individual is expected to assume a leading role in envisaging the purpose of his own existence and position in the society.

Insofar as actual living in the world is concerned, transactional analysis shares with existential analysis a high esteem for, and a keen interest in, the personal qualities of honesty, integrity, autonomy and authenticity, and their most poignant social manifestation in encounter and intimacy (Berne, 1977, p.156).



In some of its models, a strong influence of the system theory and cybernetics can be recognized. This is particularly the case in the development of the TA communication theory as a basis for understanding circularity and interrelation of the actors in each analyzed communication episode, especially game analysis (Watzlawick, 1967; Massey, 1983).

On the other hand, a strong influence has been exerted by ego-psychology and the theory of object relations. The TA personality model, though seemingly equivalent to the psychoanalytic understanding of the personality structure, is essentially different from it. The difference is in stressing the ego personality strengths (the so-called Adult ego state), as well as the abandonment of the metaphor of man's unconscious, instinctive, animalistic nature. As the development of a personality is observed in interaction with its immediate surroundings, the significant others, the structure of the personality also always contains introjected influences, traces of Other (Sampson, 1993). The content of an introjection can be developmentally stimulating, directing a person towards autonomy, but also away from it (Fiscalini, 2004). When only negative objects are introjected, difficulties appear in interpersonal relationships, because the objects' content is opposed to setting developmental goals of a person, such as autonomy.

It is also important to remember the influence of humanist psychotherapeutic models on TA, most frequently gestalt, bioenergy and neurolinguistic programming - NLP (James, 1977). The humanist paradigm may have exerted the greatest influence of all that has been mentioned on the development of the TA theory, and determined its dissident (rebellious) attitude towards psychoanalysis. This is reflected in the premises which reveal infinite trust in a progressive psychological potential that each person is born with. This potential is broken and inhibited throughout life under the influence of society, or perhaps actualized if the social environment is a source of unconditional acceptance, support and

permission for growth (Steiner, 1984). The long term goal of therapy is considered to be the very liberation of the affective part of the personality from the limiting acquired patterns by supporting free expression and learning to indulge one's needs within what is socially acceptable (James, 1974). In other words, what dominates is the gestalt therapeutic principle as a value gauge for estimating the success of therapy and the quality of life.

As we know, the bioenergetic therapeutic models are founded on the assumption that social, repressive effects cause character resistances to form, symbolized in typical postures, gestures and movements. Similarly, in accordance with TA, inadequate social experiences results in development of a script as a defense mechanism. Life script serves to block further exposure to unfavorable influences. Moreover, it contributes as a system of meanings which helps one to make sense of the traumatic experiences during development (Loven, 1977).

The strong influence of neurolinguistic programming, post-structurally oriented, is mostly reflected in the further specification and development of a **therapeutic contract** as an opening intervention in the TA work with clients (Stewart, 1989). The existence of this verbal agreement between a therapist and a client facilitates the visualization of success, distancing the client from his past and encouraging him to direct his own imagination towards creating a new reality for himself.

In the narrow sense of the term, TA is a communicational theory of personality and a specific psychotherapeutic method. From the very beginning of its development as a theoretical system, TA was more about a broader, social approach to psychological subjects than an individual one. Although Berne himself sometimes strove to represent social exchange in a linear way, searching for the formula that would compress all the complexity of the dynamics of repetitive dysfunctional social episodes (**games**), his basic explanatory postulates are oriented more towards the process and the system.

The theorists as well as practitioners of the Transactional Analysis construct explanations based on the dynamics of social interaction. This is in contrast to the traditional ego psychology, but also many other personality theories tailored by clinicians primarily dealing with the inside world of individuals as static, essentialist entities (Erskin & Moursund, 1988). The emphasis is more on the dynamics of the process and the functional analysis of interpersonal behavior than on the structures and diagnosis.

### ***Key Concepts in TA***

Since Transactional Analysis is, in a theoretical and metodological sense, an inherently eclectic approach, what constitutes the core corpus of concepts depends on the particular school of practice or field of application within TA. The conceptual link, among different lines of TA development, over time represents the following constitutive concepts: transaction, ego state, frame of reference, personality adaptation, games, script, contract and autonomy.

**Transaction.** According to Berne, transaction is the basic unit of social communication and consists of interconnected chains of transactional stimuli and transactional reactions. Berne's model is founded on the premise that communication between people is instigated and maintained more by the different ego states than the complete personality. The personality is thus considered to be a heterogeneous entity that in a way defies categorization (Berne, 1961, pp.111-116).

**Ego State.** The basic structural unit of personality, according to TA theory, is the ego state, which can phenomenologically be defined as a coherent system of connected emotions, thoughts and behaviors. Operationally, it is a cluster of behavioral patterns, while pragmatically it is defined as a system of emotions and thoughts which motivates a specific

behavior of a person. In other words, Berne's implicit assumption is that a person possesses several real "Selves" or "experiences of the Self" (Berne, 1977, pp. 19-26).

The very term transaction implies a social relation and communication, while the relations among the ego states within a person fall under the problem of internal dialogue. Each ego state has special needs that influence the course of communication. The three ego states according to the structural model are: the Parent, the Adult and the Child.

Ego state represents a coherent group of thoughts and emotions shown in different patterns of behavior. The Parent, or extero-psyche, represents the mental state in which the person is oriented in relation to introjected messages, learned values and rules, other people's experiences, indirect knowledge of social relations that has not been experienced, and the like.

The Adult, or neo-psyche, is mental state which is the adequate intrapsychic response to the current situation, or a realistic orientation with good assessment and flexibility in the use of available resources including the contents of other ego states such as values or emotions from the Integrated Adult ego state.

The Child, or archa-psyche, is the mental state which represents activation of old memories, outdated identities and patterns, and which becomes the dominant standard for decision-making and behavior at a given time (Berne, 1961, pp.9-18).

**Frame of reference.** Assumed subjectivity is explained in TA by the constructivist concept of the frame of reference. Our perception, positions and prejudices determine our reality. A transactional practitioner recognizes the mental map, or the frame of reference from which a client observes herself and the world. Through cooperation, the client is encouraged to reorganize this framework in a functional way, in relation to the problem the client is faced with.

As there exists a theoretical, scientific frame of reference (paradigm), an individual frame of reference is also supposed to exist, as a multiple and multi-layered interconnected

system of basic personality premises. It enables an individual to selectively collect, organize and process experiences based on which basic adaptations and constructs are created (Woollams & Brown, 1979).

**Personality adaptation.** As Joines and Stewart (2002) state, a personality structure is created based on fundamental developmental adaptations and constructs. This could be recognized by a structural assessment, by examining the content of the basic core constructs of a person, the support systems of a person's personality (pp.27-33). The basic premises of one's core references, seen developmentally, represent the internal limitation to the solution of further problems in life. The quality and style of developmental solutions become the fundamental auto-deterministic personality factor. The multiple functionality of the frame of reference is, among other things, expressed in the fundamental organization of a personality, the functionality of adaptations, the clarity and predictability of behavior and, naturally, in the basic experience of continuity and identity.

**Games.** Intrapsychic difficulties are, via the concept of games, associated with the interpersonal dynamics and social situation of the person (Zalcman, 1990). Repetitive dysfunctional communication episodes represent the main target for the analysis and understanding of personal and social difficulties. They also set the terrain for crucial change work in a standard TA psychotherapy procedure.

**Script.** Viewed from a broader temporal perspective, psychological games are an integral, dynamic component of an individual life plan (Berne, 1976). There are many definitions and descriptions of the script in transactional literature. In the book that marked the beginning of the development of the script theory, *What Do You Say After You Say Hello?*, Berne (1976) defines the script as a "sketch for existence" and the "preconscious life plan", as an artificial system that limits spontaneity and creative aspirations (p.138). Steiner describes the script as a "life plan in which it is specified what will happen to a person that is of

significance and that originates from the earliest childhood and the decisions made then” (Steiner, 1974, pp. 13-24).

In Erikson’s study of life cycles as psychosocial phases of development, we come across many ideas similar to the script analysis through stressing the influences of culture and society on the development of a personality and creation of the life story of each individual (Erikson, 1974).

In psychological literature similar ideas can be found in the individual psychology of Alfred Adler (1956) and Freud (1949/1938). Adler emphasizes the motivational power of the individual lifestyle, while the integral part of Freud’s theory is the teaching on the repetitive compulsion of fate. However, for such a pattern to function or worsen, it needs to have a function both for the person and the system the person belongs to.

In the words of Elkaim (2002/1990), a family therapist and system theorist, historical factors do not automatically lead to current behavior. A specific behavior will continue or worsen only if it confirms the worldview shared by the partners, and plays a role in the broader systemic context. In that sense, a **couple, for instance, is only a visible part of a broader system, which encompasses more general sociocultural and political elements.**

As has previously been stated, the development of the life script inhibits spontaneity and limits the social flexibility of a person, and thus also the quality of communication and emotional exchange. Determining the script as destiny is the transactional response to the great question of human determinism. Besides, all of the mentioned transactional phenomena suggest the existence of a psychological prestructuring of the personality, in order to defend itself from unpleasant or threatening experiences. A rigid organization of the personality, according to the principle of a closed system, blocks the full awareness and scope of possible reactions and options.

Starting from the script analysis, a transactional analyst can discover and cope with an irrational and dysfunctional life plan constructed by a person in a crisis. Each child has, in its family context, intuitively developed a cluster of strategies useful for survival, having its needs met, and solving its problems. When those strategies become fixed and closed in a rigid system of determination, there are very few degrees of freedom left for free growth and development. Thus, the dysfunctionality of this developmental solution becomes apparent. The central skill in development of the script is based on the continuity of a tendency toward an irrational type of childlike logic and childlike understanding of the world. This may remain functional in the lives of some people, even after biological maturity has been reached (Berne, 1977).

Let's consider the discursive nature of the script as a narrative identity, whose function is reflected in connecting experiences and providing one with a sense of continuity with the passage of time. The posed question is whether the script, in the above mentioned meaning of the word, can be considered as a limiting individual decision or rather a social construction?

### ***The Sine Qua Non of TA in Practice***

TA is a pragmatic approach, oriented towards the strengths and capacities of the personality, in various practical applications, as it is an individual, couple or family therapy. There is a saying in TA attributed to Berne, that one must: "Cure first, analyze later" (Berne, 1961, pp.160-174).

A transactional analyst faced with a chaotic, complex system characterized by fluid assumptions about reality can reduce the superfluous complexity. This can be done by applying certain techniques such as therapy contracting, focusing the central topics and using clear models.

The pragmatism of transactional analysis approaches the ideas of post-structuralism from the perspective of desired outcomes, with its reflective insight into the consequences of certain practices, actions, speech, thought, emotional expression and others. The coordination of our life space and the terms we use to describe it is realized via the activities of communication.

**Therapy Contract.** A therapeutic contract enables the client to “co-author” the course of therapy. It is elastic “work plan”, formulated even for each meeting individually, in which the established alliance and negotiated common language between the client and the therapist is reflected (Berne, 1966). The effect of intensifying the therapy can thus be achieved by changing an asymmetrical relationship into a symmetrical one. Namely, psychotherapy consists of the changes the therapist and the patient determines in agreement, and which are realistically attainable by psychotherapy.

The therapeutic contract can be considered to be a form of linguistic practice, envisaging and bringing to life not what is, but what is not. A linguistic shift from a problematic narrative into a desired state that takes the narrative forward opens the door to new constructions of the self and thus new outcomes.

For change to occur, it is not necessary to understand or presume the structural foundations of the current situation. Human lives, like texts, have no inherent meaning, and human identity is consequently constructed via communication in a social context. Psychological outlines are primarily shaped by language, through which we know and create the world. Korzybski (1933) believes that language is not merely a system of symbols, but also the basis for actions – conditional responses, i.e. semantic reactions developed throughout life. Later on, I return to the contract in TA, but from the perspective of social constructionism.



**Autonomy.** Let me go back to the humanistic roots of Transactional Analysis reflected in the concept of autonomy. A practitioner of the “new decision” therapy, as the synthesis of TA and gestalt psychotherapeutic approaches, starts from a superordinated assumption that the life script represents a limitation of the authentic expression, or personal autonomy. Such a limitation is constructed by one’s own free will (Goulding & Goulding, 1979, p.13).

The goal of TA belongs to the category of normative psychotherapeutic goals and Berne himself defined it as reaching autonomy. Autonomy can be viewed from three aspects.

The first aspect is reaching awareness through different insights, namely: the phenomenological, the functional, the motivational and the historical.

The second aspect refers to achieving spontaneity. Spontaneity, and the relative freedom to choose, is achieved via liberation from different compulsions, meaning reaching a certain degree of cognitive, emotional and behavioral freedom.

The third aspect of autonomy refers to achieving intimacy in interpersonal relationships, the capacity to discover and openly express one’s needs and feelings in front of other persons (Buber, 1970).

The term intimacy in durable human relations encompasses four overlapping processes: devotion/giving attention, communication, joint problem-solving and reciprocity. These processes optimally follow one another in a relationship (Wynne & Wynne, 1986). Intimacy is determined by the quality and depth of interpersonal contact and the relation with relevant people in an individual’s interpersonal environment. They enable the individual to achieve idiosyncratic expression, closeness, belonging and cooperation. Such quality of contact diminishes or excludes destructive manipulation and games between people, as elements of the script process.

The theoretical elaboration that I have put forth in this thesis has as a goal to advance the development of an integrative approach in TA, which would incorporate the social-constructivist perspective.

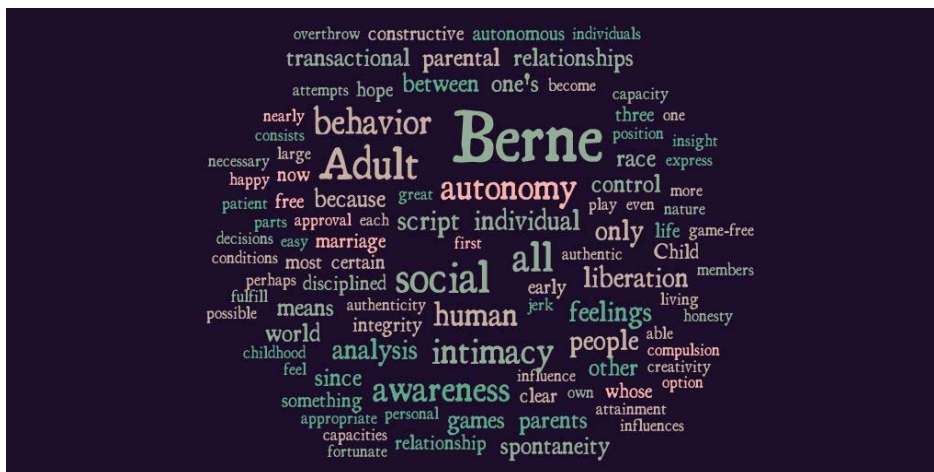
The future of the transactional analysis psychotherapeutic practice lies in increased eclecticism and integration. In that sense, the conclusions of the research conducted within this dissertation could serve as the starting point for redefining the concept of “script cure” from the viewpoint of postmodern psychotherapy. It can also be useful for surpassing the existing antagonism between these two terms by juxtaposing them when it comes to the description and assessment of mental health. Only through placing the idea of autonomy in the local context, or stressing autonomy as a strong sense of authorship over the dominant story, does the basic idea of autonomy as the potential for “constructive adaptation” become available for observation and possible reinterpretation (Allen & Allen, 2005).

### Chapter 3

#### **Dominant voices among TA interpretations of the concept of autonomy**

To avoid paraphrasing TA theorists, in the following text I present and discuss excerpts from the original interpretations of the autonomy concept, as well as the interpretations of the TA treatment goals, according to the most cited authors and publications. The selected excerpts in the following text will be the subject of a deconstructive discussion, through the prism of the research questions. Every excerpt is followed by a word cloud<sup>2</sup> as a visual representation of the text. Word cloud represents a computer-aided content analysis of the product. The most frequently used word to describe the meaning, context and implications of autonomy by a certain author, is presented by the largest font, signifying its importance.

#### ***Eric Berne on Autonomy***



*Figure 1.* Word cloud representation of the most frequently used words to explain the concept of autonomy by Eric Berne.

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<sup>2</sup> A **text cloud** or **word cloud** is a visualization of word frequency in a given text as a weighted list. The technique is often used to visualize the topical content of text.

Berne's interpretation of autonomy is, to a large extent, inspired by criticism of the classic psychoanalysis. With clarity and accessibility, he emphasizes social and interactional factors in a development of a person and his/her functioning in the world, the same way the current transactional analysis theory does. Berne's ideas can be viewed as anticipating modern change toward relational theory, which turned psychoanalysis away from drive theory and into the domain of relationship.

The most authentic people in the world are young infants whose vision and relationships have not yet been seriously impaired by the "jazz"<sup>3</sup>. In effect, transactional analysis attempts to re-establish the clear awareness and candid intimacy of childhood in the patient, as exemplified by the early relationship between the child and its mother. The patient learns to exercise Adult insight and control, so that these childlike qualities only emerge at appropriate times and in appropriate company. Along with these experiences of disciplined awareness and disciplined relationships goes disciplined creativity (Berne, 1966, p. 306).

The original Berne's idea on autonomy is of a crucial psychological ability that can only be developed and manifested in interaction with others. Aside from the relational potential of this idea, the most dominant aspect in his version of autonomy points to the importance of strengthening the sense of individuality and self-agency.

For certain fortunate people there is something which transcends all classifications of behavior, and that is awareness; something which rises above the programming of the past, and that is spontaneity; and something that is more rewarding than games, and that is intimacy. But all three of these may be frightening and even

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<sup>3</sup> Referring to the psychological games among adults

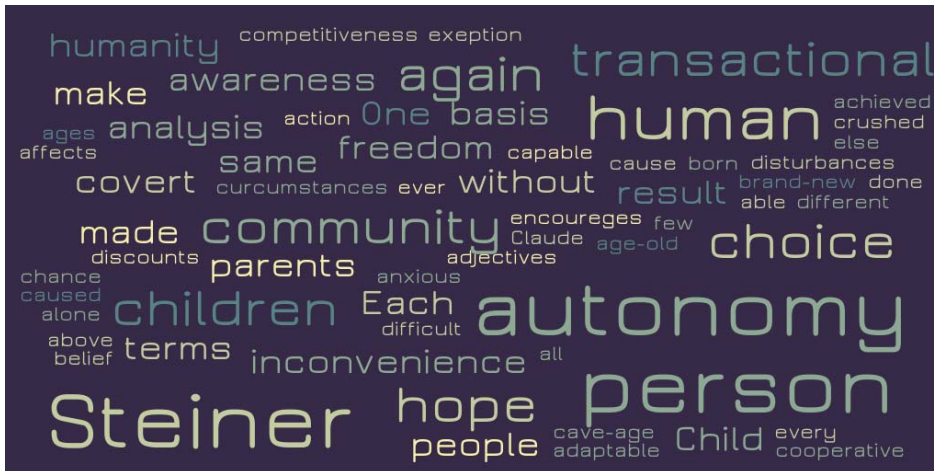
perilous to the unprepared. Perhaps they are better off as they are, seeking their solutions in popular techniques of social action, such as “togetherness”. This may mean that there is no hope for the human race, but there is hope for individual members of it (Berne, 1964, p.209).

Autonomy, described by Berne (1977) as a condition for “personhood”, is greatly limited by the existence of script as an “archaic compulsion”. On the other side, the decontaminated Adult can rationally control his/her behavior in the particular situation and exert social control over a large portion of his/her behavior with people (Berne, 1977, p.155).

When it comes to relational implications and understanding of autonomy, which are the main focus of this dissertation, it is important to mention Bern’s inherently individualistic view on relationships as unions of two independent actors, with separate or, at most, compatible agendas.

The relationships and games in a marriage should be made optional instead of compulsive, so that the destructive or unconstructive elements can be eliminated. After this is accomplished, the spouses may or may not be interested in each other. Time must be allowed for the emergence of more constructive relationships and games. Then each party can decide on rational grounds whether or not they wish to perpetuate the marriage. (Berne, 1961, p. 236).

### *Claude Steiner on Autonomy*



*Figure 2.* Word cloud representation of the most frequently used words to explain the concept of autonomy by Claude Steiner.

The most influential voice in TA theory, besides Bern's, is Steiner's, especially on the topics of script and autonomy. The interpretations he offered to the TA theoretical corpus are connected with the ideas and values of democracy, weighted with the political connotations very close to the radical psychiatry thought. In his interpretations, Steiner recognized autonomy and its manifestation - authenticity, as a result of the democratic upbringing style.

Autonomy does not include the freedom to cause inconvenience or pain to others. As long as a certain action affects the person alone, cooperative child-rearing for autonomy demands that the person is given the choice and is allowed to make it. If the choices made result in some harm or inconvenience to other people, then the inconvenienced people have the right to demand that such a choice is not made again (Steiner, 1974, p. 304).

What is interesting within his explanations of autonomy conditions and implications is moving away from the individual toward appreciations for the community as an agent in the constitution of the person and its potential.

Raising children for autonomy is a project that cannot be done in isolation of a larger community which is supportive and understanding of the process. When everything in the community is decided based on competitiveness, individualism, discounts, “rescue” and “persecution”, it is very difficult for a specific household in that community to operate on a totally different basis. One person can only rise a few inches above the rest; and in order for one person to be liberated completely, everyone else around that person has to be traveling the same path and achieving the same benefits. We are not able to raise our children without scripts unless we deliver them into a social situation in which they can make free choices (Steiner, 1974, p. 306-308).

The important points contained in Steiner’s theoretical work accentuate personal freedom, autonomy and “scriptlessness” that cannot be achieved in the midst of oppressive circumstances.

*Muriel James on Autonomy*

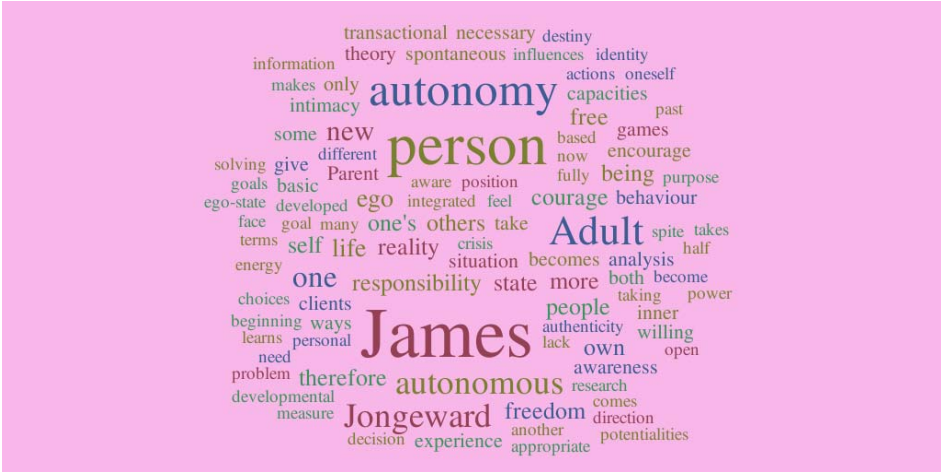


Figure 3. Word cloud representation of the most frequently used words to explain the concept of autonomy by Muriel James.

Elaborations on the subject of personal autonomy in Muriel James's work are, figuratively speaking, provided in the form of an individualism manifest. Her theories of human development and change are deeply saturated with the ideology of individualism, assuming that each individual person is a self-contained unit, requiring minimum levels of sharing, caring and interdependency. Being autonomous means being self-governing, determining one's own destiny, taking responsibility for one's own actions and feelings, and throwing off irrelevant and inappropriate patterns to living in the here and now. (James & Jongeward, 1992/1971, p. 259)

An autonomous person is one who makes decisions which give purposeful direction to his or her potentialities. Within realistic limitations, the person takes responsibility for a self-imposed destiny. To consciously decide for oneself from the Adult ego state is to be free. Free in spite of basic instincts or drives, free in spite of inherited characteristics and environmental influences... Only when one's inner ethic and outward behavior match is a person congruent and whole. A spontaneous person is free to "do his own thing", but not at the expense of others, through exploitation and/or indifference. It takes courage to experience freedom that comes with autonomy, courage to accept intimacy and to face another person, courage to defend an unpopular cause, to pick authenticity over approval, and to keep choosing anew, courage to take responsibility for one's choices, and of course, courage to be an exceptional unique person... (James & Jongeward, 1992/1971, pp. 261- 270).

Often, James's interpretations of personal autonomy are circular and tautological. She is using descriptions of the Adult ego state as a hypothetical construct, to operationalize or support the vague ideas on autonomy, introduced by Berne, as the ultimate psychotherapy goal. James & Jongeward (1992) state that people moving toward autonomy expand their personal capacities for awareness, spontaneity and intimacy. In James's (1998) view, one sign



of autonomy is the ability to move psychic energy through the semi permeable boundaries, from one ego-state to the other, at will. As this occurs, they develop integrated Adult ego states. Later on, in her theory on change, she offers an explanation of the Adult ego state (neopsyche) functioning and manifestations. In her interpretations the Adult ego state is concerned with data collecting and processing of his/her surroundings, autonomously and objectively, while estimating possibilities for a suitable action. It organizes information, is adaptable, and functions by testing reality and computing dispassionately. (James, 1998, p. 12)

An autonomous person is spontaneous and flexible - not foolishly impulsive. This person sees the many options available and uses what behavior seems to be appropriate to the situation, and to his or her goals. A spontaneous person is liberated, making and accepting responsibility for personal choices. This person gets rid of the compulsion to live in a predetermined life style and instead learns to face new situations and explore new ways of thinking, feeling, and responding. This person constantly increases and re-evaluates a repertoire of possible behaviors (James & Jongeward, 1992/1971, p.261).

Throughout her theoretical work James alludes to autonomy as a signifier of mental health. Being able to think clearly and creatively is necessary for freedom and autonomy (James, 1981, p.130). Transactional analysis therapists strengthen the Adult with information, restructure the Parent when appropriate, and encourage clients to give up destructive transactions, games and scripts in favor of authenticity and autonomy. The goal is mentally healthy clients (James, 1998, p. 203-204).

*Fanita English on Autonomy*



Figure 4. Word cloud representation of the most frequently used words to explain the concept of autonomy by Fanita English.

The antipode example in defining personal autonomy, introduced in TA discourse by Fanita English, is the concept of “racket” feeling and behavior. The racket feelings and joined behavior are described as delusional, manipulative forms of human experience. She contrasted it to the Adult functioning that is free, spontaneous and authentic in expression, implying that autonomy is possible only for those who are affectively fluent and cognitively able to make a distinction between “real” and “unreal” feelings and needs.

Ground-work is laid for the Adult supervision of his own behavior, rather than the panicky Child suppression of awareness. The child has less need for artificial “approved” feelings to substitute for real ones. A racket is kept from taking deep root when the child can say to himself: “I may feel whatever I feel without fear. I can decide what I show and what I do.” (English, 1971, pp.27-33).

### *Richard Erskine on Autonomy*



Figure 5. Word cloud representation of the most frequently used words to explain the concept of autonomy by Richard Erskine.

Following James and English with their lines of thinking and practice, Erskine situates the autonomy in a discourse of developmental psychology, defining it as the outcome of appropriate developmental circumstances. Erskine (1997) states that the quality of autonomy, which children develop, depends on their parents' ability to grant autonomy with dignity and a sense of personal independence which they derive from their own lives. Psychotherapy is in the service of providing the developmentally corrective environment that enables later acquiring the undeveloped skills of autonomy. Further on, he relates personal autonomy with independency and overcoming of symbiotic, script driven, ways of psychosocial functioning.

Berne's use of the term "autonomous" refers to the neopsychic state of the ego functioning without intrapsychic control by an introjected or archaic ego. When in the Adult ego state, a person is in full contact with what is occurring both inside and outside his or her organism, in a manner appropriate to that developmental age (Erskin, 1997, p.110).

Besides autonomy as personal independence in its narrow meaning, Erskine introduces interdependence within the same discourse. From his viewpoint interdependence is explained as a skill, instrumental in its nature, developed through adaptation to others and their needs.

Interdependence represents a combination of the autonomy of independence and the acknowledgment of the responsibility and dependency each person experiences in relation to other members of the household. Only through independence are we able to satisfy some of our emotional and physical needs. The aim is to have family members actively ask for and negotiate to get what they want, while also learning to give without resentment and hidden “You Owe Mes” (Erskin, 1997, p.188).

*Charlotte Sills on Autonomy*

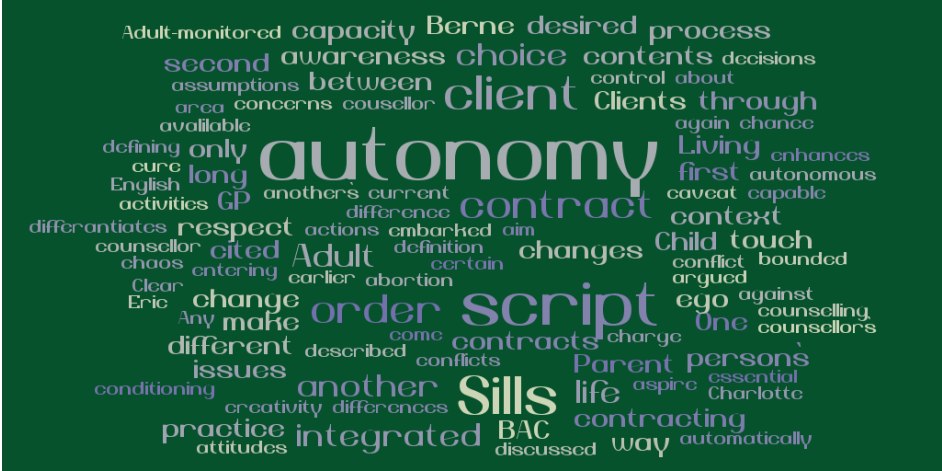


Figure 6. Word cloud representation of the most frequently used words to explain the concept of autonomy by Charlotte Sills

An interesting shift in the interpretations of autonomy among TA theorists and practitioners comes from Sills’ emphasis on the importance of contracting in counseling. The existence of a contract assumes that all parties involved are obliged to a certain amount of responsibility and power.

Holloway (1974) differentiates social control contract from an autonomy contract which has the aim of releasing the client from his conditioning and putting him in full charge of his life. This again implies a second-order change (script cure by Berne, 1961) (as cited in Sills, 1997, p. 21).

Thus, the contract as a concept is coherent with individualist assumptions of the previously discussed autonomy interpretations. On the other hand, contracting as a process becomes a psychotherapy intervention that supports a certain view on autonomy and at the same time teaches the clients how to operate within the society that favors contractual relations.

The English philosopher John Stuart Mill (1962) argued that we should respect another person's autonomy – as long as one person's autonomy does not harm another's, and as long as people are responsible for their actions. The BAC links this principle with the practice of contracting: "Clear contracting enhances and shows respect for client autonomy" (BAC, 1992: B.2.2.10) (Sills, 1997, p. 209).

The shift visible in Sills' interpretations of autonomy, compared to other dominant voices, comes from prioritizing the contact with the client and learning about the client's frame of reference through the process of contracting. Sills postulates autonomy as an unattainable, theoretical ideal.

The attainable, through the process of counseling, is the integration of the client's experience in a new and meaningful way.

Autonomy means living our life in the integrated Adult ego state. Any moment lived in the Child or Parent ego state is inevitably a script, unless it is the Adult-monitored or Adult-integrated. To put it differently, our script is expressed through the contents of our Child and Parent ego states. If we automatically replay the contents, we are in the script. The way out of the script, then, is through our Integrated Adult

awareness which, as we stated earlier, involves a choice and, with the choice, responsibility... Living a script-free, autonomous life is an ideal toward which we can only aspire (Lapworth, Sills & Fish, 1993, pg. 88-89).

### *William Cornell on Autonomy*

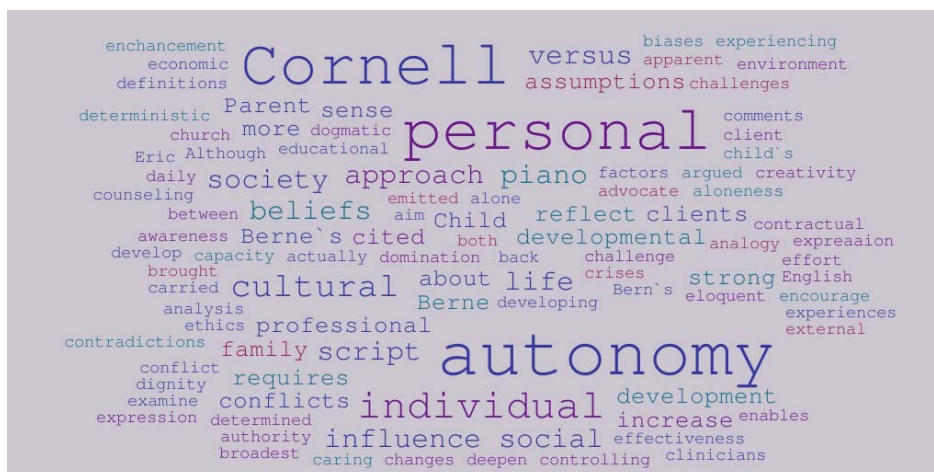


Figure 7. Word cloud representation of the most frequently used words to explain the concept of autonomy by William Cornell.

Cornell's interpretations on autonomy represent a valuable contribution to the development of the theory built on the critical re-evaluations among current, culturally sensitive, present-day practitioners. Cornell is a relevant figure in the critical reconsideration of the original TA concepts. Personal autonomy is one of them. He pointed out that Steiner gives far more importance than Berne did to the social, cultural and economic forces that influence a child's developing sense of self, autonomy and possibility. Although a strong and eloquent advocate of the individual rights and dignity, his theory of script does little to challenge the deterministic and reductionist underpinnings of Bern's approach (Cornell, 2008, p.59). Cornell remarks that Gilligan (1982) "challenges the pervasive influence of the masculine perspective in developmental theories, stressing individuation and autonomy, and argues persuasively for the recognition of the role of caring and relatedness in human development" (as cited in Cornell, 2008, p.56).

It should be noted that Cornell does not considerably pay direct attention to the reinterpretation of autonomy in his critical analysis work, nor does he openly address it. Indirectly, he claims that psychotherapy works to deepen self-understanding so as to increase the range of personal autonomy and effectiveness in a person's life (Cornell, 2008, p. 5). An important aspect in this interpretation, regardless of the script theory and its implications, is the positive description of autonomy from the positive psychology standpoint, as a personal quality for self-reflection.

The counseling process enables clients, or client's systems, to develop awareness, options and skills for problem management and personal development in daily life, through the enhancement of their strengths and resources. It aims to increase autonomy in relation to the client's social, professional and cultural environment (Cornell, 2008, p. 115).

Furthermore, in his view, several important values are inherent in the transactional analysis ethics and techniques: contractual treatment, individual responsibility, protection of the client and his or her developmental needs and personal autonomy (Cornell, 2008, p.238).

Thus, Cornell again places autonomy in the category of ideology and values. Autonomy, interpreted as a value, has a strong, yet indirect, impact on the formulation of concrete goals and process of psychotherapy.

*James Allen & Barbara Allen on Autonomy*

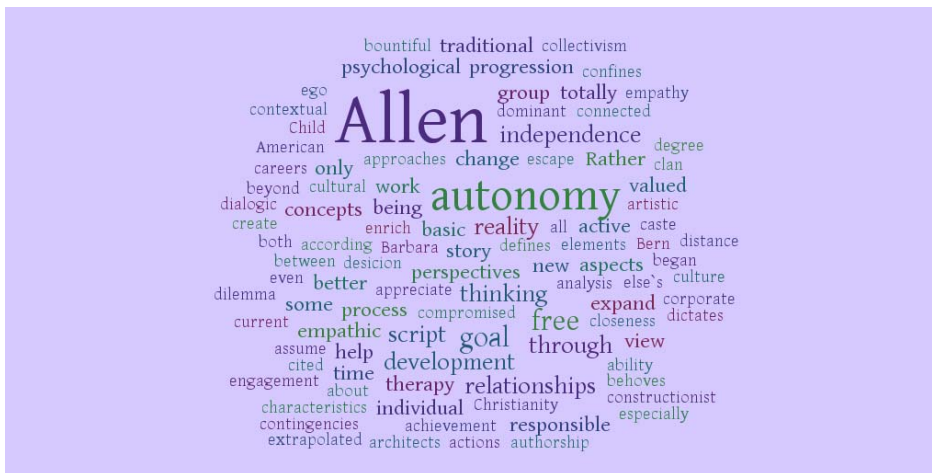


Figure 8. Word cloud representation of the most frequently used words to explain the concept of autonomy by James R. Allen & Barbara A. Allen.

The relational view on autonomy and self can be openly recognized in the work of James R. Allen & Barbara A. Allen. Individual identity is corporate and includes family, caste, clan and linguistic group. Autonomy means being settled in work and marriage according to the dictates of the cultural group (Welch in Allen & Allen, 2005, p. 360). They have articulated implicit TA relational implications in claiming that development may not be so much an individual’s journey through a linear progression of stages, but rather a process through which we unfold and expand in and through our relationships with others (Allen & Allen, 2005, p. 257).

Their theoretical orientation and its contribution are mainly grounded in the postmodern paradigms. The goal of the TA therapy script work, with the constructionist sensitivity, is to help the person escape a dominant story that defines him or her as a problem, and to increase his or her sense of authorship and autonomy. That is, the goal of TA therapy – as it is the goal of more traditional approaches – is to help the individual redesign and live his own story (Allen & Allen, 2005, p.108). As representatives of the postmodern currents within TA, Allan & Allan discussed the traditional TA discourse in the following manner:



Our North American culture, and especially those aspects of it most influenced by Protestant Christianity and the bountiful nature of the New World, has highly valued independence, autonomy, achievement and initiative. However, these valued characteristics can sometimes be compromised in the schizoid dilemma of finding a safe place between closeness and distance in interpersonal relationships. There are also other values of importance in life, and therefore of significance for psychotherapy: interdependence; the development of empathy, relatedness and mutuality; and the ability to stand outside of oneself to appreciate better the perspectives of others. A dialogic postmodern view does not oppose independence and interdependence, objectivism and contextual understanding, individualism and collectivism. Rather, it views these factors not as opposing elements but as aspects of a total process (Allen & Allen, 2005, p. 63-64).

The cited critiques shift autonomy from the sphere of values and responsible choices on one side, and emotions and behavior on the other side, to the cognitive sphere. Autonomy, in that light, assumes cognitive efforts to identify and name doxa and tradition, as such, and to exercise cognitive skills that will restrict its influence on beliefs and decisions. Thus, autonomy means broadening the spectrum of thinkable options. If we were to state it more clearly, it would imply “the freedom of thinking”.

First, since we cannot know whether our worldview (including our therapeutic orientation) fits reality better than someone else’s does, it behoves us to be tolerant. Second, we are responsible not only for our actions, but also for the reality we create. We are totally responsible and totally free, the architects of our realities, as well as our scripts. This is the true autonomy. We are not only script free, as Bern (1972) suggested, but free of the traditional confines of reality as well (as cited in Allen & Allen, 2005, p. 348).

### *Summary*

In this chapter I have presented the chronologic overview of various interpretations of personal autonomy, introduced by prominent TA authors over time, from the 70's to present days. Interpretative analysis of their theoretical works illuminated the significant change on the level of meaning and its implications. Autonomy as the central concept, operationally defined from the framework of individualism as independence, responsibility or self-management, transformed into a less used metaphor over the years. References to autonomy and it's meaning become less frequent and important aspects of contemporary theoretical work in TA. Often it is interpreted as an integrated experience of the person, a flexible cognitive style and a capacity for interdependence.

## Chapter 4

### Transactional Analysis and Partnership

#### *TA Theory and Family Dynamic*

Family and couple transactional therapy was developed at the time when it became clear that the changes effected during the course of therapy do not remain permanently if they are in collision with the functioning of the family system. This refers especially to those changes concerning the patterns of emotional exchange and the quality of communication. Therapists needed a way to gain insight into the functioning of a family group independently from understanding its members.

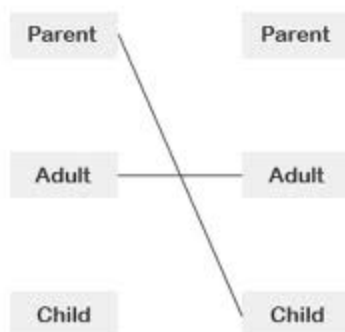
Transactional Analysis as a socio-psychological theory incorporates the view that humans are social beings, created and constructed in a society. The miracle of birth alone is insufficient for us to realize our “human nature”. It has to be earned by hard work, i. e. constructed via the practice of communication (Burr, 1995/2001). Individuals can therefore exist, and be observed as persons, only in social situations, or else within their families. Moreover, the social situation is not determined by the essential core characteristics of the individuals entering it, but in turn forms those individuals. Interpersonal theories of social psychiatry, such as TA, have the basic premise that people are determined by their mutual relationships, their mutual connection which forms the basis of personal characteristics we ascribe to each other. Explanations of human functioning can be found neither in the individual psyche nor in social structures, but only in interactive processes routinely occurring among people. The Self is an interpersonal process, learned, developed, and ultimately known only through one’s living among others (Sullivan, 1964).

Berne was not a family therapist, but he spoke of TA in the therapy of married couples. In that sense, the goal of therapy is to change the context of living in the partner or family system as a whole. This is achieved through the correction of transactions by rehearsing them until there is harmony in communication and a creation of “parallel transactions”, as a prerequisite for communication and good contact (Berne, 1961, pp.86-95). Figure 1 shows a visual representation of crossed transactions, i.e. non-parallel flow of communication.

A transaction is the basic unit of communication which consists of a stimulus and a reaction from a specific ego state. It is a general notion in TA that transactional exchange has two levels.

First there is the externally visible, social level. On this level we follow the literal, verbal content of the message.

The second level of communication, the psychological level, actually contains and transmits the actual message of the communicant, based on which his motivation can be deduced. Paying attention to gestures, posture, facial expression, the tone of voice, in a word, nonverbal communication helps to better understand the psychological meaning of every transaction.



*Figure 9: Crossed transactions*

Transactions can be analyzed on the basis of their complexity (unambiguous and ulterior), the parallel direction of their communication vectors (parallel and crossed) and on the basis of the directness of the message (direct and indirect; angular and double) (Woollams & Brown, 1979).

A stimulus can be directed from any ego state of one person towards any ego state of another person, as can the feedback reaction. Transactions can thus be complementary, crossed or double (incongruent).

Transactional analysis in its practical application enables the understanding of interpersonal relations and communication. At the same time, the ability is being developed for a conscious (of one's own accord) choice of the ego state which the stimulus is directed from in a social situation, and accordingly, the invitation of ego state of another person which the response is expected or wanted from. This model of analysis in a graphic way raises the awareness of the possible modes of reacting in conflicts and other stressful life situations.

Consistent with the autodeterministic developmental model in TA, the goal of a psychotherapeutic intervention is that a person can, though perhaps not having previously been in such a position, begin to practice, by relying on this model, the awareness and spontaneity in choices. Thus, the person gradually obtains responsibility for the outcomes of the social interactions that they are part of. What is here assumed under awareness and spontaneity is what is defined by these terms in TA discourse (Berne, 1964).

Further explanation of the principles of transaction analysis will not be given here, as it would lead us too far away from the central topic of the dissertation and its research questions. I will only note that it is important for psychotherapy of individuals, as well as couples and families. A whole array of special transactions could be recognized in the analysis: the carom transaction (transactions that take a detour over a third person), the

allows transaction (reinforcing destructive ego-content) and the “bull’s-eye” transaction (which simultaneously stimulate all three ego-states in a single personality).

### *The Analytic Perspective and Partnership*

In the psychotherapeutic process, a great importance is given to the analysis of “redefining transactions and discounting transactions”. This analysis, together with the analysis of “passivity, grandiosity and discounts”, enables the diagnosis of basic unsolved symbiotic conflicts which stem from the family of origin, and lead to the creation and maintenance of many interpersonal problems (Schiff, 1975). The analysis on this level represents an introduction to the understanding of psychological games and script change. The assumption is that behind every conflict episode (game) emotions can be identified through analysis of the residues of past unpleasant or traumatic experiences, as well as life positions and interpersonal styles of the conflict actors. We can also include here symbiotic urges and script topics in the family relations analysis.

A specially developed model for the analysis of dysfunctional partner dynamics is Karpman’s model of the Drama Triangle. According to this model, one enters into conflict for the reason of “social roles”, rather than for authentic reasons or needs. The social roles he identifies are Persecutor, Victim and Rescuer (Karpman, 1988). More specifically, in understanding partner dynamics the starting point is that conceptions about marriage in general, as well as the specific roles and behavior within wedlock, most commonly exist *a priori* in both partners. They are most frequently based on the subjective experience of the parents’ marriage, which later represents a unique referential framework of the person, concerning the matter of expectations from a partnership.

Therefore, any theoretical reflection on marital and familial behavior with the purpose of advancing therapeutic practice must take into consideration the logical link that exists between the individual and systemic dynamics. The logical link between the individual and partner dynamics is seen as a crossing and blending of personal themes and myths between the partners. It is difficult to analyse personal myths and script themes in isolation from familial, national or cultural myths. In order to comprehend the meaning of personal myths it is important to gain insight into their influence on the relations with significant others.

The developmental model in couple therapy is partially based on TA theory, first and foremost on the concept of script injunctions and intrapsychic personality impasses. It analyzes precisely the early experiences of partners with a view to improving the current partner relationship.

According to Levin (1974), just like a person goes through critical developmental stages, a relationship as well has its stages that pose certain challenges for partners (p.39.). The main question within that framework is how to improve one's relationship in the development of a partnership, from an unstable symbiosis to the level of comfortable interdependence (Bader & Pearson,1988).

An individual, a couple and a family actively choose and adopt, as their own, those cultural myths whose elements (symbols, rituals and the like) have a significance and importance to each family member individually, but also to the system as a whole. According to Bagarozzi and Anderson (1989), this is the starting point that family therapists, that base their work on the analysis and change of script topics within a specific cultural framework, assume (pp.77 -88). These cultural myths are then modified and reworked on the level of the individual, in order to fit his or her personal mythology (life script). In this way, a person manages to maintain through time his or her self-image, i. e. his personal integrity. Similarly,

the role of cultural myths is reflected in stabilizing the organizational structure of the partnership or family system, in order to preserve the predictability of the interaction patterns among its members.

Viewed systemically and circularly, this process, in turn, actually reinforces and stabilizes the cultural myths themselves (English, 1969; Noriega, 2004). Steiner (1974) provides an attempt to systematize the script topics which can be found in couple work, taking account of socialization as a repressive process, particularly so in defining male and female roles in society and family.

Steiner recognizes a whole array of “banal male and female script patterns” in American culture and gives them humorous slang names to promote a critical attitude towards them (pp. 176-206).

As has been stated above, the basic units of analysis in TA are ego states and transaction. When the course of communication between two or more persons is observed, the ego state can operationally be defined as a cluster of behavioral patterns.

What does that mean in practice? It means that the mental state in which the person is can be visible both on the interpersonal level in the content and in the process of communication. There are thus certain typical signs based on which we can hypothesize about which mode of mental processes is taking place intrapsychically by watching what the person emits into the external environment.

On the basis of activated ego functions, at every point in time it is possible to draw conclusions as to the supposed functional ego profile of the personality. This ego profile is in TA referred to as the Egogram. Every person, according to Dusey (1972), uses one hundred percent of his or her available psychic energy to function at every given moment (pp.37-42). The concept of the **Egogram** is founded on the hypothesis of constancy, according to which mental processes and interpersonal transactions are based on a closed system of psychic



energy within a person with a relatively constant level. What may appear to be too much or too little energy on the level of manifestation is merely the expression of a specific distribution of energy among the ego states within the person. The egogram describes the individual at any given moment, i.e. provides an intuitive, changeable portrait of the individual, deriving from accepting early programming by parents, as well as other internalized influences.

Unlike the psychogram, as a phenomenological, subjective assessment providing information about a person's internal strengths, the egogram illuminates the external, projected personality strengths which others can assess and report on. In fact, an individual observed by others and experienced as a person is a public entity expressed in the third person. All we know, claim or think of an individual simultaneously constitutes the individual as a person (Burr, 1995/2001).

In other words, intrapsychic dynamics and determining the development of a person's hypothetical capacities such as intelligence, the superego, psychoticism or the functionality of the Adult ego state are of great importance for contemporary clinical assessment. However, the consequences of an individual's actions, the impression he or she makes on the broader environment, as well as the individual's feedback are of equal relevance. Thus the identity of an individual as a person is what is determined by other persons. This mode of understanding of the individual encompasses what others attribute to the individual. What constitutes the person, the idiosyncrasy, the conditions under which a person can be identified, personal identity, can all be found in the public domain. What make us persons are in fact discursive constructions created as a product of social exchange (Burr, 1995/2001, p.63).

This brings us back to some of the questions arising in this dissertation. Do hypotheses, which the work with couples in the TA framework is started with, inform one and

make one more perceptive, or do they really narrow the domain of comprehension and the acceptance of the client's interpretations?

### *TA Research on the Interpersonal Dynamic*

The roots of the research issues that I present with this thesis can be found in numerous similar research projects (Karpman, 1974; Sowder & Brown, 1977; Dusey, 1985; Loffredo, 2004; Brajovic Car & Hadzi Pešić, 2011). Among others, I will focus particularly on the one I have taken part in.

First, I discuss one quantitative, questionnaire-based research project conducted with the aim to empirically test the transactional assumptions and their validity for the couple counselling application (Brajovic Car & Hadzi Pesic, 2011, pp. 63-81).

In a nutshell, the research could be described as an exploration of the occurrence of marital happiness, depending on the personality functional profile and patterns of the partners' emotional exchange. The assumption is that the functional profile testifies which intrapsychic resources a person activates and uses while communicating with others. What are meant under resources are the functions of the different ego states, namely: the Critical Parent, the Nurturing Parent, the Adult, the Free Child and the Adapted Child (Berne, 1961).

The Critical Parent is a way of functioning of the Parent ego state, manifesting himself in behavior motivated by Parental directives, which often goes in the direction of intolerant control, while simultaneously underestimating the capacities of other people.

The Nurturing Parent implies focus on others, giving support, finding the good, rewarding and encouraging other people as well as one's own Child internally, on the intrapersonal level.

The Adult ego state is undivided in the functional model and describes a mode of behavior that is an adequate response to the “here and now” situation, and which demonstrates the engagement of the Adult personality capacities.

The Child ego state, also according to the functional model, is differentiated into two parts, namely the Free Child ego state and the Adapted Child ego state.

The Free Child is spontaneous in expressing emotions, autonomous and independent of parental influence.

The Adapted Child describes such behaviors which are, in actuality, automatic repetitions of the patterns learnt in childhood, so they are mostly not a good fit for the situation at hand. When in this ego state, a person takes no account of the consequences of his or her behavior and can thus hurt him- or herself, or other people.

Sussane Temple’s research (2004) introduced into TA theory alternative interpretations of the functional profiles of personality. According to Temple, no ego state can be claimed to be inherently “good or bad”; instead, there are only positive and negative aspects to every functional ego state expression depending on the social situation and the goals of the participants (Temple, 2004, pp.197-204).

Prior to commencing the work on this dissertation project I conducted a correlational research on partnership, as mentioned above. The starting hypothesis of my prior research dissertation was informed by similar previous researches on the Transactional Analysis and partnership dynamics (Karpman, 1974; Dusey, 1985). The main conclusion from the previous studies in TA is that those partners who mostly invest their psychic energy in the functional state of the Adapted Child, whether Rebellious or Conforming, are also those who express a high degree of partnership dissatisfaction (Dusey, 1985).

As suggested by TA theorists on partnership (Karpman, 1974), in the selection of the partner, people intuitively try to find others with a similar distribution of mental energy

among ego states. Without a minimum of similarity, in the sense of an overlap of the dominant ego states of partners, it is impossible to achieve a satisfactory marital union. To have a harmonious relationship and to be content with the marriage, it takes an overlap of a minimum of two areas, i.e. two to five functional ego states, namely: the Free Child, the Nurturing Parent or the Adult (Dusey, 1989, pp.61-72).

Sowder and Brown (1977) made an effort to demonstrate that it could be possible to operationalize and empirically test the presented hypothesis by applying the egogram for the purposes of research. The time a person spends manifesting specific modes of behavior, based on which it is possible to indirectly judge the dominant contents within the ego states, determines the intensity of the functional personality aspects. The final distribution of the total energy into the ego states is mostly determined by how much each ego state is stimulated during development.

The sample for the correlational study prior to this dissertation research consisted of 63 married couples from Serbia which could be considered clinically inconspicuous. The married couples constituting the sample were not in the process of a divorce, nor undergoing partner therapy during their participation in the study. In terms of education, the sample consisted of educated participants (at least one spouse with a higher education), as opposed to lower-educated examinees. The spouses in the sample belonged to the middle class, according to their economic status, and had one to two children on average.

They evaluated the strength prominence of the five functional aspects of personality indirectly, via an already existent measuring tool developed by Loffredo (2004): the questionnaire of behavioral manifestations of the Ego-states in the interpersonal context - ESQ-Revised.

Additionally, for the purpose of conducting a research on partnership (Brajović Car & Hadži Pešić, 2011), a scale was constructed in the form of a short questionnaire to examine

the patterns of emotional exchange between spouses, on the basis of the four indicators taken over from the concept of Jim McKenna's **stroking profile** (McKenna, 1974, pp. 20-25).

In the TA theory of motivation a stroke is the unit of social stimulation, which includes emotional exchange. A profile of the spouses obtained in this way provided us with information about the dominant styles of affection and intimacy exchange, both according to quality and frequency, in relation to the partner. The same idea pertaining to the functions of the ego states is also relevant to the concept of emotional exchange. It is a closed energetic system. Namely, a choice made simultaneously means less available energy at the given moment for some other choices, or modes of social exchange.

The premise of a humanistic school of thought integrated into the TA concept of stroke implies the exchange of attention, stimulation and appreciation as well as operating within structured time, as the essence of human motivation (Sartre, 1970). Frustration on one of these two levels, and sometimes both, leads to the development of psychopathology, as well as social pathology.

The therapeutic strategy in that sense should progress towards providing the conditions for the mentioned needs to be met in an unimpeded and secure way. In the basis of this model, emotional exchange can be operationalized as the following activities: giving attention, seeking attention, accepting attention, giving oneself attention in a social situation and rejecting unwanted attention. Stimulation, or attention, can roughly be divided into positive or negative, depending on the intentions of the sender, the reaction of the recipient and relational consequences.

General marital satisfaction of both spouses was explored by giving the examinees two standardized questionnaires, the IMS - Index of marital satisfaction, developed by Hudson (1982), and the KMS - Kansas marital satisfaction scale, developed by Schumm (1986).

The scores were calculated through a methodological novelty in the application of this instrument for the purpose of studying the partnership (Brajović Car & Hadži Pešić, 2011). Namely, the scores obtained by applying both scales to the examinees were presented as average, joint scores for a marital couple, attained on the basis of the calculated individual scores of both spouses. After processing the obtained data in the KMS and IMS questionnaires, it was noted that the differences between partners in relation to the numerically expressed degree of satisfaction were negligible. More accurately, not a single case was noticed where partners would be distributed into different categories of examinees based on whether the examinees were satisfied with the spousal relationship or not. Naturally, this does not exclude the possibility of exactly the opposite occurring in practice. Still, within our research, the comparison between couples based on the joint marital satisfaction score of each couple can be considered to be methodologically justified.

Scores obtained in the questionnaire measuring the functional aspects of the integrated personality are also presented as the sum scores for both spouses, and further interpreted within the appointed theoretical presumptions.

The results of the conducted research were obtained on the basis of the completed statistical analysis by methods of correlation analysis (the Chi-square and the ANOVA test). They did not confirm McKenna's theoretical hypothesis on the specific interrelation between the stroking profile and the functional dimensions of the personality. The hypothesized correlation between the expected and obtained distributions of results within categories defined in advance was not substantiated (Brajović Car & Hadži Pešić, 2011).

At the beginning of the study we have expected that if a person is functionally influenced by the Critical Parent or Adapted Child personality dimensions, what must also be noticeable in that case are corresponding indicative changes in the stroking profile. These changes would have been shown as a negative interaction or refraining from reaction, or else

as a lack of selectiveness in the giving and receiving of attention. However, McKenna's model further assumes that a balanced pattern of emotional exchange is only characteristic of those personalities whose dominant ego state is the Nurturing Parent, the Free Child or the Adult. And indeed, the results of the research unequivocally demonstrate that the couples who are very satisfied with the marital relationship have similar functional personality aspects. The spouses are satisfied with the marital relationship to a high degree in cases where both partners demonstrates such a distribution of the functional ego states that they score the highest on average on the Adult, Nurturing Parent and Free Child function scales. Individuals who share mutual characteristics and affinities with their partners experience their marital relationships as balanced. This is based on their experienced similarity with the partner and a prediction that they will be loved and accepted in the relationship, which opens the space for intimate and enhances emotional exchange. A functional symmetry of marital partners leads to a realistic and reciprocal appreciation and acceptance between the spouses. Marital partners, as they are naturally drawn to everyday interaction and extensive coordination in taking care of common tasks and possible problems, stimulate and support the adaptive process through the existing similarity in their interpersonal styles. Such modes of intimate relationships are based on seeing oneself reflected in the observed behavior of the partner. Personal and interpersonal balance is supported if the person has the opportunity to find a partner whose interactive style and social rules do not require significant alterations in their own style of behavior and communication. This finding can also attest to the quality of communication contributing both to the development of a communal feeling and reciprocity and the cognitive assessment of similarity.

If we only look at the segment concerning the patterns of emotional exchange, we see that the marital partners whose style of emotional exchange is flexible simultaneously achieve the highest scores on the marital satisfaction scale. The mentioned flexibility means

that none of the examined indicators of emotional exchange represent the dominant mode of interaction. On the other hand, if both partners exhibit a tendency of consistent preference for certain modes of emotional exchange regardless of the situation or given circumstances, the marital satisfaction scale score is significantly lower than in the aforementioned cases. Also, in those cases where the existence of complementary emotional needs is noticed in the partners (one always demands – the other always gives), the satisfaction scale score is significantly lower than the determined borderline value.

Complementary emotional problems could well be an indicator of potential marital disputes and difficulties. The marital relationship does not suffer a static equilibrium in which the balance collapses if there is the slightest change within the system or the influence and conditions of the environment. This dyad is a self-organized system which can sustain a high degree of imbalance and tends towards a dynamically stable state. There is no game without coordination, i. e. the joint action of people who are in some type of relationship (Gergen, 1992).

Research data of the study discussed above also indicates that if there is at least one person in the marriage willing to give, reject, accept and seek attention in a moderate and equitable way, the marriage is more stable and the spouses more satisfied (Brajović Car & Hadži Pešić, 2011).

The conclusions of this study, along with others, influenced the questions explored in this dissertation on the influence of partnership roles, gender conditioning and power relations aside from analyzing the isolated social episodes.



### *Practical Aspects of TA Couple Counseling*

Having stepped out into the empirical thinking, let me return to the practical aspects of TA couple counseling. Generally speaking, it can be said that the goal of TA partner counseling is the partners' achievement of autonomy (Berne, 1964, Dusey, 1989, Bader, & Pearson, 1988, Karpman, 2009).

Autonomy is the readiness to recognize and accept responsibility for the outcomes of communication within the spousal relation. Thus, we can find autonomy in opposition to games and adaptation. Autonomous persons, who inevitably change developmentally in time, also change their needs for attention and stimulation within intimate relationships. The success of a marital union, as it is assumed by Friedman and Shmukler (1983), thus lies precisely in the achieved balance between the negative and positive modes of interaction (positive and negative modes of attention). Marital success is also partly found in the balanced emotional exchange (the quantity of emotional giving and receiving) between the spouses.

The reason why I decided to present in full detail the previously mentioned research, apart from the fact that it was done in the same social context as the dissertation study, are the implications of the collected data. However, the previous research introduces the idea that marital partners whose most dominant functional ego states are the Critical Parent or the Adapted Child achieve higher scores on the marital satisfaction scale. The same scores are not reached when one partner has as dominant the functional ego states of the Free Child, the Nurturing Parent or the Adult, and the other the Adapted Child or the Critical Parent. This leads to the conclusion that, despite the starting hypothesis according to which extreme dissatisfaction with the marital relation is expected, it is nevertheless possible to achieve stable modes of durable interpersonal attachment to a certain extent. This can be

accomplished even through prestructured and rigid personality adaptations, as well as “game playing”.

Psychological games are a predictable, repetitive exchange which often leads to emotional escalation and the confirmation of script themes. The greatest gain from playing them is reflected in keeping people comfortably happy or familiarly unhappy (Horewitz, 1979). This furthermore provides evidence that Parental programming yields a true image of their existence and position in the world. The partners become comfortably predictable to each other, which leads to the diminishment of suspense and anxiety within the relation. By way of “manipulative modes” of expressing emotions and repetitive, complementary transactions, partners between whom there is a psychological and emotional distance, provide themselves with a high level of affective exchange (Karpman, 2009). Rituals, customs, myths, fallacies and the like protect us from confusion and suspense, and in a nutshell, they preserve mental energy without demanding the engagement of higher cognitive functions, such as decision-making, reasoning or assessment. On the face of it, they allow a person to act spontaneously and automatically in a predictable social context (Massey, 1985).

All this leads to the inevitable conclusion that **in practice, partner satisfaction and optimal functioning of the relationship can be identified even where there is no autonomy**, conceived through the prism of the Transactional Analysis theory.

The aforementioned conclusion on the possibility of relationship satisfaction regardless of the presence of games and adaptations (Brajović Car & Hadži Pešić, 2011), *does not support* the starting assumption of the cited research. The statement that individuals who significantly invest psychic energy into the functional personality aspect of the Adapted Child generally experience dissatisfaction with the marital relation and the partner (Dusey, 1985) is, thus, not supported. The dominance of this ego state is characteristic of those people who do not question their options, but instead act according to inertia. In that case it is a matter of a

reactive, as opposed to a proactive, personal style. The fact that the difference between a desirable and a dysfunctional level of personality adaptation is greatly conditioned by the cultural context should not be overlooked. Accordingly, any additional research into a similar phenomenon needs to start from further revision of certain items in the ESQ - Revised questionnaire, especially the indicators of the Adapted Child personality dimension (Brajović Car & Hadži Pešić, 2010). Personal adaptation, or as some authors also call it – the counterscript, represents a scenario based on the directives, regulations and injunctions usually in accordance with the social and cultural demands of the environment (Joines & Stewart, 2002; Steiner, 1974). The presence of identical or compatible personal adaptations in partners, i.e. the existence of symmetry in the preferred channels of communication (thinking, feeling or behavior), contributes to a better understanding and cooperation of the partners.

### ***Different Perspective on Compatibility and Adaptation in Partnership: The Notion of Power in Partnership***

The French theorist, Michel Foucault (2005/2003) illuminated the way in which different communities – in the domains of science, religion, the government and the like – produce disciplinary regimes. A disciplinary regime is a collection of rules we learn in order to regulate our behavior and expression. When we adopt the given discipline, we learn how to behave in specific ways, as opposed to other ways we reject. Instead of allowing others to observe our every move, we prefer to discipline ourselves in order not to do the things which could be considered bad, distasteful or foolish. On the other hand, disciplining simultaneously creates a blindness to all that is outside certain framework (pp. 91 -130). Different types of discipline close the doors to other possibilities and lead to the degradation of those outside the regime of discipline (Gergen & Gergen, 2006).

The idea of discipline placed in the context of partnership could mean the recognition and nomination of values and rules in the conduct of partners, and thus the ability to anticipate behavior. This can guarantee a certain degree of stability and the sense of certainty in the relationship.

According to the structural view of the family, both partners have their stable position, roles and corresponding behavior, indicating a very complex relationship structure (Minuchin, 1974).

As the attachment theory suggests, the greatest number of emotional reactions manifested in marriage are also learned via the most intimate childhood relationships, during the period when parents still identify the construction models. The same models then appear again in the marriage in the most complex form (Ainsworth et al. 1978). In this way, the person is prepared for certain emotional habits, such as impetuous reactions to insults (the anxious ambivalent style) or passive withdrawal from a conflict (the anxious avoidant style).

Returning to TA theory, it is clear that complementary relationships, which also means complementary transactions and games, are simpler than the empathic ones, since in that case partners jump right into long-rehearsed roles, close and familiar to them. I must note that not every choice based on complementarity is at the same time neurotic, nor that every “neurotic choice” must lead to a dysfunctional marriage. Sometimes the very orderliness of the system may be the source of pleasure in a relationship. However, when it comes to the dysfunctional complementarity, the question of power and hierarchy within the partner relationship should be raised.

The “power myth” is still the dominant discourse for some modalities of family therapy and especially humanistically oriented psychotherapies such as TA. According to it, the starting assumption is the belief that two adults of the opposite sex function based on equality, i. e. from the position of equal access to free choice and power. This view can only

be supported if the therapist limits his or her focus to the interaction of the two partners, disregarding the ways in which their actions, feelings and beliefs were also influenced by the social constructions of their roles and identities.

Also, when it comes to socio-demographic influences, interesting correlations obtained in the previous study pertain to the relation between the number of children, education and economic status. Namely, the number of children significantly correlates with marital satisfaction, and spouses with many children (three or more), as well as spouses without children, are more satisfied with marriage than couples with one or two children (Brajović Car & Hadži Pešić, 2011). As the partner relationship, similarly to that between parents and children, is based upon emotional exchange, it is necessary to establish an interactional balance in this sense. The positive effects of nurturing the partner relationship, on the other hand, have a positive effect on the relations between the parents and the children. If the partner role is neglected due to being hyper invested in parenting, it is a matter of time when a partner crisis will appear, destabilizing the entire system. In some other cases, not infrequent in traditional patriarchal communities such as Serbia, the fact that the marital partners have become parents is sufficient to keep together spouses with primary marital dissatisfaction. In such cases, the spouses discount divorce as an option even though they express marital dissatisfaction.

Another correlation pertains to the educational and economic status of the partners. Based on the obtained results, it can be inferred that the level of education significantly correlates with marital satisfaction. Better educated partners, as well as those with a better economic status, are simultaneously more satisfied with their marriage than those with less education and with a lower economic status. Higher education influences the development of cognitive processes, such as personal expectations and goals, the feeling of self-satisfaction, cognitive complexity and reflexivity as opposed to impulsiveness and the like (Meyers &

Meyers, 1985). Via education, social roles are adopted which help prepare individuals for future experiences, teach conforming to social values and beliefs, but also the struggle for independence. The acquired skills of coordination and self-regulation, built through active involvement in the long educational process, are in positive correlation with partner success. More accurately, the marital partners are more willing to negotiate and compromise, as well as respect the professional goals of each other.

All of the abovementioned suggests practically putting in parentheses the idea of predicting and prescribing certain forms of behavior based upon theoretical assumptions, all with the aim of inducing the desired changes or controlling the symptoms. Therapists prone to theoretical explanations seem to know the problems their clients are experiencing even before they come through the door. Therapy that starts from an “omniscient” position grants no significance to the client’s “knowledge”. Goolishian and Anderson (1990) have suggested an alternative approach, entitled the “not-knowing” orientation, which does not mean abandoning all previous knowledge, but rather viewing past experiences as possible sources for enriching the therapeutic conversation. Thus the theoretical assumptions the therapist accepts, in order to understand the concept of autonomy as a developmental and therapeutic goal, can be supplemented and expanded with specific interpretations and implications of the idea of autonomy, coming from the context of practice.

Certain recommendations transpire from the above discussed researches in TA. First of all, I need to stress the importance of refraining from setting diagnostic categories to clients and the premature formulation of a therapeutic contract based on an arbitrary association of multiple theoretical concepts. Psychotherapeutic application of the Transactional Analysis theory in cultures which are not similar to the cultures and traditions of North America, where the theory was generated, carries the potential for misunderstanding or misdiagnosing the client.

A research similar to the one discussed here (Brajović Car & Hadži Pešić, 2011) also demonstrates, among other things, that a precise cause-and-effect relation between partners, marital satisfaction and marital stability is difficult to ascertain using experimental methods. The privacy of the feelings and behaviors which are being measured is added to the usual difficulties in conducting research, making the bulk of the results highly suggestive.

Conclusions on the connection between personality traits and marital success are even more indistinct (Caspi & Herbener, 1990; Karney & Bradbury, 1995; Gruber – Baldini, Shaie & Willis, 1996). Despite researchers' efforts to measure this relation, it is still unclear if and how certain modes of personality functioning influence a marriage.

The aim of this dissertation, as a response to the cited researches and its limitations, is also to examine the finer structure of the relationship dynamic, apart from learning on the importance of personal autonomy between partners and among couples. The specific purpose is to achieve a broad insight into the qualitative differences in the functioning of couples satisfied with the relationship, as opposed to the couples who exhibit dissatisfaction with the partner and the relationship.

Methodological route in line with the abovementioned goals would be the qualitative methodology. I have selected **the social constructionist paradigm** as a methodological foundation for the dissertation on the topic of partnership. My purpose has been to move beyond the limitations of a single paradigm exploration of such a complex phenomenon that is the relationship dynamic. I have managed to do so by broadening the focus of analysis so that it assumes various social determinants of Self and partnership - historical, economic, political etc. In the exploration of complex interpersonal phenomena such as partnership, it is important to acknowledge the wider social and relational contexts and their **influence of external events on partners and the dynamics of the relationship**, events such as losing a parent or a close family member early on, illness, job loss, change of

the place of residence and the like. External circumstances **beyond the reach of parental programming** represent potentially very important motivational factors which stimulate the desire for intimacy and form the quality of intimate social relations.



## Chapter 5

### Social Constructionism and Couple Counseling

#### *Process of Transformation*

Postmodern ethics, the so-called ethics of participation, differentiates between the traditional client-therapist model, family therapy approaches, transactional analysis, rational emotional behavior therapy, and all others that imply a superior, active and directive role of the therapist (Hoffman, 1992). Social constructionism, through the questions it asks and the answers it provides, allows for more subtle, **collaborative** methods in working with people (Anderson & Goolishian, 1988; Riikonen & Smith, 1997). The dialogue, as such, has a transformative potential. The therapist, just as much as the client, becomes transformed through the dialogical process. Interpreting and understanding is always a dialogue between the client and the therapist, and not a result of pre-defined theoretical narratives which are crucial elements in the therapist's world of meaning. This sort of sensitivity, according to Gadamer (1975), does not imply either "neutrality" with respect to the object, or the weakening of one's own Self. It rather indicates a conscious adaptation of one's own fundamental constructs, so a text can represent itself with all its novelties and, in this manner, defend its own truth against pre-assumptions (as cited in Anderson, 1997, p. 114). Of course, for this to be possible, what is required of the therapist is to be ready to accept things as they are presented by the client, rather than looking for hidden meanings. After all, social "reality" is not a given, but created in social interaction (Gergen, 1994; Strong & Pare, 2003). Social constructionist counseling approach requires from the practitioner, apart from familiarity with sophisticated techniques, to have an immediate **interest**, at times even a direct involvement in the client's social context. In other words, joining is required in its broadest sense. When the

therapist and the client truly come together and become a **therapeutic union**, the boundaries between “personal” and social problems disappear, and the therapy can concurrently transform both the individual and his/her local environment. Moreover, for any meaningful transformation to even take place, the synergy and coordination of multiple actors is required, as **change is always an inherently relational process** and is not possible on the level of individual will and decision (McNamee & Gergen, 1992). Such a theoretical and therapeutic approach helps people in psychotherapy to take part themselves in the creation and maintenance of the environment in which the change is occurring. Throughout the therapy process clients can experience the sociality of their existence and what it means to practice the power of collective creativity (Holzman, 1999). Emphasis is given to the human capacity to reshape and change what exists in his/her environment, and thus to take an active part in creating both his/her present and future and the reconstruction of his/her history. The described approach is readily accepted and successful in practice, as it is close to the spontaneous expression and play, and is consequently aligned with the universal human needs for exploration and creative expression. In other words, new narratives arising out of interaction are common products of all those involved in the therapeutic process (Freedman & Combs, 1996). Dialogic understanding is an active and generative process, since each of the participants is trying to understand the other from their perspective. The very process of dialogical conversation represents a new relational experience (Anderson, 2011).

### ***Etiology of Symptoms and Therapist “Neutrality”***

From the constructionist standpoint, psychotherapy is considered a dialogue, **the interpersonal process of construction**, and as such cannot be stripped of the social context in which it takes place and by which it is determined (Anderson & Goolishian, 1988; Anderson & Gehart, 2007; Pare, 2007). The politicization, and the parallel humanization, of

psychotherapy pertains to the abandonment of a strict position of the illusory “neutrality”, and to the affirmation of positive values such as morality, both in the private and the public (social) life of the individual (Newman & Holzman, 1997; McNamee & Gergen, 1999). The ethics of postmodernism draws the attention to one of the greatest traps a therapist can fall into, which is a firm belief in the therapist’s “**neutrality**”. The therapist must stand for something – he or she always represents and embodies some values. Confrontational techniques, for instance, sometimes used by therapists convinced of the truthfulness, correctness and objectivity of their assessment, can often deepen the confusion, despair or passivity, especially with clients prone to self-blame. The only thing that becomes certain in such practice is the deepening of the inherent inequality in the client-therapist relationship. The therapist oriented more towards confrontation and directiveness, and less towards reflexivity in work, takes a superior position from which he discards the meaning of “dysfunctional” behavior or the alternative explanations of the same phenomenon. This is done for the sake of maintaining trust in the theoretical narrative that the therapist bases his or her “understanding” of the client on. The content of the communication the therapist gives emphasis to demonstrates the very same thing. The segment of the communication the therapist focuses on most frequently actually speaks more about the therapist him- or herself than about the client or the family he is working with.

The new ethos of postmodernism positions psychotherapy as a positive psychological practice that does not label or diagnose. As we know, the postmodern discourse is heterogeneous. What is emphasized in it are differences and a constant shift of the perspective, while dichotomized and reified concepts are eschewed. The social constructionist therapist embraces certain ideas and abstract assumptions in his or her work, as the need arises. The therapist also makes some generalizations of problem definitions, solutions or strategies from one therapeutic situation to the other. One of the useful aspects of

constructionism is that it liberates us from the belief in the existence of a perfect solution, and with it invites the attitude that differences in the clients call for the differences in the approaches by the practitioner (Gergen, 2004). The practitioner is always subversive in some way with respect to any reified “Truth”. All descriptions are creations and all concepts related to the social sphere are open to **reexamination**. We do not live in a universal world but in a **multiple world**, in which there are as many descriptions as there are those who describe (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000). Various constructions of reality are possible and valid, but not equally useful and acceptable. Common meanings we share with the people from our immediate surroundings stem from a collective system of representations and significations, such as values, norms, social codes, and **language** itself. According to Foucault (1975), in every society there are certain institutionalized discourses, i.e. verbal practices that produce by themselves the definitions of social events and impose interpersonal rules. In a word, they legitimize certain forms of behavior (as cited in McNamee & Gergen, 1992, pp. 13-14). It is through language that a person experiences and comes to know his or her world. New realities, meanings and understandings are created through language and the dialogical process, and it opens up the possibility of change for the client.

If we take a careful look at individual human interactions, we see that a flexible and fluid flow of communication precedes the institutionalization of routine. A routine is established when certain forms of a practice become satisfactory for the interactants for a specific reason. By the same token, for a change in a routine to take place, no more is required than to reactivate the same conditions under which the routine itself developed, i.e. to enter into communication. As Anderson (2011) outlined, with participatory attitude therapist’s efforts to connect, collaborate and construct with others become an authentic, spontaneous and natural action. These are not techniques or pre-structured steps, since the therapist is oriented toward “knowing with”, instead of knowing “about”.

### *The Influence of Social Constructionism as it Relates to Couple Counseling and Therapy*

Critical psychology, close to social constructionism, stresses the fact that the contemporary individual has “multiple identities□, each of which is a reflection of the various groups the individual belongs to. This idea calls for a reconceptualization of the humanistic notion of the individual’s autonomy, which indicates the existence of the whole and integrated self. It also undermines the belief that integration and personal uniqueness are a necessary condition of autonomy. Social constructionists, according to Harre (1986), see even “private” emotional states as parts of a complex web of human communication (as it is cited in Mc Namee & Gergen 1992, p.12). In line with this interpretation, emotional responses are seen as experiences that arise within a network of relations and are thus not granted with the status of internal, private states.

Aside from significant changes to the conceptualization and, consequently, to the explication of personhood and identity in the psychology of individual differences as well as social and clinical psychology, social constructionism also introduces a new point of view into family and partner therapy. For instance, the etiology of symptoms becomes irrelevant compared to the significance attached to interpersonal and social processes and the dynamics that contributes to the maintaining of the symptom.

Berger and Luckman (1985) describe social constructs as a consensual recognition of the truth and correctness of the constructed reality, as well as a process of socialization which facilitates the acceptance of this reality (pp. 15-33). By means of socialization, the meanings originally constructed in common human practice become internalized, filtered and comprehended by the mediation of the symbolic systems. The content of social constructs does not comprise solely rules, roles and rigid definitions, but also very complex meaning systems. Meaning systems are understood as cultural norms and discourses that affect the

behavior of all individuals on a personal level. Meanings can be individual, interpersonal and culturally shared (Samuels, 1989). Each represents a frame of reference within which the world of social phenomena is seen and comprehended. Thus, in the practice of partner counseling we have the opportunity to learn about how a newly formed couple arrives at new definitions of themselves, the partners and the wider family, through verbalizations and communication. What happens is that both partners bring into the relationship their own individual narratives as scripts for the behavior in the partnership. Subsequently, through interaction, adaptation and negotiation, they construct a common narrative on the relationship which they will use in the future as a reservoir of meanings (Atwood, 1996).

**Therefore, each narrative (i.e. script) on partnership, for instance, can be viewed as containing a trace of the opposite narrative. For the unsatisfactory relationships those opposite narratives provide an inspiration for imagining and defining the desired relationship. In the same way, the narrative of a problem, within troubled relationships, contains a trace of the solution, i.e. that which is deemed desirable.**

In TA terms from a social constructionism perspective, a conclusion can be drawn that scripts on partnership, aside from the fact that they are a product of social exchange, can likewise be modified through dialogical social practice. For example, during the course of social constructionist therapy and counseling, the background, alternative, irrelevant narratives are explored or performed, through which new perspectives and possibilities then arise.

Postmodern therapists put interest primarily into understanding partnership narratives that represent the reality of a couple, paying special attention to linguistic symbolization such as myths, legends, metaphors and rituals (Gergen, 2006). Ritualized conversation reflects a certain frame of reference, a system of meaning shared by the partners. By the reflective (orthogonal) investigation of what has become part of a routine, of

presupposed “truths”, standard behavior, customs and the like, reconstruction is inevitable, a crucial process in the social constructionist therapy.

Reality, as we sometimes term the product of perception, is created by people communicating with each other through “language”, while each participant determines the range of responses of his or her interactant. Couples come to understand, through the process of partner counseling, that even when they use the same words and mannerisms, they do not give them identical meanings. Also, it becomes clear that the differences in the language are conditioned by the family contexts and the personal experiences that they do not share. The discovery and sharing of individual, idiosyncratic meanings that each of the partners is referring to, further deepens their sense of intimacy.

In an attempt to juxtapose TA and social constructionism, I have noticed that the therapeutic reconstruction process corresponds to what is referred to in the traditional TA as working towards the reconstruction of the Parent ego-state (Reparenting) and Redecision. This is carried out with a view to relativizing, abandoning or replacing the rigid beliefs by a different and more flexible view of the world and one’s place in it. Of course, unlike social constructionist therapy, the classical school of TA does not take a meta-analytical stance with respect to the society and its socialization mechanisms. In doing so, it does not shift the focus of analysis away from the individual or family.

The classical TA is aimed towards analysis and understanding of the layeredness of meaning, for example in a problematic social encounter. I must note again that the analysis stops here, in the case of TA, i.e. apart from the elements of a manifest social episode and the relationship history, the analytic framework does not consist of other behavioral and motivational markers.

Differing to classical TA, the role of the therapist in the social constructionism framework is manifested not only in encouraging multiperspectivity or the hyperproductivity

of new definitions, attitudes and meanings within a family or a couple. It is also the therapist's responsibility to facilitate dialogue in which possibility, descriptions, perspectives and explanations emerge and are connected. A new narrative is always a kind of integration of already existing narratives the clients bring with them. (Freedman & Combs, 1996).

In short, Atwood (1996) summarizes the course of TA partner therapy informed by a social-constructionist premises and practice in the following way:

- The central idea/value, around which therapeutic communication is organized, is the broadening of the meaning system of the couple and their partnership narratives (i.e. scripts).
- The problems the couples discuss are considered as sociocultural symbolic constructs. By means of engaging questions, the therapist and the partners go through different time perspectives together: the past, the present, and the future. The time machine is a metaphor which is the best one-word description of psychotherapy in this sense.
- Conceiving of the past as a construct leads to a gradual balancing of positive and negative memories.
- By focussing on the present, exceptions are sought out, as well as repressed narratives or alternative meanings relative to present problems.
- Orientation to the future is accomplished by strengthening and emphasizing the examples of deviations from the rules which support the problem. After that comes reframing, introducing new metaphors, creating a frame of reference through which the future without problems would be envisaged by means of new meanings and new narratives.
- Relationship revision is the last stage in the therapy, in which new frames of reference serve as instruments of observing the future relationship, freed of



the past problem constructs, which brings about a second-order change (Watzlawick, et al, 1974).

In other words, the aim of the presented model of therapy is a deconstruction and reconstruction of the narratives (i.e. scripts) the clients bring to counseling (Atwood, 1996).

A change of narrative is followed by a change of the person's frame of reference, resulting in a reorganization of the perception of the self and the relationship with the partner.

### ***Contractual Method as Reflexive Practice: Transactional Analysis from the Viewpoint of Social Constructionism***

Contract is one of the basic characteristics of TA psychotherapy and one of the basic premises of its frame of reference. The formulation and achievement of psychotherapy goals in TA are both reached via contract. The contractual method defines psychotherapeutic reality and contributes to the creation of a new reality and a new perspective for the clients, where the symptom belongs in the past. The goal of TA is a change of the script toward autonomy, expanding the options and behavior of choice. Contract making provides a certain degree of security, protection, and orientation to the future.

In the course of the therapy, the client and therapist join their commitment and become partners in moving toward "autonomy". At the same time, the therapy contract enables a client to be a "co-author" in the conduct of psychotherapy. It is a flexible "plan of work", formulated sometimes for each of the therapy sessions separately. It reflects the established alliance and agreed common language between the client and therapist (Berne, 1966). The effect is strengthening of psychotherapy that is achieved by changing the asymmetrical relation into a symmetrical or quite symmetrical one. This is to say that TA psychotherapy is made out of changes the therapist and patient agreeably define and that are

really available to the possibilities of psychotherapy. The contract can be realized as a measure that contributes to building efficiency and shortening the length of psychotherapy.

Therapy contract is not a rigid form that imposes a strict succession of moves, but it is goal-oriented. TA psychotherapy, inherently integrative and even eclectic, carries possibilities for modification and intervention during the therapy process. However, it is important that clients achieve the contracted goal and that they recognize and celebrate the changes (James, 1977). Contract making is a psychotherapeutic process in itself. The agreement and negotiation over the therapy goals support the establishment of “mutuality” between the psychotherapist and client, and provides for their “alliance”. A contract provides the conditions, rules and goals of psychotherapy. It defines the quality of mutual relation between the psychotherapist and client and enables the creation of the framework for joint action, as well as the specific activities. The contract clearly defines the roles, relations and goals and thus, from time to time, enlightens the psychotherapeutic situation both for the client and therapist. The principle of “agreed practice” is based on the presumption that the client him- or herself creates the frames of his/her therapy. To quote Holloway:

There is another caveat in relation to the clients who wish to make “an autonomy contract” which concerns the first and second-order change (Holloway, 1974). Clients can make specific contracts for the desired changes initially, but by definition, if they are capable of imagining them, they come from the current frame of reference and are therefore the first-order changes. The fundamental shift will be made only when they have risked entering that area of bounded instability between order and chaos and embarked on the process of “reflexivity” – the capacity to reflect upon themselves and their assumptions. It is essential that the contract be non-restrictive and extremely flexible, so that the client is available to his or her creativity (Holloway, 1974 as cited in Sills, 1997, p.18).

The constructionist therapeutic practice puts strong emphasis on the nonhierarchical nature of the process of inquiry and interpretation. The performative concept of language transgresses any dichotomy between the description and intervention. One of Berne's innovative ideas, closely related to the contractual model of psychotherapy, in certain aspects heralds the advent of what we today refer to as the reflective team, introduced by Andersen (1987). In a therapeutic reflecting team, the individual therapist and team members from different disciplines sit together, involved in a generative conversation about clients' and therapists' different ideas on living with a certain disorder. All participants are mobilized to learn from the clients' realities, their narratives, and the premises structuring their self-understanding (De Haene, 2010). The concept of reflective teams emphasizes the importance of polyphony, multiple voices and being open or public with these voices, by using everyday and nonpathologizing language, if possible. Bern, on the other hand, insisted on the necessity to demystify the diagnostic process and make the psychiatric terminology communicable to the clients for a change or progress to even occur.

Because of the belief that pathology is primarily the result of external interaction, transactional analysis regards psychiatric adjectives with the suspicion that the covert purpose of these words is primarily to insult, control, or dismiss the person to whom these terms are applied. These adjectives are addressed to hypothetical internal states, such as passive, anxious, manipulative, hostile, neurotic, schizoid, character disordered, and so on (Steiner, 1971, p.188).

In the implementation of this idea, the therapists and other involved mental health experts were asked to openly discuss the diagnosis in front of the clients, relinquishing

hierarchy and exclusivity in setting the diagnosis.<sup>4</sup> The goal of this transparent practice was to help bring the languages of psychiatry and psychotherapy closer to the users of their services, instead of standardizing psychological life and looking at their experiences through a certain set of categories. In other words, this means working with people following the principle “less is more”. In essence, it is a brilliant idea of depathologizing clients in such a way as to encourage them to take an active role in the therapeutic process.

When it comes to the reflective teams I recognize the equivalent principal. Andersen (1987) summarizes some of the theoretical gains from the reflective work mode in the following:

When we finally began to use this mode we were surprised at how easy it was to talk without using nasty or hurtful words. Later it became evident that how we talk depends on the context in which we talk. If we choose to speak about the families without them present, we easily speak “professionally”, in a detached manner. If we choose to speak about them in their presence, we naturally use everyday language and speak in a friendly manner. (pp. 415-428).

With the performed comparison of contract and reflective team practice, we are pointing to the aspects of contractual model that are multiple voicings and supporting mutuality through language. This, in fact, carries a great amount of transformative potential attributed to the contract as a method. “While contracts are no inoculation against difference, the process whereby such conflicts or differences are acknowledged and discussed need defining (Sills, 1977, p.165).”

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<sup>4</sup>“Eric Berne as Group Therapist.” *Transactional Anal. Bull.* 9: 75-83, 1970. Transcription of taped therapy session conducted by Berne at a closed ward of McAuley Neuropsychiatric Institute at St. Mary’s Hospital, San Francisco, 1970. The observer method is used with two groups alternating as “patients” and “observers.”

Perhaps the greatest strength of TA in working with people lies in the very transparency and reflexivity of the therapist. TA is an intuitive approach that connects the empirical and the phenomenological worlds. By intuitive I am referring to the primacy of naturalistic, clinical methods in the process of client evaluation, which are observation, interviewing, description, countertransference analysis, as well as anticipation and visualization of future goals via psychotherapy contract. According to Berne (1949), “true knowledge is to know how to act rather than to know the words (as cited in Stewart 1992, p.4).” The process of communication thus becomes the main field within which individuals express, observe and understand themselves. Diagnostics, exactly as in the systemic approach, becomes part of the therapeutic process, a form of intervention. Both the therapist and the client, united around the same goal, are the object of self-reflective analysis, and together they make up the therapeutic system. At any rate, every interaction is a combination of stimulus and response.

Most terms used to describe personality dynamics are easy to understand, remember and use, as they are close to colloquial speech. As has been emphasized a number of times already, what holds back further development of TA in a sense of its pragmatic value, is the reification and dogmatization of its theoretical assumptions and the formalism in the training of practitioners. The training of practitioners from the 80’s onwards has been moving away from stressing the therapist’s intuitive perceptiveness and the application of the phenomenological method. This requires learning about the clients from the clients themselves. It has been moving towards a technical, procedural model (Clarkson, 1992). What has been happening is exactly what the narrative psychologist Sarbin (1986) warns against when he says that “once a metaphor has done its job of sense making, the metaphoric quality tends to become submerged... Users of the term may treat the figure as a literal expression... The reification provides the foundation for belief systems that guide action (as cited in Parry,

1997, p. 118).” An explanation of this developmental turn can be found in the fact that TA has paid a dear price for recognizing the language of everyday conversation. Mostly for this reason, but also partly because of the controversial ideas on reforming psychotic patients via regression which has been attributed to Schiff’s (1975) school, TA was discarded in academic circles as a popular psychology. Thus, the sophistication of the contractual method as a reflective practice, and the narrative force of this approach, has not received the respect it perhaps deserves.

TA theory often sends contradictory messages incompatible with the requirements of context, such as analysis in terms of social functioning and contracting for individual change. However, practice offers abundant integration opportunities. A responsible, professional development of the psychotherapist means ceaseless re-examination and expansion of the theoretical perspective in working with clients. It also suggests incorporating new tendencies in the family therapy, such as the reflective processes (Hoffman, 1992) and collaborative inquiry (Anderson, 1997), even when TA is the basic work mode. This implies systemic thinking of the practitioner and understanding the meaning of a client’s individual problems and difficulties in relation to a wider social context, even to political circumstances. For instance, integrating the family therapy techniques into TA, e.g. the genogram, aims to uncover family plots across generations, family “karma”, or, as Fanita English puts it, “episcripts” (English, 1969). The Jungian idea of episcript succinctly expresses the beliefs in the existence of deeply rooted, even mythical, misconceptions that personal tragedy can be avoided if the pathology is relegated or transferred onto another family member. The particular family member becomes a sort of “lightning rod”, protecting the other members from a similar fate. The use of genogram analysis in TA is aiming at the deconstruction of multigenerational constellations, family histories and narratives.

Working with families and couples within a contractual method requires continual intellectual flexibility and critical self-reflection of the therapist, related both to the theory, methods, work style and ethics, and to the therapist himself. Working on oneself in this sense means discovering and accepting personal limitations, weaknesses, mistakes, but also personal powers, strengths, and affinities. Most importantly, it implies giving up on the illusion of the analytically-oriented therapists as para-humans and of achieving a meta-perspective of the Martian position that Berne has postulated as a therapist's main task (Berne, 1972/1999).

As Foucault (1979) warns us, power and knowledge are interconnected, so every human relationship, professional or intimate, includes of necessity the struggle for and negotiations over power. In every interaction between two people, there is always the category of power, whether it is aimed at producing or limiting the truth (as cited in Stojnov, 2005, p. 45). The dimension of power, an inevitable inequality in relationships, a hierarchical order in social exchanges, and the relational construction of meaning, as topics in applied TA, have not been properly recognized and researched. It is for just these reasons that this thesis deals with the neglected question of the interrelatedness of the positions of the psychotherapist, the transactional analyst, as an **advocate of a theoretical ideology** and as an **active co-creator of a new conversational context** within which new meanings are produced.

### *TA and the Concepts of Structural Determinism and Autopoiesis*

The TA concepts, such as script theory and game theory, in a classical interpretation that is not sensitive to the social power inequality, are somewhat similar to the ideas of structural determinism (Maturana & Varela, 1987). As cognitive biologists, Maturana and Varela emphasized that individuals and systems can only respond based on their internal

cognitive structure. Implying that a system or a person can only act on the basis of their cognitive system is considered as structural determinism. They termed this structural determinism their personal map of the world. While discussing Maturana's idea of structural coupling and autopoiesis, Mariotti (1999) summarizes the essence of structural determinism. The notion that living systems are structurally determined is of utmost importance for many areas of human activity. In analytical individual psychotherapy, for instance, transference and countertransference can be understood as manifestations of structural coupling, in which changes sustained by the client are determined only by his or her structure. Within that frame of thinking, they cannot, therefore, be considered as caused or produced in any way by the therapist. As a consequence, it is very important to remember that the consensual domain that results from structural coupling of autopoietic systems is indeed a linguistic context, but not in the mere sense of transmission of information. Communication, according to how the word is used by Maturana and Varela (1987), as proponents of structural determinism, is not only the transfer of information. There is no information independent of the structure made up of the person that speaks and the ones that listen. Consciousness, like language, arises out of the experience of structural pairing and effective action. Organisms start interacting by means of structural pairing, i.e. they develop together creating conditions for effective action. Furthermore, Maturana and Varela equate effective action with survival (as cited in Stojnov, 2005, p. 96). Put differently, communication represents for a man, as it does for all other living beings, *a modus vivendi*, i.e. a necessary, not optional, human activity.

Biologist Richard Dawkins (1976/1979) boldly claims that each and every one of our genes is a symbiotic unit. Dawkins bases his conclusion on the fact that the mitochondria, which provide us with the largest part of the energy we need, was in the beginning, evolutionarily speaking, a symbiotic bacteria that had joined ranks in the early stages of evolution with our type of cells (p.233). The symbiotic relations for mutual benefit are usual



among animals and plants, so why would humans be an exception? If I take this analogy to the very end, then I must note that the relation of fundamental asymmetry, such as relational symbiosis, can lead to evolutionarily stable strategies of mutual cooperation. Therefore, symbiosis, or networking by interest, is more inherent to our organism than the principle of autopoiesis, and in this way perhaps to psychological functioning as well. Hence, it would be a legitimate expectation that mutual altruism played a significant part in the evolution of human.

Let me again reflect on the contractual model in TA. Does it represent the authentic expression of the client, if we take the psychotherapeutic situation to be a structural pairing and symbiosis, serving to help development? It all depends on the quality of communication, the motivation of the participants, and the therapist's capacity for self-reflection. The contract in its application can be a reflection of domination and directivity of the therapist, but it can also potentially lead to the establishment of the culture of accepting, negotiating and supporting the client's experience of agency.

I will conclude in the light of social constructionism and reflective team practice, that "therapy contract" as a concept in psychotherapy, invites the practitioners to be open and public, as Anderson (2011) phrases, with the inner conversation they have with themselves about the client and the therapy. In that sense, contract becomes yet another possible way for the therapist to contribute and participate.

## Chapter 6

### Methodology

*“Any true understanding is dialogical”*

*M. Bakhtin*

#### *Research Goals and Selected Methods*

The general aim of the dissertation is to **rethink** the concept of personal autonomy, as it is constructed in the Transactional Analysis, through the prism of **social constructionist theory**.

The specific focus, as the basis for rethinking, is on the concept of **personal autonomy** within the chosen context – **heterosexual couples living in Serbia**. Within this focus, the specific aim of the dissertation is to achieve a broad insight into the **qualitative differences** in the process of generating meaning among couples satisfied with relationship. They are then compared with the couples who exhibit dissatisfaction with the partner, as well as with the relationship. In other words, apart from learning about the client’s **interpretations** and the importance of personal autonomy, among and within couples, the aim is also to examine the finer structure of the **relationship dynamic**. In general, I strive to question whether the hypotheses on the couple dynamic, constructed in a TA framework, inform psychotherapy practitioners and make them perceptive, curious and client-oriented. Or, on the other hand, does it perhaps narrow the **domain of comprehension and appreciation** for the client’s needs and definitions of personal autonomy?

Since the posed research questions and aims are narrative in essence, the **qualitative inquiry** is the first methodological choice. Researching the domain of

comprehension and interpretations requires that the narration or story becomes the unit for analysis. It also requires results to be presented in the form of explanations and reconstructions that will generate further descriptions, suggestions and hypotheses, instead of quantified generalizations and conclusions. According to the constructionism paradigm, research on psychotherapy or couple dynamics, as well as other researches on social processes, is inherently narrative and participatory. This is the case because the researcher actively takes part in the study and influences the phenomenon under question. Social constructionism puts emphasis on social production of knowledge and also calls for practitioners reflexivity with regard to the influence of theory on practice, and vice versa. Therefore, for the purpose of methodological planning, I lean toward contemporary social-constructionist sensitivity of postmodern critical psychology as theoretical grounding. From this methodological stance it would be possible to examine the usefulness and relevance of the Transactional Analysis concepts, in particular the concepts of autonomy and life script (as a rigid life narrative) in relation to the social constructionism lens. Moreover, by way of qualitative, interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), it is possible to reexamine the contents of participants' answers and the course of the conversation itself. As it is emphasized, socialization leaves space for specificities and differences on the microplane. Knowledge, defined as such, becomes enriched through interaction and multiperspectivity. Nevertheless, the qualitative research paradigm demands a systematic, analytical and critical stance of the researcher (Fajgelj, 2004, p. 282).

The application of qualitative methods within this research or, more accurately, the semi-structured **interview** in the form of a systematic conversation with a couple on a set topic, has the goal to illuminate local connotative meanings of the autonomy as a psychological concept. Along this line, the narration is at the same time the unit of analysis but also the technique for data collection and presentation of results. Let me summarize the

TA interpretations of **autonomy**, broadly presented in the chapter *Dominant voices among TA interpretations of the concept of autonomy* (Vide pp. 45-63). Autonomy is conceptualized as a general psychological characteristic, both an important indicator of mental status and a parameter for defining the social position, partnership role, and the distribution of power in a relationship. Starting from the interpretations in accordance with the classical TA terminology, as a psychotherapist and a researcher, I am interested in learning from the participants (the couples) directly about the pragmatic implications of the aforementioned defined concept of autonomy by dominant voices, such as those discussed above. In other words, the implicit question is **whether the discourse of TA can practically secure a range of options wide enough to name, mark, understand and change problematic partner constellations and narratives?** For that reason, both satisfied and dissatisfied couples were included in the research dialogue.

Why do I ask these specific questions? The problematizing questions are induced above all by the feedback information that the context provides, with all its specificities expounded in detail in the introductory section of this thesis (Vide pp. 7-33). With the intention to deal with this difficulty in an explicit, systematic fashion, the ethnographic task of the dissertation is to reconstruct the dominant macro-framework. The reconstruction is done by using a “bottom-up” approach, i. e. from the description of a problem back to the general theory which has lost touch with the world it strives to comment upon.

Methodologically speaking, for the accomplishment of this sort of research ambition, **interviewing** practitioners and clients in a certain context should be the technique of choice. In order to **rethink** the concept of autonomy in TA, from the **social constructionism** standpoint, it was necessary to perform a deconstructive reading of the original TA literature on autonomy and its various interpretations.

### *Methodological Triangulation*

Transferability of information and the credibility of conclusions are, to a great extent, secured through the procedure of methodological triangulation. Triangulation is very broadly defined by Denzin (1978) as the process of combining various methodologies in the research of one and the same social phenomenon (p. 291). It is a research strategy for improving the validity and reliability of a study, and the assessment of the significance of results. Patton (2002) advocates the application of triangulation in qualitative studies claiming that “triangulation strengthens research by combining methods. This means the use of several types of methods or data sources, including the quantitative method alongside the qualitative (p. 247).” Methodological triangulation is also defined as “a trustworthiness procedure in which researchers search for the convergence (agreement) of data collected from various information sources, so as to form topics or categories in their research (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 126).” The data which served as the research material was gathered from **multiple sources** in the following chronological order:

- Preliminary focus group interview
- Statistical data from public survey polls
- Semi-structured interviews with couples
- Perspectives and influences of two researchers
- Therapist survey
- Multiple theoretical platforms for analysis and interpretation

Apart from the interviews with couples as the basic technique, during the preparation of this study, one focus group was conducted with eight participants (clients). All of them are in the process of TA psychotherapy. In addition, statistical data from the domain

of public opinion polls was used as a parameter for understanding the wider context in which the study was set (Gudac Dodić, 2008, Blagojević, 2006). Open question written interviews with ten TA practitioners – the so-called “expert public” in focus, were also used to illuminate meanings attached to the concept of personal autonomy in their work.

Conducting the interviews and collecting the data involved the work of **two researchers**. In addition to me, as the creator of the research design, the interviews were conducted by an assistant-researcher, also a TA psychotherapy practitioner.

In a discussion on the research material, i.e. conceptual analysis (deconstruction), **multiple theoretical platforms** were used as the basis for the critical analysis. Apart from original sources, the deconstructive conceptual analysis also refers (as an equally relevant source) to data obtained through focus group interviewing of the clients. This includes voluntary users of TA psychotherapy in a non-institutional context, as well as the answers from the survey of ten TA practitioners (psychotherapists) from Serbia. The key ground for the validation of conclusions in this study was the couples in the interviews themselves. The interviewees from the group of dissatisfied couples were offered to participate in a discussion on the validity and accuracy of a condensed form of their answers and views. This condensed form was made by the researcher after the preliminary analysis of the first round of interviews. This decision is thoroughly elaborated in a discussion on the interview analysis.

To summarize the rationale behind the methodology design, I am of the opinion that the chosen methodological components further open the field for a multidisciplinary, qualitative research methodology. This is achieved through the application of combined analytical, social-psychological and interpretative-phenomenological analyses of the concepts of “autonomy” and “life script”.

### *Steps of the Inquiry*

In the subsequent pages I discuss the chosen research methodology and its steps.

The research was conducted in the following order of methodological phases and subphases:

1. Pilot focus group interview (preliminary explorations)
2. Development of the interview guide
3. Sampling process (outsourced)
  3. a Sampling procedure
  3. b Questionnaire survey to select participating couples
  3. c Division of the sample into two subgroups
4. Interviews
  4. a First round of interviews
  4. b Second round of interviews
5. Two researchers: consideration of the influence on the results
6. Ethics and validity of the study
7. Interview analysis
  7. a Data processing techniques
8. TA therapist survey
9. Deconstruction of autonomy by the researcher

**1. Preliminary explorations via pilot group interview.** In general, a focus group should consist of a sufficient number of participants to start a productive discussion, and yet not too many so that everyone takes an active part. An optimal number is six to ten participants (Morgan, 1988.).

The focus group discussion, conducted for the purpose of preparation for this research, had eight participants, members of the client population, i.e. an “interpretive

community” that was available to me, as the researcher. The participants were selected with the assistance of a colleague, also a TA practitioner. She invited participants from a group of her clients, who at that time were involved in a post-therapy psycho-educational group program. The invitation included basic explanations on the purpose and the process of the research, such as the time and setting format, confidentiality, general topics of inquiry and a summary of the study goals.

Clients in the focus group were selected to match the age range of the couples who would be interviewed – ages 25 to 40. The topic of partner autonomy, but also of autonomy in general, was important and close to them. They had an opportunity to learn the values that TA modality advocates through intensive therapeutic work, specifically in the light of their own dilemmas and problems. None of the focus group participants was in a psychotherapeutic relationship with the researcher. I mention this for ethical reasons, as otherwise the results, as well as the validity of the research process, would be called into question because of the dual roles and possible abuse of power (Sprenkle & Piercy, 2005). All of the focus group participants had experience with group therapy prior to the research. Moreover, they were familiar with each other and had the opportunity to overcome the anxiety caused by an open group discussion. They were somewhat prepared and motivated to undertake an active role in the process of group discussion on intimate topics and issues, i.e. the research questions.

The focus group discussion technique was chosen as an ancillary technique in the preparatory stage of the research, more precisely in the pilot study, for several methodological reasons. These reasons are developing the interview guide, improving the context validity of the study and the trustworthiness of the interpretative analysis of the interview results and its implications. Justification of knowledge is confirmed by its applicability, and knowledge thus becomes the ability to produce effective action. Method, as the warranty of truth, loses its credibility (Gergen, 1990). New research tendencies within psychology as the “practical



science”, as Polkinghore (1992) asserts, return human beings into the context they belong to and develop in, i. e. the local cultural narrative (pp. 146 -163). Namely, it is difficult to imagine that knowledge constructed within a particular context is automatically transferable and equally applicable in other contexts. It is also unimaginable that it can be understood as analogous to something that exists as an established corpus of knowledge in another time and context.

The goal of the focus group interview was to identify and develop topics and subtopics for further, in-depth exploration through interviews as the main part of the study. The basic advantage of this technique lies in the fact that it is suitable for exploratory purposes, in cases when ideas need to be generated, the preliminary methodological assumptions checked, research questions formulated, and the like. Apart from that, the results obtained in this way were included in the final corpus of research material as the discussion conducted with the clients, as interviewees, provided an abundance of data suitable for an interpretive analysis. This shedded light on a field of experience which is rarely the object of investigation, namely the attitude of clients towards the modality and the applied theory in the treatment process.

As Berger and Luckmann (1985) point out, we should never forget that all symbolic universes and all legitimizations are human products, and that the basis of their existence are lives of concrete individuals, without which this existence has no empirical or ontological status (p. 38). Namely, might what we consider to be rational and justified in psychotherapeutic practice be no more than cognitive distortion, i. e. a myth, if we interpret it from some other theoretical position? If this other position is grounded in TA terminology, I would then be discussing the researcher’s or therapist’s contamination of the Adult ego state by Parent ego state contents, a dysfunctional Adult or something similar. Polkinghore (1992) further claims that the knowledge that the therapist has at his disposal is at level with the

postmodern understanding of knowledge as baseless, fragmentary, socially constructed and subject to evaluation, before all, via the criterion of pragmatic contribution (p.162). The focus of evaluation of the validity of such knowledge is the communicological and pragmatic estimation of whether the constructed theoretical interpretations can be comprehended, accepted and applied by adherents of the evaluated system. Naturally, there is always a risk of pseudo-pragmatism. Certain theories can be said to be convincing because they are effective. However, in the sense that they have become standard knowledge in a particular society or the experts community, they can be taken for granted. Likewise, even when a particular theory demonstrates its empirical adequacy through its applicability in therapy, this still does not prove the ontological status of its categories.

The data collected via group interview was analyzed by themes contained in the answers. The discussion was guided by the same set of topics as the interviews. The category of themes was later contrasted with the themes identified in the answers of therapist that have been surveyed as part of the same study. The focus group results from the pilot study, as well as the results of TA therapists' open question survey, was mostly referred to in later deconstructive analysis of the traditional meanings of autonomy found among theoreticians of classical TA.

**2. Question design for the interview guide.** Bearing in mind the aims of the research – to explore the concept of autonomy, in general and specifically in relation to satisfied and dissatisfied couples in its diversity and ambiguity - a technique best suited for further investigation appeared to be the semi-structured interview. The interviews were conducted in a semi-standardized, conversational format. The basic questions were determined ahead of time by the researchers and the subsequent questions were asked depending on the subjects' answers.

The following questions were asked of both partners:

- What is important in a relationship (marriage)?
- What are the values in a partnership?
- What does it mean to be autonomous (independent) and yet be in a relationship?
- Provide everyday life examples of autonomy.
- What is your understanding of the concept of personal autonomy?
- Is that important, good, harmful... for a relationship?
- Why did you decide to get married (live together)?
- In your opinion, what is the role of a man and what is the role of a woman in a marriage, family, partnership?
- Is this division, if it exists, important and functional for you?
- On what grounds are you evaluating satisfaction with the relationship?
- Provide illustrative examples on how it shows.
- What can disturb marital harmony?
- What must not happen in a relationship?
- How do you contribute to the success of, and satisfaction with, your relationship (marriage)?
- How do you see your role in arguments or conflicts with your partner, if there are any?

Participation of the researcher as a “professional collocutor” in the semi-standardized, conversational interview was guided by the list of topics. The goal of the research conversation with the couples was to learn about:

- 1) The meanings that partners in both groups assigned to the idea of autonomy in partnership.

- 2) The rules, conventions and beliefs which direct them in their mutual conversation on mentioned topics in relation to the degree of partnership satisfaction.
- 3) The oscillations or the potential differences in the expression and constitution of the power and gender roles in relation to autonomy as the topic and degree of satisfaction with the relationship.

**3. Sampling for the interviews: couples.** The context of research, i.e. the selected sample, consists of contemporary partner relationships. Age range of the participants is from 25 to 40 years. With the purpose of selecting an adequate, relatively homogenous sample of couples from the categories defined in advance (satisfied and dissatisfied couples), two standardized questionnaires of partner satisfaction are used (Hudson et al, 1982; Schumm, et al, 1986). The starting assumption is that the satisfaction/dissatisfaction with the relationship variable produces a difference within the sample. This would be reflected in significantly different narratives about autonomy and partnership, depending on the currently experienced satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the partner and the relationship. Given my clinical orientation, as well as the clinical significance of the topic itself, I wanted to approach the critical theoretical analysis of autonomy from both ends, the position of satisfaction as well as the position of dissatisfaction. I start the inquiry with the assumption that the autonomy is perceived and interpreted differently depending on what is going on in the relationship. It is my intention to gain an insight into the general degree in which the hypothesized difference in conceptions is based on the indicators of the partnership quality, recognized by the measure of general satisfaction/dissatisfaction. The intramodel comparisons, in this case within the transactional analysis, carries a great potential for advancing psychotherapy theory that will have implications for other models of therapy as well. The ambiguity regarding the success

and failure of therapy relates to an even thornier problem that has never been adequately addressed by couple therapy researchers: how to define treatment success flexibly without being self-serving (Jacobson & Addis, 1993, pp. 85-99). This problem brings us back to the issue of personal autonomy conceptions.

The convenient sample consists of eight couples between 25 and 40 years of age. This age group has been chosen as relevant in relation to the research questions considering that attaining and envisioning autonomy is one of the more important psychological developmental tasks in this phase of the life cycle (Erikson, 1959). Considering the fact that the attention is focused on the couple, and not the individual, it should be stressed that partnership itself passes through developmental stages similar to the development of the self during early development (Bader & Pearson, 1988, Nichols, 1988). Aside from the developmental phases of the partnership, demographic factors also represent an important determinant of the couple reality. For that reason, couples have been selected in such a way as to minimize, to a possible extent, any demographic differences such as socioeconomic status, ethnicity, level of education and length of partnership. The central difference, included in the sample plan, is the degree of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the relationship on the couple level. The interview, as the technique through which the majority of data are collected, is aimed at learning about the quality of the relationship, the ideations and meanings which are brought up within the personal autonomy discourse.

**3a. Sampling procedure.** The selection of subjects includes a preliminary survey, by means of questionnaires, for measuring partner and relationship satisfaction administered by seasoned surveyors of one of the leading Serbian polling agencies. Their training in carrying out field research is based on the skills of motivating potential subjects for conversation, then keeping organized records of the basic demographic data necessary for

fitting the selected participants into the predetermined quotas. Following that comes guiding the questionnaire administering process and clarifying the purpose and significance of the entire research and, as the need arises, of individual questions from the questionnaire. In addition to general training, the surveyors are given specific instructions pertaining to the very topic of the research. Apart from that, they are given a brief rationale for the significance of targeting the specific subpopulation, i.e. the group of younger adults, aged 25 to 40, from urban environments, who have been in a stable relationship or marriage for a number of years. A special request presented to surveyors is that it is necessary for the questionnaires to be filled out in full by both partners. The couple give their consent to the possibility of being invited by the researcher herself for an interview, in which case the conversation would be on topics along the lines of the questions from the questionnaire. Bearing in mind the sensitive nature of the topic, such as the satisfaction with the partnership, I am of the opinion that the questionnaire is better suited for collecting this type of information from the population at large. I base this opinion on the fact that the questionnaire would provoke self-censorship to a lesser degree, as well as fear of judgement and criticism if done so.

**3b. Questionnaire survey to select participating couples.** The instruments chosen for sample selection measure both partners general satisfaction with marriage: the Index of Marital Satisfaction (Hudson et al., 1982) and the Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale (Schumm et al., 1986). As clarified in a number of sections in this dissertation, and especially in the part dealing with the methodological choices, both instruments showed satisfactory psychometric characteristics, above all high reliability and item discrimination, in previous administering in the same context. The correlation between the two marital satisfaction scales (Pearson correlation coefficient) is 0.771 ( $p < 0.001$ ). The level of correlation this high indicates that for measuring the relationship satisfaction either the Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale (KMS) or

the Index of Marital Satisfaction (IMS) can be used with the same level of reliability.

However, simultaneous administration of both of these scales contributes to the enhanced reliability and validity of the assessment of partner satisfaction degree.

**3c. Division of sample into two subgroups.** During the preliminary phase of interviewee selection, 50 completed questionnaires were returned from the field from 50 couples. Out of these, it was possible to create a balanced sample of eight couples, four in each of the two groups – the satisfied and the dissatisfied partners.

The scores obtained from the General Marital and Partner Satisfaction questionnaire were presented as cumulative, average scores obtained for every couple, derived from the calculated individual scores of both partners. This methodological decision was taken after an examination of the results, obtained using the two scales of General Marital Satisfaction, showed that there are no significant differences between partners in their answers to this questionnaire. Therefore, only couples that were aligned in their assessments of partner and relationship satisfaction, whether positive or negative, were included in the sample. Hence, the unit of the analysis was the couple and not the individual. To ensure a sufficient number of subjects in each theoretically relevant category of answers, the decision was made to merge the categories. The “general marital and partner satisfaction” variable is represented in the form of categories within which the score is expressed as an average for an individual couple. Individual scores on the IMS scale can vary between 0 and 100, where higher scores indicate a greater gravity of the identified relationship problem. Scores under 30 indicate the absence of clinically significant relationship problems. Scores over 30 indicate the presence of clinically significant problems. Scores over 70 almost always indicate the presence of serious stress levels in the relationship and point to the presence of some form of violence between partners (Hudson, 1982). Depending on the result on the scales measuring general partnership

satisfaction, the sample was divided into two parts. Two groups of participants were formed, relative to whether the married couples obtained scores over or under the critical score of 70 on the partnership satisfaction scale. The couples whose average score on the partnership satisfaction scale was 70 or higher were considered dissatisfied, whereas the couples whose score was under 70 were considered satisfied with their relationship. In order to maintain the reliability of the comparison, having a relatively small sample, I divided the participants into two equally sized groups, by means of a rough dichotomous categorization of the participants.

**4. Interviews: The conversational research framework.** The qualitative methodology applied in this study entails a study of interviewed partner cases based on a conversational framework. Important characteristics of the interview as a method that contributed to choosing this particular research format are: *the interactive nature of research process, the researcher's flexibility supported by a semi-standardized conversation guide, permissiveness and open appreciation of the interviewees, and learning how the participants comprehend and assign meaning to the concept of autonomy.*

**Interaction.** The intentional nature of human practice can, quite reliably, be registered by qualitative methods which entail an interactive, contextualized approach usually accompanied by illustrative case studies. In many respects, the knowledge produced through interviews is closer to the postmodern conception of knowledge as conversational, narrative, linguistic, contextualized and relational.

**Flexibility.** Interviews were conducted in accordance with the conversational research framework, so the role of the researcher was in part to facilitate, as well as to observe. It is relatively difficult to impose rigid forms on face-to-face interaction. The flexibility of direct communication is reflected in the constant modification and change in the accepted patterns through subtle mutual exchanges of subjective meanings. The very situation



of an interview is a type of intimate face-to-face interaction, with the purpose of magnifying and revealing the nature of direct communication on the focal subjects and issues.

**Structure (less).** Since the interview, as a technique, focuses on the subject, i.e. is adapted to it, the semi-structured interview specifies in advance only the conversation topics and the most important questions. The interviewer formulates many questions on the spot, orders them and decides on the length of conversation, allowing for the possibility of changing the phrasing of even the important questions if it becomes obvious that the subject has not understood them. (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

**Permissiveness and mutual appreciation.** The interview technique also allows adding new questions that help check and better understand the answer to a question prepared in advance. Naturally, since the topic under investigation is complex and even ambiguous, as was set forth in the introductory section of the thesis, I have opted for the interview technique rather than the questionnaire. The reasons for this are numerous. Firstly, the topic and the questions are emotionally colored to a great extent, thus they require creating an atmosphere of permissiveness and respect, ensured by the interaction with an experienced interviewer. This is exactly the same as the case with the clinical interview. Secondly, interviews are characterized by the flexibility manifested in the fact that the interviewer can discern critical points in understanding while conducting the test-phase, pilot studies. Following this, the interviewer prepares in advance alternative formulations and explanations of lesser known words. Then, apart from getting verbal replies, interviews allow observations of participants' reactions, which can be used to validate their answers in a sense, depending on the agreement between the verbal and non-verbal channels of expression. Of course, any interpretation made by the researcher of manifested incongruity in answers needs to be shared with the interviewees, asking for their clarification and confirmation. It should also be pointed out that an advantage of interviews in practice is that they allow the possibility to obtain more

thorough and complete answers to open questions. The reason for this is that the interviewer can work to encourage a subject reluctant to give a concrete answer or further explain their thoughts. Lastly, the focus on a smaller number of cases ensures the possibility of researching and analyzing in detail the links between a type of behaviour, attitudes and context.

**Meaning and comprehension.** It should be remembered that interviews are especially suitable for the study of how people comprehend and assign meaning to their everyday experience, how they describe the experience of their self using rich descriptions and explanations of their worldview.

**4a. First round interviews - practical details.** Starting from the exploratory nature of the research, one of the guidelines in defining the sample was data collection to the point of information saturation, i.e. to the point where subjects' answers became redundant. Data collection was stopped at the point when it became obvious that certain comments and patterns in answering were repeating without contributing to the production of new findings. This came subsequent to finalizing the second round of interviews with the couples from the dissatisfied partner group, i.e. after 11 interviews.

In the contemporary qualitative research this number varies at around  $15 \pm 10$  (Kvale, 1996). The final sample in this study has 8 subject couples (16 individuals), which meets the above referenced standard. As indicated in the methodology explication, representativeness and generalizations are not in themselves the goal of the research. Therefore, those parameters were not used as a starting framework in the construction of the sample. The study participants were subjectivized as persons whose "theories" of themselves and others are not inferior to the theories of the researcher. The role of the researcher consists of being a "professional interlocutor" who is expected to be able to listen, analyze stories and "frame" them in new ways.

The interviews lasted up to one hour per couple, on average. All interviews were recorded on a voice recorder and later turned into a written transcript, which represented the working material for further analysis. In the case of this study, the transcribing was done by a research assistant who was present at the interviews. In a retrospect, supported by her notes, non-verbal content of the communication was also accessible to her. The material was collected in November and December 2009, and subsequently in January, February and March 2010. The couples were financially remunerated for their participation in the conversation. The amount was symbolic, but nonetheless a stimulating token of respect. As a guide in setting the price, the current standard remuneration amount for participating in focus groups and in-depth interviews was used, as set in the social environment in which the research was carried out. It is important to stress this fact as the subjects who participate in scientific studies are rarely financially rewarded, especially for researches in the areas of clinical theory and practice, such as the present one. Although basic personal information on age, education, employment, number of children, marital status and the duration of partnership was collected from the subjects, they did not have the status of independent variables. The correlation of participants' answers with these variables was not investigated in this research. The only purpose of collecting this data was to balance the sample on the basis of listed variables.

Given that the central focus was on couples as units of observation and analysis, I expected and hoped for a dynamic discussion with a wealth of data, verbal as well as non-verbal. Beside the verbal content, the very interaction during the interviewing carried important information. The fact that the process was guided by two interviewers ensured more dynamic and inviting conversation, more room for spontaneity, greater participation, involving the couple more easily, and less room for entering into coalitions and the like. In addition, the final report and analysis were a product of a dialogue, point-of-view

juxtapositions alongside exchanged observations, even on the behaviour of the researcher herself, and a subsequent joint reconstruction of the interview situation.

**4b. Second round of interviews and feedback from the participants.** As the researcher is in this case the psychotherapist as well, after the first round of interviews, which was supposed to be the only round according to the initial plan, the research continued.

The information collected from the interviews brought about new dilemmas and questions pertaining to the effects and the therapeutic influence of the very research conversation on the topics. In participants' experiences, this has not been approached in such a curious and respectful manner. The methodology was then extended by the introduction of a second round of interviews with the couples from the group of those dissatisfied with the relationship and the partner. The satisfied couples were presented with an opportunity to name and crystallize what makes the fundament of their relationship's quality, and by doing so to strengthen those aspects. The dissatisfied couples, on the other hand, were given the chance to go through the second round of interviews. On that occasion they were invited to comment on the observations and conclusions of the researcher and the research assistant. These conclusions and observations were drawn based on the completed analysis of the narratives on autonomy they contributed, but also on their partnership in general. The repeated conversations had two aims: the therapeutic, as well as the reflective. The idea was to identify and understand the possible therapeutic elements of the research interviewing. Concluding comments of this inquiry are presented in the Part One of the Discussion chapter.

The second round of interviews was carried out with three out of four couples. One of the couples separated in the meantime and was not willing to proceed with the study. In the Result chapter it is indicated which couple this refers to. I could conclude this segment of the dissertation with the observation that an extensive verification of the study was achieved

through a combination of methodological choices. These methodological choices entail observation joined with interaction and free conversation in the following directions: interviewees-researcher, researcher-assistant researcher, researcher-expert therapeutic community, as well as the participating couples between themselves.

**5. Two researchers – the influence on the results.** It is inevitable for the researcher to have some influence on the process of the construction of the meaning and systems of interpretation that are being inquired into, and therefore on the results of the inquiry. Therapist's values form both the questions being asked and the narratives about the people and the therapy, as Freedman and Combs (1996) claim. They accelerate the experiences they induce; they suggest the beginnings and the endings illuminate certain portions of the experience and cloud and exclude others (p.224). Even beyond that, Anderson and Goolishian (1990) see the researcher as a co-author of the experience which he strives to observe, in contrast to the idea of predetermined meaning of specific experience. Experience is not statically stored in memory, but receives the meaning that is relevant to the narratives people are living at the given moment (Anderson & Goolishian, 1990; Tomm, 1988). The interview as a method is not weakened by this position. On the contrary, considering the existence of an interactional loop among the collocutors in an interview, which opens new fields of experience and consequently also new views on the same topics, interview was confirmed as the adequate method of choice. In the light of this specific study, which aimed at rethinking personal autonomy in a relational context, interviews generated new interpretations.

With the purpose of managing the inevitable influence of the research on the very system of interpretations under examination, a second round of interviews was held with those participants who expressed dissatisfaction with the relationship during the first

interview. From our side, that is the researcher assistant and I, the conversation was initiated by showing interest in how the questions were perceived, if they had been helpful, if they had instigated further conversations and thoughts. Even more importantly, risking criticism for capitulating to a populist trend, I presented, separately to every couple that participated in the conversation, a summary of our initial thoughts and hypothesis. This was done in the form of a preliminary thematic analysis of each interview. Of course, the couple was presented only with the analyzed material of what they had produced during the interview. There were two reasons for this methodological decision. Firstly, to impede and identify the possible “writing” of our previous knowledge into what should be a narrative about their reality, or at least to separate these two stories, ours and theirs. Secondly, as these were couples with ongoing difficulties, I considered it a part of my responsibility as psychotherapist, even though a researcher. I wanted to broaden the specter of options and perspectives to clients who voluntarily shared with me their thoughts on partnership problems, in light of the research subject. What I did was to share openly with them our views, hypotheses, interpretations, dilemmas, and to correct all of these analytic impressions of ours if they were not useful or meaningful to the given couple. Recognizing the importance of Andersen’s (1987) “reflecting team” in family psychotherapy, I decided to apply a similar idea to conducting the interviews. With the purpose of validating the results of the interview analysis and interpretation, I invited couples themselves to comment on reports made by the researcher and the researcher assistant. Postmodern research practices bring the positions of the researcher and the subject closer to each other, thus bridging the hierarchical distance within this relation via egalitarianism and inclusion of both sides in the research process. The research process evolves and becomes an essentially collaborative practice (Kvale, 1996). It is along those lines that research practices come very close to the constructionist therapeutic practice, insofar as they both insist on the non-hierarchical nature of the relationship between

actors. What used to be a clear partition line between research and psychotherapy is blurred as both approaches, in the dialogical form, can invite a transformation of the daily practices.

Quoting Mair (2000): “Conversing with ourselves and the others, we can develop the feeling of ‘authorship’ that we did not have before. We become an author of a sort, and not just a character trapped in the narratives told at another place and at another time... To have someone who will listen to us and devote themselves to stories that construct what we claim we are, sometime gives a sense of a new reality... (p.335-347)”

Psychotherapeutic ethics enjoin following the effects of professional conversation with possible interventionistic effects inherent to social researches, especially those carried out in situations of crisis. Prolonged dissatisfaction with the partnership can be considered a crisis situation in itself, regardless of the primary research intentions and aims. The very research situation that couples who are facing dissatisfaction are brought into, represents a kind of intervention within their system, and can be an introduction to change. A repeated interest could strengthen the evaluation of their relationship and thus motivate and direct them towards overcoming conflicts and some of the problems. Also, what is specific to this thesis is a methodological decision, following up on the work of Gale (1992), that the transcript analysis, with respect to the research questions, is tackled in a collaborative fashion. In doing so, I acknowledged and included among the results the subsequent information following the later corrections and additions that couples made to preliminary interpretations of the first interviews. **This decision influenced which points in the transcripts are taken as key, which topics as central, and which answers as significant relative to the questions asked.**

All through the first round of interviews with the dissatisfied couples not a single situation was registered where it would have been necessary to stop the conversation due to the agitation of one of the interlocutors, a poor understanding of the topic or a low motivation for the conversation. I take this to be a result of combining the psychotherapeutic with the

research approach to holding conversations. Specifically, the idea of the second round of conversations was to familiarize couples with differences in points of view between the researcher and the assistant which did not impede joint functionality, respect and orientation towards the same goals. In addition, in order to attain reflexivity and polyvocality in the end product of the research, the subjects were encouraged to intervene in the preliminary analysis and the report from the interpretive-phenomenological analysis (IPA). This is reflected in the fact that they were invited to make corrections themselves to interpretations drawn after the transcript and process analysis of the first interview. It can be noticed that, through these means, the conducted research supports the discontinuation, at least in the given local context, of research practice in psychotherapy, the tradition of the authorship in research, understood as the authorial contribution of individual nature. I am of the opinion that placing the subjects from the dissatisfied couples group in a position in which they negotiate possible interpretations of their situation and the mutuality of their relationship introduces into their reality a novel idea. This idea is that the same situation and the same events can be framed and interpreted in a multitude of different ways. The interpretation itself leads to an experience of satisfaction or dissatisfaction. Even though I am a psychotherapist, my interpretations as a researcher in this particular study were mainly informed and limited by the participants frame of self-understanding. On the other hand, participation in a qualitative study can sometimes be experienced as a positive and rewarding experience, leading to a better understanding and thus a change for the participants. If any change occurred among the couples, it should be attributed to the side-effect of participation in the research. A repeated interest in their story can motivate them to activate creativity and see their problems as something that can be subjected to reexamination. In exchange for personal information, I was obliged as a psychotherapist to provide a space for the dissatisfied and distressed couples for professional support and counseling, if needed. What happened during the metalevel of



discussion, e.i. the discussion on the validity of the interview reports, is that they defocused problems from their relationship or any individual flaws in either of them. They defocused the problems to the characteristics of the society and a broader context they are part of, in their case as a couple who decided to live in a union, with or without children. This led to the recognition in the same story, beside the tension and dissatisfaction, of what may have, on the face of it, seemed to be the opposite of the former, i.e. the ever-present points of contact within the relationship which inspired them, held them together, and made them satisfied.

**6. Ethics and validity of the study.** During the realization of the research itself special attention was paid to the ethical aspects of the research as a variety of data was gathered from people in the role of interviewees. The interviewed individuals participated in the research voluntarily and were informed in advance as to the purpose and the aims of the study. Also, during the gathering and processing of the data the interviewees were, in a way, included in the process of writing the report and asked to intervene by commenting on the conclusions and interpretations which concerned them. Contact was reestablished with each of the four couples registered as dissatisfied with the partner or the relationship, in the period of two to three months after the interview. Three out of four couples remained in a relationship, while one cohabiting couple discontinued the relationship. In this way, the research, apart from keeping its deconstructive-interpretative dimension, also became a “mode of therapy” for the participants. As a researcher and a psychotherapist at the same time, I was aware that my questions influenced the direction of the conversation, as traditionally we were always a part of the dominant power/knowledge domain. Taking that as my starting point, I set the position of the researcher methodologically as a participant rather than an observer. In other words, the researcher was a co-author of a text attained after the

conducted interview. The researcher's role, apart from analyzing, was also to facilitate, when it comes to the process, the content and the meaning of the created text

**7. Interview analysis.** The IPA approach, as a technique of gathering and processing data in psychological qualitative research of idiographic focus, strives to widen the scope of understanding how a certain person, in a certain context, assigns meaning to a specific phenomenon or experience (Smith, 1996). IPA is based on the view of man as a cognitive, linguistic, affective, and physical being, assuming circular links between speech, thought, and emotion. The goal is to explore, flexibly and in detail, the chosen field of experience. A detailed analysis of a small number of cases, i.e. the transcripts of the conducted interviews, takes more time than some other methods of analysis (conversation analysis, coded content analysis and the like...). The goal is to come to understand the perception and comprehension of the selected group instead of formulating premature or general claims, laws or regularities. In that sense, a phenomenological analysis of everyday life, or rather the subjective experience of everyday life, refrains from any causal or correlation hypotheses, as well as any claims as to the ontological status of analyzed phenomena. It is up to the reader to establish the links between the findings of the IPA study, his personal and professional experience, as well as the available relevant literature. Different interpretive positions are possible, as IPA combines an empathic with questioning approach in interpretation, while accepting Blumer's (1969) premises of social interactionism through a special interest. The interest is in how meanings are constructed simultaneously within the social and the personal world. Specifically, the subjects are trying to formulate the experience and concepts they are describing while the researcher tries, during and after interviews, to assign meaning to the process during which the subjects arrive at meaning. Explanations of the social world ought not to be sought in the individuals themselves but rather in the

linguistic space that they move in together with other people. That space is, for the purposes of this study, a partnership one.

Unlike quantitative methods, interpretative phenomenological analysis supports an open dialogue between the researchers and the study participants. Thus, it leads towards reaching answers which are not anticipated in advance, including the possibility of opening new views of the starting research questions (Spinelli, 1989). The subjects introduce topics and open questions that the researcher may not have predicted. In this research situation, the subjects are seen as experts in the chosen topic so it is necessary to provide enough opportunities for them to develop and transfer their story. At the same time, this form of interview reduces the control of the researcher over the conversation, and is therefore more demanding time- and analysis-wise. The basic role of the researcher in the semi-structured interview is to facilitate the interview and to inquire into new topics that emerge during the interview that were not part of the initial interview scenario. Interviews do not follow a predetermined list of questions, nor does every question have to be asked of all subjects, and especially not in the same way. In this regard, the researcher has to make a decision to ask a particular question sooner than planned because it follows logically from what the subject has just said. Therefore, during this type of interviewing, emphasis is placed on establishing a good rapport with the subjects, thus the ordered list of questions is not in the foreground. The researcher has the freedom to pursue further interesting lines of discussion as they emerge during the conversation and to acknowledge and follow what the subjects themselves define as the key aspects of their experience.

**7a. Interview data processing techniques – transcript analysis.** The processing of the collected material was not approached from the position of testing a set of hypotheses (except a single hypothesis concerning the assumed differences between satisfied and

dissatisfied couples). The material was collected with the aim of encompassing and acquainting ourselves with the participants' shared experience – in this case, the couple. Therefore, let me repeat the general focus of the inquiry, i.e. the questioning position of the researcher: *Are the tenets of humanism tendencies in TA, which orient the practices of a great number of psychotherapists and family counselors in Serbia today, simply unfounded theoretical generalizations, insensitive to the context? Or, on the other hand, do they offer the minimal difference in the experience which is necessary for a new understanding and creativity?*

Firstly, the whole interview is read through to get a sense of the whole. Then, I determined what Kvale (1996) named “natural meaning units” as expressed by the subjects. The theme that dominated natural meaning units was stated simply as possible. The transcripts were coded according to the central themes found in them. The analysis of content itself and the themes selection from the content moves between extracting key assertions, understandings and values of the interviewees, and the interpretations of the researchers, colored by theory and personal history. Understanding the content and the complexity of meaning is the basic aim of the analysis, which in turn requires from the researcher an interpretive approach to the transcript content. In other words, it is up to the researcher to find expressions sufficiently interpretively broad to enable establishing connections between theory and analyzed cases. There is also an additional condition that the connections are based on concrete, specific content verbalized by the subjects (Denzin, 2008). As a researcher, I used my own interpretive powers and resources in data processing, while at the same time taking heed of what the subjects themselves stressed. Analysis was conducted in such a way that every offered conclusion was followed by its connection with the participants' narrative, illustrated by the literal segment of the transcript. This is an idiographic approach which does not support generalizations, but allows for a somewhat transferability of the learned, while

paying attention to the limitations of the contextual validity. Transparency of the research method and individual methodological decisions, with an extensive contextual description of the sample and literal quotations from the transcript, are illustrations. They open the discussion and introduce the reader to the experiential world of the interviewees and all together additionally contribute to the credibility of this qualitative research project, as well as to the validity and transferability of knowledge. Also, the conclusions of the research, as has been noted, are products of a joint process of assigning meanings to the chosen segment of experience through research interviews conducted by highly experienced psychotherapists. I believe it is important to stress this, as specific theoretical competence is one of the relevant indicators of the validity of a qualitative study. Just like this study, it leads to a theoretical interpretation and analysis of its results and conclusions (Creswell & Miller, 2000). The central question imposing itself throughout the entire process, and especially in the data analysis phase, is the examination of experiential significance or adequacy of theory which sets the framework for practice.

McLeod and Elliot (2008) identify some general forms of the qualitative study method applied in a research: the pragmatic, the comparative study, the evaluative study orientated to results and effects, then the study directed towards the development and construction of theory, as well as the narrative studies. As McLeod and Elliot (2008) note, a concrete research endeavor can have the characteristics of more than one of the mentioned study forms. In other words, in the conduct of research itself the different purposes are crossed and open several fields for analysis (as cited in Widdowson, 2009, pp.17-18). Thus, apart from the general purpose of further development and testing of the TA theory, the cases presented and discussed here have another purpose, a narrative one. The wealth of materials and meanings, which every individual couple brings into the story that develops around the questions the researcher asks, opens a new dimension. That dimension is positioning the

concept of autonomy into a context of real life situations, challenges and relational needs. Although I reject the idea of a search for the universal truth, I accept the possibility of revealing specific, personal forms of truth, directed towards the central themes of local narratives and shared quotidian life.

What did all of this look like in practice? The first step in the analysis was the organization of the key portions of the transcript into separate directories of sentences and phrases obtained from participants, which were relevant to the research questions. Hence, relative to the three research questions, the answers were sorted into three categories. The first group of answers contains the utterances of all eight couples, i.e. 16 individuals. The answers to the remaining two questions were sorted into two categories, of the satisfied and dissatisfied couples, with answers obtained from four different couples in each. These are questions on the power distribution in relationships, as well as on the discovery of social rules, values, and beliefs that the definitions of autonomy are based on. The next stage in the analysis was a further categorization of answers on a higher level of generality which allowed seemingly disparate claims to be connected via the production of clusters based on superordinate topics that appeared in answers. Clusters themselves got their names from identified topics, so all answers were categorized one more time. Behind every answer there was a code that connected the answer to the specific original transcript it had been extracted from. This, in principle, allowed for an analysis at the level of a single couple or individual, as the specificity of this research was the idiographic focus, with the couple as the unit of the analysis. By acknowledging personal idiosyncracies in the manifest answers, the results of the analysis also allowed a higher level of interpretation in accordance with the theoretical postulates and hypotheses that served as a starting point in the thesis. In the further discussion of the results, the identified topics, but also the very process of investigation, were set forth in

the form of a narrative report, which in fact was aligned with the creative characteristics of qualitative research.

**8. The TA therapist's survey.** The deconstructive analysis of dominant TA definitions of autonomy from original sources was supplemented by the focus group interview results, as well as the results of the TA therapist's survey.

The experienced Transactional Analysis practitioners from the milieu in which the research was conducted were invited to become involved in the study. They were asked to make explicit their understandings of autonomy as they communicate them with their clients, as well as to proffer their views on what they themselves learned from their clients about this concept and its applicability. The reason for setting such a sample design that would encompass several subpopulations is to achieve multiperspectivity within a mutual field of experience.

Such a form of survey, being written in an open-ended question format, provided room for subjects-therapists to think undisturbed before giving answers. This reduced the possibility of giving uniform, short, and conventional answers inspired first and foremost by theory. In the application of individual interviews or the focus group, an awareness of the fact that they are talking to a colleague with the same approach would exist on their part. My assumption was that their answers would, above all, else be geared towards giving the "correct" answer. Open-ended questions are used more often than not in exploratory research such as the present one, in cases when the researcher seeks to obtain specific, personal formulations from the subject. The formulations are then to be qualitatively analyzed or utilized for a more thorough interpretation of existing data, listing specific answers as examples and illustrations of the categories of answers previously known or determined at that time. (Kvale, 1996).

The invitation to the TA therapists to participate in the study was addressed to the members of the Serbian psychotherapist community via the mailing list of the National Alliance of Psychotherapy Associations. The mailing list *Psychotherapy* includes 600 active practitioners, in all 12 modalities practiced in Serbia at that time, among which there were up to 100 TA therapists and psychotherapy students. The reason behind a somewhat indirect approach to participant selection was the intent to reach out to the broad membership (70 members) of the TA association, other than the one that I belong to. Ten therapists responded to the invitation and provided me with insight into their perspective on the autonomy. The invitation was stated as follows: “Please join the study on the implicit meaning of the humanistic TA concept of personal autonomy among clients and therapist, by completing the attached questionnaire”.

Unlike with the groups of clients and interviewed couples, the technique selected for the collection of data from the expert community was a questionnaire with the following two open-ended questions and the attached instructions:

*Dear colleague, please give an answer to each of the following two questions which fully conforms with YOUR OWN understanding, evaluation, and application in your work of the humanistic concept of personal autonomy.*

***I most often explain the concept of personal autonomy as:***

***I have learned from clients that autonomy is:***

The written survey was answered and returned by ten psychotherapists. As this is a qualitative research, this number is not negligible, but it still confirms the information from the introductory part of the dissertation. The professional circle of psychotherapy practitioners in the Balkans region, and in this case Serbia, is closed and inert when it comes to open,



public conversation on the topic of reexamining the principles and standards of their practice. This is precisely the reason why the principle of this study was to give a preference to the knowledge of the people I was working with on my own, but also to espouse such a position among the “expert” oriented psychotherapists.

The therapists, that the certified TA practitioners population sample consists of, have many years of experience in working with clients, 15 years in average. They are mostly female, with the exception of one male therapist. This gender distribution is a faithful reflection of the gender relations within the profession itself. Specifically, women are predominant among the psychologists and psychotherapists with the humanistic approach in Serbia, whereas it is exactly the opposite with the psychoanalytic psychotherapy and the psychiatric profession.

Interestingly, even though autonomy as a subject is in a way central to the chosen modality of the practice, and thus their professional identity, relatively few practitioners chose to engage in this conversation. In this segment of the research one can even see elements of action research. Where is this evident? It can be seen in my initiative, as the researcher, to promote the culture of reexamining one’s assumptions and preconceptions among the professionals from this area of the practice. A special emphasis was put on openness to feedback and learning from the clients and then contrasting new findings to the theory which was the starting point in their practice. One of the questions (the second on the list), asked directly of the therapists, invited them out of the position of power into a collaborative position. Thus, the concomitant goal of asking this question, apart from the research purpose, is to support the legitimizing of client’s narratives and values with which the client goes into therapy. It also has the goal to make prominent the fact that the therapist’s work itself is guided and shaped by the therapist’s personal values, as well as the values of the very

modality which is objectivized precisely through the therapist's engagement and interventions (Ellis & Bochner, 1996).

**9. Deconstruction of the TA concept of autonomy.** The theoretical analysis within this dissertation was aimed at rethinking the concept of personal autonomy, as it is constructed within the TA theory, through the prism of social constructionism. In this case, the matter at hand is the concept of **life script** set against **personal autonomy**, viewed from the angle of the partnership in a particular context. **The problem** behind this inquiry has to do with underestimating and often a complete neglect of **factors broader than a personal script** in psychotherapeutic practice, as I have already elaborated in the Introduction chapter.

One of the theoretical goals within this study was to produce the ground for reconstruction and reinterpretations *of the personal autonomy, as a concept*, specifically with regard to the complexity of the partnership and family reality. The theoretical analysis, conducted as part of this study, was structured with the following question: whether the discourse of TA can, in practice, secure a range of interpretations wide enough to name, mark, understand and invite change within problematic partner constellations and narratives?

The results of this type of analysis are a product of a search for different views, answers, interpretation, and implications of selected theoretical postulates contained in the original sources. For that purpose, the theoretical discussion will be guided by the following deconstructive questions:

- Where is the center, the origin, i.e. who is the author of this narrative?
- Is a social group marginalized when this theory is informing the practice?

- Which form of power does this theory delegate to its adherents, the practitioners?
- Does it leave room for optional narratives or are they blocked out and repressed?

The methodological choices, made in relation to the stated questions, are expanded with the inclusion of the deconstruction as an analytic philosophy method. The text deconstruction, i.e. the dominant interpretations of autonomy by classical TA theoreticians, is aimed at exploring possibilities for multiple understandings, alternative interpretations, meaning layeredness and the identification of excluded naratives.

It is impossible to understand or accept a theory without understanding the historical process within which it was produced. For example, radical changes in social structure can result in subsequent changes in the psychological reality, in which case new psychology theories may appear, as the old ones are no longer able to adequately explain the phenomena of contemporary life. Analyzing the reification of a theory is significant because it serves as a constant corrective to the reifying tendencies of theoretical thought in general and psychological in particular. Fundamentalism can be easily recognized when it appears in politics or religion, but can we recognize it when it rears its head within our profession? As radical psychiatry warns theories, as well as institutions in psychology, via the very fact of their existence are controlling human behavior. They do so by establishing previously set behavioral patterns which channel it in a certain direction, as opposed to many other directions that would theoretically be possible. The pioneers of TA theory, such as Steiner (1995), still insist on codification and closing the interpretative amplitude of key constructs. In spite of this, the influence of interculturality and new interpretations in the further development of contemporary TA theory is undeniable and irreversible (pp. 83-86).

**Multiple understandings.** The theoretical assumption, as a starting point in the conceptual analysis, is that subjective meanings of focal concepts are situated in the visual and auditory world of social interactions and relations, rather than the hermetic and therefore inscrutable world of exclusively personal, idiosyncratic emotions. This is so because the basic mode of human living comprises of persons conversing with each other (Berger & Luckman, 1985). Words mean different things in different circumstances, depending on who uses them, when, in what occasion, as well as on the context of the rest of the communication. (Burr, 1995/2001). The most relevant experience of others occurs in a face-to-face situation, which is the prototype case of social interaction, while the most important transmitter of keeping reality as we experience it is conversation itself. According to the French theorist of deconstruction, Jacques Derrida (1982), language is a system of signs which have no inherent positive or negative value. They do not obtain their value until they are used and given meaning. The existence of a word automatically includes all the contradictions and differences both of the concept itself and its relation to other, absent words. Thus, multiple understandings are always possible by distinguishing what is present, contained in the text, from what is the opposite of the given word, or the absent idea. These other possible understandings can be comprehended as clues in the text, “always already” available for recognition (ibid.).

**Alternative interpretations.** The goal of applied deconstruction in this dissertation is to question and relativize the explanatory rhetoric of TA by studying the genesis and history of the knowledge which lies in its foundation. Moreover, it is done by testing the logical sustainability of the contained binary oppositions. Derrida (1982) claims that such binary oppositions, in which one term is always more privileged than its opposite, are typical of ideology. Derrida advocates the rejection of the “either/or” logic, the logic of the binary opposites, and recommends instead the “both/and” logic (pp.1-28).

Alternative interpretations should not be looked for in the text itself, or the theory. They, in fact, come from the direction of the “reader” or “user”, in this case the user of psychotherapy whose voices are represented as focus group themes in the Research Results Chapter.

Derrida’s deconstruction serves as the theoretical foundation in the discussion section of the study, more specifically in the analysis of the denotative meaning of the concepts of autonomy and the script. Both concepts represent humanistic practice guidelines in the TA tradition. Starting from leading TA theorists’ interpretation, a critical analysis was carried out of the theoretical relation between these terms set as binary oppositions. The analysis was of the relation between the results of the research (consisting of the subjects’ interpretations) and the starting, original theoretical interpretations as well, which lead me to a reconstruction of autonomy.

**Layeredness of meaning.** A critical, deconstructive reading destabilizes and demystifies the concepts over which it casts a shadow of doubt by dragging to the surface implicit presuppositions, the wider social, political, and economic aspects of certain “knowledge” (Foucault, 1998). Deconstruction includes a very careful reading of the text with a view to discovering the way in which its construction rests upon unacknowledged absences. This means acknowledging that a quality is present depends on the implication of what is absent, which signifies that there cannot exist a clear demarcation line between two opposite concepts. Thus, the concept of freedom has no sense outside of a specific context in which it can be related to subordination, slavery and the like. The intentions of the text author cannot be accepted unconditionally. The absence of the speaker’s presence increases the number of legitimate interpretations of the text, i.e. equals the different interpretive frameworks of which none is privileged of necessity (Sampson, 1993). The deconstruction method in the analysis of meaning does not include only what is expressed through an individual word, but rather

interprets the word via the relation to what the word excludes. Thus, it reveals the layeredness of meaning in language which is in constant flux. (Stojnov, 2005). This method can demonstrate that word meaning is not unchangeable, but that it changes incessantly and that it depends on the context in which words are interpreted.

The research results will be presented with the accompanying discussion, since I approached the research questions from different aspects and using different data sources, in order for the study to formulate more affluent remarks. Each presented results category is followed by a discussion that will link the results to the initial questions.

## Chapter 7

### Discussion on the Research Results

*“Happy families are all alike; every **unhappy family** is unhappy in its own way.”*

*Leo Tolstoy*

Through the interpretation of the results, with critical consideration to the limitations of the study and its specific tasks, I offer an array of responses to the posed research questions. Once more I state the general and specific questions. The general question is:

“Do humanistic principles, contained in the personal autonomy concept, which informs the practice of a significant number of TA family counselors and psychotherapists in Serbia, represent the minimal (stimulative, critical) difference in experience? Or do they, conversely, restrict interpretation and clients’ further explorations?”

All enumerated perspectives in the interpretation of the obtained results have the same purpose, and that is to **reconstruct the term “autonomy” in partnership.**

The first part of the discussion encompasses the analysis of the interview content according to the questions asked and the categories of the answers.

The initiating question for the first part of the discussion is:

- 1) What does the idea of autonomy in partnership mean for the partners, does it have any significance? Learning about the breadth of the interpretations and meaning of autonomy from the couples.

I will present here the answers, obtained from all the couples that have participated in the research, that contain elements of the implicit definitions of autonomy. The answers, as

well as the extracted central topics, provide insight into the breadth of the couples' understanding and interpreting of the concept. This includes a critical overview of the concept itself, as well as a multitude of forms, causes, conditions and foundations of autonomy. The topics have been extracted directly from the transcript, without any editing or text interpretation. The participants were not classed into pre-formulated categories, but rather the categories were created based on the subjects' answers. Therefore, next to the name of every category I list the types of answers which it encompasses, as well as several of the most frequent and most illustrative answers.

***Results of the thematic analysis of the interviews content: The meanings that partners attribute to the idea of autonomy in partnership***

**Table 1**

**Freedom of expression: Openness, sincerity, absence of secrets**

<i>"I love being able to be my true self, to be completely honest at every moment, as well as being able to expect complete honesty"</i>
<i>"Freedom in a positive sense. Not by being my true self independently, apart from the family and marriage, but being my true self in that marriage... being able to openly express my opinions and feelings at any time, and to get the same in return"</i>
<i>"Some kind of openness, without secrets. Freedom of saying everything, without being afraid what might happen... Trust as the basis for everything"</i>
<i>"Freedom to be who we really are, but not necessarily to do everything we want"</i>
<i>"It is Ok not to change yourself if it doesn't upset the partner or affect the marriage in a negative way"</i>
<i>"If there are secrets between the two of us, we would have thought that something is wrong in our relationship"</i>



**Table 2**

**Time and space needed by an individual**

**Emphasis on the variance and harmonizing of needs, as well as the influence of life stressors on the relationship and the partner (the challenges to togetherness )**

<p><i>“Balance between independence and unity”... “When you support your partner in doing things he likes, without including you. Sometimes, when my partner is playing his instrument, or is going fishing, I am upset, but not too much.”</i></p>
<p><i>“We have a child, so for us, it is impossible to go out together.”</i></p>
<p><i>“Branko and I haven’t changed anything in our lifestyles and friendships, but we always make decisions together and try to reach an agreement.”</i></p>
<p><i>“It is when a person keeps it’s friendships on a certain level, but I am much more focused on my work and home.”</i></p>
<p><i>“If I were alone, I would go out more, do something... if I didn’t have a child.”</i></p>
<p><i>“Djurджа prefers an active life, I don’t, and I am not interested in that. She has a tendency for that and I have a different character, so we have adjusted in that area.”</i></p>
<p><i>“Well, I like to watch football games with my friends, but she is always complaining about them coming over, so I am not doing that anymore.”</i></p>
<p><i>“In our household we share the work and we make arrangements for our social life together, but in our professional lives we are independent, it’s not a common ground.”</i></p>
<p><i>“Well, we go out independently... we do that. It is good for our relationship because we both have had our own friendships and lifestyles before we met... These are some minor freedoms, to be able to see friends when you want to.”</i></p>
<p><i>“I don’t share other people’s secrets with my partner. I would tell him what I know only if he could help. As of me, I don’t feel that I have to be told everything about his friends either.”</i></p>

*“At the beginning of our relationship we were going out independently more often, but now, everything is about us. We have mutual friends, but we are still able to maintain our old friendships. When we are not together I miss him, and for me, I do not feel that I have to do something independently, anymore.”*

*“We are both independent personalities, each of us has its own interests. We are not focused only on each other, without any interest for other things. Vuk has his friends... I love his friends and their wives.”*

*“Each of us has our own interests. We have different friends we go out with. There are a few social occasions that we attend together. Although, lately, we almost don't go out at all.”*

*“I am not at home most of the time because of my work. We rarely quarrel. For me it is very important to have a talk about us being apart all the time.”*

*“Both of us are having a hard time now... but we are both aware that, at this moment, there is no other solution. We agreed on that... and we'll see...”*

*“I have enjoyed going out on my own from the beginning of our relationship. Both of us were unemployed and in a situation like that, it is important to do something which gives you positive energy. So I think, it is better to spend some time out with friends and come back home in a better mood.”*

**Table 3**

**Freedom or strength - of relationships outside the partnership**

**Or Autonomy, as US opposed to OTHERS**

<i>“Total (one hundred percent) independence from the families of origin.”</i>
<i>“Autonomy, freedom, independence... I realized that this is important when I became a mother.”</i>
<i>“We are on our own... We don’t have family around to ask what to do, and how... We rely on each other, everything is just the two of us. In some way, we are both alone.”</i>
<i>“I have lived independently for fourteen years.”</i>
<i>“We live on our own, we make our own money... Having your own money means a lot.”</i>
<i>“We don’t have the need to include anyone else in our life.”</i>
<i>“We count only on ourselves, financially and emotionally.”</i>
<i>“It is important to have at least one steady salary and in that segment we do not depend much on... others ... We solved our housing problem... We are waiting for her to get a steady job and then we’ll start thinking about children.”</i>
<i>“We achieved everything by ourselves, which is rare. We bought an apartment and furnished it. We did everything on our own.”</i>
<i>“We do not pay attention to those kinds of provocations. We have our own opinion about everything and those kinds of comments do not matter to us. You just hear them, and that’s all.”</i>
<i>“We have some kind of our own micro world that helps us get over everything... It is our source of strength, I would say.”</i>
<i>“My life is limited by the amount of money I have.”</i>

<p><i>“She is having a hard time. She studied hard and went through a lot of troubles, and now, having a child, she lost her freedom. We agree that we have to get over it. We should set our goal, make a plan and live according to it. But we live from day to day, and everything what matters is of material nature. That’s how we are functioning now.”</i></p>
<p><i>“Everybody around us tried to impose something, but we said: No, no, we want to do that by ourselves, and so on...”</i></p>
<p><i>“It is hard to be intimate when your child doesn’t want to sleep.”</i></p>

**Table 4**

**Individual (independent) decision making**

<p><i>“This kind of autonomy is very important, but in many situations I need my partner’s experience.”</i></p>
<p><i>“Mostly, she is making decisions on her own... regarding her family and friends.”</i></p>
<p><i>“We do not interfere in each others decisions... We try to help each other. It is matter of ours beliefs.”</i></p>
<p><i>“In decision making, we consult each other. We listen to the advice, but each of us is making the final decision of personal matter for themselves... Still, we can tell that we make decisions together... It is best for the both of us.”</i></p>
<p><i>“When we have to make a decision we talk to each other, and compromise.”</i></p>

**Table 5**

**Autonomy and individual differences : Character, temperament, opinions, beliefs, interests, etc.**

<i>“We have different opinions, we do not agree on exactly everything.”</i>
<i>“We have different characters... we are both devoted to the family, we are sociable, but our interests are completely different... We are used to that, we do not have too many similarities, but we have accepted that in our marriage.”</i>
<i>“We are similar enough, and different enough.”</i>
<i>“A person develops as an individual and has some parts unknown even for himself, let alone the partner... It is complicated.”</i>
<i>“One should appreciate himself and to have time for himself, too. We do not have such special wishes.”</i>
<i>“It is a personal decision to get close to someone, a partner is not always approachable. It takes a great effort to be understood... You can always keep that for yourself.”</i>
<i>“Maybe a person remains more himself when he doesn’t know where it leads to.”</i>
<i>“We need to exchange opinions, absolutely. It should be appreciated, and it is perfectly normal if our opinions are sometimes different.”</i>
<i>“If I don’t feel comfortable in our relationship, I try to find the reason by myself first and then we talk about that.”</i>
<i>“There are some topics we do not discuss, we talked about them hundreds of times and we couldn’t agree, so we do not discuss them anymore.”</i>
<i>“We have some different opinions... maybe.”</i>

**Table 6**

**Autonomy as a negative occurrence and unfavorable phenomenon in partnership –**

**Balance as an ideal**

<p><i>“The idea of independence is, mostly, a negative approach... We do everything together, except football, and we have the same friends... Everything changes when you are in a relationship.”</i></p>
<p><i>“He doesn’t care about others, it is selfish.”</i></p>
<p><i>“That would mean that he doesn’t care what I think, what I need.”</i></p>
<p><i>“Me, me, and nobody else but me.”</i></p>
<p><i>“There is no such a thing as living with someone and making decisions completely on your own... It is damaging for the relationship and the unity.”</i></p>
<p><i>“In my opinion, people are too preoccupied with themselves. They do not want to invest in a relationship to make it successful. It is selfish... very selfish... They all want love and attention for themselves, without giving anything in return... Maybe the reason for that is fear of losing integrity.”</i></p>
<p><i>“We know couples who go to the extreme in their independency. They don’t function as a couple, or as a team, any more. They live together, but as individuals.”</i></p>
<p><i>“It is hard to live as a couple when one of the partners insists on a need for unlimited freedom.”</i></p>
<p><i>“I think each partner should give up on selfishness and make an effort to change, at least a little bit.”</i></p>

**Table 7**

**The opposites of autonomy: Interlinking, closeness, symbiosis, dependence**

<p><i>“We are less focused on other things, we have become bored... We are focused only on each other.”</i></p>
<p><i>“In these nine years we haven’t been apart for more than two-three days... We cannot live without each other... I cannot imagine doing something without him.”</i></p>
<p><i>“It is not pleasant when I see that he does not want to share something with me that he keeps something in the other room, or in his own file, and it is obvious that he does not want me to know what it is... Such behavior always makes me concerned that something is wrong with our relationship.”</i></p>
<p><i>“We can’t imagine being apart for three days, even if the reason for the separation is our job.”</i></p>
<p><i>“We phone each other five, six times a day. He is always the first one I call.”</i></p>
<p><i>“Knowing that I have him, makes my life happier, easier, I feel safe.”</i></p>
<p><i>“A stable and close family life helps us to overcome concerns we might have about other things... In a family something is going on all the time.”</i></p>

### **Part One: Autonomy and Partnership as Viewed through the Interview**

#### ***Implications for Couple Therapy***

The portions of the preceding results, that I discuss here, represent the central part of the study. Why? The interview data provides important information about the context of the research, which is used as grounding for further interpretations and the redefinition of personal autonomy in partnership. Namely, notwithstanding the fact that we are discussing autonomy which belongs to the psychotherapeutic discourse, the questioning and learning about autonomy is conducted with a different focus. This focus is closer to the everyday lives and realities of the clients, and that is partnership as the milieu in which persons could be affirmed and actualized, not only as a couple, but as individuals as well (Carter & Mc Goldrick, 1980).

As has been explained earlier, in the methodological section of the study, the research was conducted on a sample of 8 couples. The interview was conducted in the form of a conversation with the couples who, through a mutual dialogue, explained their views and determined themselves in relation to the questions asked. Their replies were thus the product of a mutual exchange, but also the participation of the third party, represented by the position of the researcher in the course of the conversation. As is the case with spontaneous adoption of values and certain forms of behavior in real life, I also consider the responses obtained within this study to be the result of a poly-factor influence (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008).

The multi-method approach applied to the exploration of the concept of autonomy has given us the ability to move beyond the classical, traditional interpretation of personal autonomy towards its placement into the context of partnership and reconstructing its meanings.



Through an analysis of the participant's responses and the proportion of representations of similar responses according to their frequency, I summarized and concluded the following six categories of autonomy interpretations:

- 1. "Time and space for oneself".** The most frequently represented understanding and the implicit definition of autonomy in partnership is related to the notion of time and space. What is recognized as a common denominator in the contents of different answers belonging to this category is accepting the idea of the existence of elements of being separate within the partnership. The emphasis is on the difference in needs, balancing and the influence of various life stressors on the relationship and the partner, as the challenges to togetherness. *"As for the household, we share the work and we arrange that segment of life together, both household and social life, but not the professional life, it's not a common ground"*. The largest number of offered answers can be filed under this category, and following, according to frequency, are the categories:
- 2. Free "as a couple" from other, external influences** and negative definitions of autonomy, for example the **negative connotations of autonomy** or, at another extreme, stressing the **negative consequences of the absence of autonomy**. Among the negative connotations of autonomy one in particular stands out, and that is *selfishness*. I believe that it is important to take into consideration and discuss this observation from the position of social constructionism. Let's observe the family and the couple at a microeconomic level, in relation to the macroeconomic crisis which has lasted for decades in Serbia due to political instability and isolation. The pooling together of economic resources, multigenerational at that, initially for the reasons of practical survival, in time becomes a value in its own right. Tendencies

towards autonomy, which is seen as economic independence of the individual member or a couple, can therefore be perceived as a threat to the stability of the broader family system. However, the economic aspect of life is not easily separable in contemplations on the psychology of partnership. *“My life is limited by the amount of money I have.”* This is learned from the responses of the group of psychotherapy clients who perceive economic strength and independence as the main precondition for autonomy in psychological functioning. Therefore, in their perspective, defining autonomy as a desirable, attainable goal is displaced from the framework of partnership and perceived as economic independence from the extended family. Further, self-determination is conducted through contrasting or comparison with the negative extremes of the absence of autonomy, such as being preoccupied and psychologically dependent on another, deindividuation, conformity, and the like.

- 3. Differences in individual traits.** I conclude that the definition of autonomy as “differences” is backed by a readiness to accept and tolerate the differences and support individuality of character, temperament, opinions, beliefs or interests. *“A person develops as an individual, and has some parts unknown even to him- or herself, let alone to the partner... it is complicated.”* This quality is manifested in the openness to specific expressions for every member of a household, rather than the independence of choices made by its individual members.
- 4. Freedom of expression.** Freedom of choice, as the most frequently represented connotation among the group of theorists and practitioners of TA, and which is, on the other hand, never mentioned once in the group of clients,

also makes no appearance in this group of responses. *“It is the freedom to say everything without being afraid what might happen”*. *“Freedom to be who we really are, but not necessarily to do everything”*. Instead, partners associate autonomy with the **freedom of expression** as a dimension of intimacy that is manifested as openness, sincerity and the absence of secrets in their experience.

- 5. Freedom in the decision-making process.** This category includes the interpretation of autonomy as the practice of separate decision-making skills on certain issues. Incidentally, freedom of expression and freedom in the decision-making process are the two meanings that most closely resemble the dominant TA interpretations of autonomy among those I encountered in the responses of participating couples. *“We do not interfere when one of us makes the decision, we help, maybe”*. Within this group of answers it is possible to recognize a specification of what it means in practice to act autonomously, by independent decisions or choices.
- 6. Negative determinations of autonomy opposed to examples of “non-autonomy”.** Within the category that I have entitled examples of non-autonomy, I have allocated the received responses in two ways. One is how they describe themselves when they are not autonomous, and the other is which modes of behavior in the other couples they view as a reflection of the lack of individual autonomy. The implication is that the **balance between those two extremes can be signified as a favorable situation**. The responses obtained suggest that the experiences of togetherness, just like self-centeredness, when they are accompanied by anxiety, insecurity, preoccupation, malaise, and a general dissatisfaction, are not considered to be

desirable experiences in a relationship. In other words, I conclude that the need for autonomy, and even the idea of autonomy itself, is not a value per se.

Autonomy is interpreted as an aspect of togetherness, within this category of answers. Every disturbance to this balance between two tendencies within a relationship is followed by negative connotations. Both extremes in behavior and attitudes, towards individualism or towards a neurotic dependency, are perceived as a threat and a challenge. The first extreme is framed as a threat to the preservation of the relationship (*"It is hard to function as a couple if one insists on his or her freedom"*; *"I think a person should reject his or her own selfishness..."*) and the other as a challenge to the preservation of personal integrity (*"Being apart for three days, if he or I went on a business trip, would be unthinkable"*). Namely, the expectations from oneself and the partner, with which one enters into a relationship, do not necessarily include personal autonomy. Instead, depending on the characteristics of the partners, the characteristics of the relationship itself, and the perception of one's role within it, one either prefers the feeling of togetherness or the feeling of autonomy. As Berne (1977) proposes: "A practical and constructive script may lead to great happiness if the others in the cast are well chosen and play their parts satisfactorily (p. 156)."

The topics identified in the answers to the other two research questions, the question of social conventions, rules, and values, as well as the question of power distribution by role, are presented in two thematic groups. One pertains to the subsample of dissatisfied couples and the other to the subsample of satisfied couples. The following presentation of the results allows tracking of answers for each of the partners by questions and topics. I believe

that the content of the subjects' responses carry information and meaning that we have identified and put into the focus of analysis for the purposes of this study.

*Rules, Conventions and Beliefs that Guide Mutual Conversation about Autonomy*<sup>5</sup>

*Satisfied couples*

**Table 8**

**Pointing out skills and quality of communication as a support in partnership**

<i>"When I talk to him I can be open with my thoughts and feelings more than when I keep them for myself."</i>
<i>"Passion and love are the strength of a relationship... good communication too... You can see if partners are satisfied by the way they talk."</i>
<i>"After the first few months of dating, we broke up for a month and we wanted to die without each other... That has never happened again... We realized that we couldn't live without each other... We didn't know what we were supposed to do then, to wait for those five minutes, none of us wanted to let go. We have never separated since then. Maybe that made us stronger."</i>
<i>"We try to solve problems right away. We don't wait till they accumulate. As soon as we feel that something is wrong, we talk to each other... but there haven't been any complaints or problems so far, I don't know what that would be like."</i>
<i>"One doesn't need much for happiness. It is enough to send a message and get some feedback. When I'm having a hard day, it is enough for me just to hear from him."</i>

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<sup>5</sup> Answers from the total sample of couples, categorized according to the questions and the level of satisfaction with the relationship

**Table 9**

**Orientation to the same goals**

<p><i>“Sufficient house budget – that is the goal for both of us.”</i></p>
<p><i>“We got married after being in a relationship for four years and we were both mature people. We had a goal; we both knew what we should accomplish together... Of course there is a lot of interfering of others, but when you have a goal, for instance, to have children, you have to commit yourself to it.”</i></p>
<p><i>“It is important that we have a roof over our heads, and we’ll make it somehow, but how it is going to be with us, I don’t know.”</i></p>
<p><i>“When I say kids, it’s not that we are committed only to kids, it’s not like that. But both of us agree that the most important goal is raising kids. That is what we are looking for... That would fulfill us... to have kids, to teach them values, and to give them knowledge and experience.”</i></p>

**Table 10**

**“Ethical principles” as the basis for expectations from partnership/partner:**

**Desirable vs. undesirable behavior**

<p><i>“Honesty between partners makes everything possible. Physical or emotional abuse is absolutely unacceptable... as well as lying, or being secretive.” “I would get over an affair... but not one which lasted, for instance, for a year, or if it were a more serious relationship... We are all tempted sometimes.”</i></p>
<p><i>“Our relationship is very natural. We respect each other... That is very important.”</i></p>
<p><i>“There are no secrets between us.”</i></p>
<p><i>“We exchange and discuss our different opinions, but in a civilized way, without any insults or bad words.”</i></p>
<p><i>“Lying, being unfaithful and secretive, as well as verbal or physical abuse would definitely affect our relationship in a negative way.”</i></p>
<p><i>“It is very important to have the same moral values both for yourself and others.”</i></p>
<p><i>“Nobody likes lies and unfaithfulness. That is the worst that can happen in a relationship... If that happened to my partner, I hope not, I would not get over it.”</i></p>
<p><i>“In our relationship we don’t have to lie to each other. I don’t like lies, I have to be honest. That is my value, and, honestly, that is something that makes me happy. I want to be an honest person and I will do my best to stay like that. I hope I won’t have any temptations.”</i></p>
<p><i>“We don’t have any secrets between us!”</i></p>
<p><i>“For me, respect stands before love!”</i></p>
<p><i>“People around me have quarreled a lot... I am trying not to think about that... Maybe that’s what brings us closer together. We talk to each other in a civilized, nice way.”</i></p>
<p><i>“I think that infidelity in a relationship makes permanent damage and termination of communication... In my opinion, partners who are not able to solve a problem in their relationship, should separate.”</i></p>
<p><i>“It is very important for partners to be able to compromise.”</i></p>

**Table 11**

**Analyzing a relationship through various comparisons: “Lessons learned from other people and from your own mistakes”**

<p><i>“We have very similar ideologies. Political, how to raise the kids, and we have never had a real fight.”</i></p>
<p><i>“We know people who are in much harder situation.”</i></p>
<p><i>“When you live together with the extended family, everybody wants to impose on something... in a situation like that, the only solution is to compromise... and then, every problem can be solved... When we live on our own, we have our privacy; we control our life and free time... Imagine how that would look like with kids and grandparents around.”</i></p>
<p><i>“In my family it was very different... My mother did everything in the household and she took care of the children... My father managed only his work... nothing beside that.”</i></p>
<p><i>“Jelena is from Mostar, I am from Croatia... We experienced war and have gone through a very difficult time when we arrived in Serbia. All that shaped us a lot. It was survival, literally. Ten years of our lives have been taken from us. We had everything, and overnight, everything was destroyed.”</i></p>
<p><i>“The main cause of my dissatisfaction is living in the country with a very bad economy. I graduated from university but I can’t earn enough money for a living. I would like to live a more active life, to go to the gym, to learn English language... that would make me happier and more productive... but I can’t afford that. That is my biggest problem... not having enough money to live as I would like to.”</i></p>
<p><i>“It is obvious that people around us are jealous.”</i></p>
<p><i>“You can find a lot of people you can ask for help when you are in trouble... but it is hard to find someone who would share happiness with you. It is hard for people to see someone happy and satisfied!”</i></p>



**Table 12**

**Religion as the framework for understanding marriage and partnership**

<p><i>“We entered our marriage in a traditional way. There is a big difference between dating and marriage... I am a genuine believer and my faith enables me to see that difference... Marriage is an institution above all, blessed by God and by the definition it is permanent, something that is forever. It is very important to be aware of that commitment.”</i></p>
<p><i>“We made our commitments in front of God... that makes me stronger. Both our families believe in God. Civil marriage means nothing to me.”</i></p>
<p><i>“For us getting married was a natural, spontaneous act. In my opinion, marriage is more important than a long-standing relationship, it is something sacred. A long-standing relationship is more of an adventure. If we take our relationship seriously, we should raise it to another level.”</i></p>
<p><i>“After our engagement everything became a whole new dimension. Now we can see that our relationship is going somewhere.”</i></p>
<p><i>“I think of marriage as the crown of love, of everything that already exists, a way to share your happiness with someone else.”</i></p>
<p><i>“You can see the quality in how much one wants to contribute to all that and how serious one considers the wedding day. By all that you can see how serious they are about that decision.”</i></p>

**Table 13**

**Focusing on positive aspects and expectations in a partnership**

<i>“Everything was kind of predetermined; we knew where it was heading.”</i>
<i>“We have total support.”</i>
<i>“You enjoy what you have, you appreciate it.”</i>
<i>“Simply put, you realize that you have found your soul mate, and that’s it. There is no need to further complicate it.”</i>
<i>“To be a family and to be important to each other... that’s the most important thing... You expect help and support, love.”</i>
<i>“Our relationship improves every day, especially after getting married. For me, it’s even better now.”</i>
<i>“I had imagined all that differently, what it should be like, and nothing was like that!”</i>

**Table 14**

**Individualism as a value in partnership**

<i>“I think that everybody has to be able to be alone, to be mature and stable enough to make themselves happy without any help from others... Also, selfishness is not acceptable.”</i>
<i>“His personality and identity have not been affected by emotions that I have expressed sometimes.”</i>
<i>“In a relationship, you should be allowed to express your desires and talents, not to feel suffocated. But, at the same time, you should not neglect your family life and partner, it has to be balanced.”</i>

*Rules, conventions and beliefs that guide partners in their discussion of topics below*

*Dissatisfied couples*

**Table 15**

**Avoiding the topic of marriage, repulsion towards marriage**

<p><i>“I don’t think that we have to get married. A good relationship is more important, the respect for each other’s freedom and individuality... I have a strong individuality, but I don’t insist on it... For me, understanding, as well as mutual respect, is very important.”</i></p>
<p><i>“We are not married, but there is no difference in our relationship... except that we don’t have kids. We make decisions and do everything else together.”</i></p>
<p><i>“We, actually, have never talked about marriage.”</i></p>
<p><i>“Marriage makes everything much more simple and practical, especially in raising children. There has to be love in a relationship... Marriage only makes a relationship official for the purpose of having children. It is perfectly normal for two people to live together out of wedlock... It’s only a custom.”</i></p>
<p><i>“In my opinion, people get married because they want their partner only for themselves!”</i></p>
<p><i>“Before, when our relationship was based only on love, everything was much easier... definitely!”</i></p>
<p><i>“The challenge for a relationship is when one of the partners is not ready to commit to marriage.”</i></p>

**Table 16**

**Recognized values, qualities and strengths: “Openness, understanding and trust”**

<i>“To respect each other, to have enough for a basic living.”</i>
<i>“Not to have a personal interest, no manipulations and abuse.”</i>
<i>“Trust is very important. Partners should respect and trust each other.”</i>
<i>“His respect for me is very important... and, also, the positive emotions between us.”</i>
<i>“Humiliation, disrespect or insults are not acceptable.”</i>
<i>“Respect is important, gives me the support I expect... It is not enough for me only to hear that from him, I want him to show that respect for me.”</i>
<i>“We are committed to each other and there is nothing that I wouldn’t share with her.”</i>
<i>“I don’t know what it would be that we would have to hide from each other.”</i>
<i>“Love and respect above all... and no jealousy.”</i>
<i>“Lack of honesty makes everything complicated... It depends how much one is afraid of himself, and how well he knows himself... Understanding can help you to open yourself to the partner.”</i>
<i>“It is very important to talk to each other about problems.”</i>
<i>“Understanding is important and that the partner is there for you... like Vladimir is there for me.”</i>
<i>“For me, personally, trust and closeness are important.”</i>

**Table 17**

**The feeling of responsibility – obligation**

<i>“We are motivated by our child... Life is hard, I work all day to earn just for a basic living, but I am not complaining.”</i>
<i>“Nothing happened accidentally, we wanted to have a child, it didn’t happen accidentally.”</i>
<i>“Before we had children, we were each other`s priority... Now, children are the most important.”</i>
<i>“Every relationship requires sacrifices... You have to sacrifice your freedom... your independence.”</i>
<i>“I don’t believe that any couple can say: We are soul mates, we are the same.”</i>
<i>“We don’t let our parents interfere with our parenting... We want to take care of our child by ourselves.”</i>
<i>“If you have decided to get married, than you have to do your best to change yourself, as much as you can.”</i>
<i>“It is very important to feel closeness to the partner.”</i>
<i>“If sense of togetherness exists, partners can always find solutions.”</i>
<i>“If it were only the two of us, without a child, I would do everything differently... Sometimes we can be focused on ourselves too much... But a child needs both parents.”</i>
<i>“You have to be able to adapt to every situation. I do not have problem with that.”</i>
<i>“You learn how to love all that, the bad stuff as well, to love your partner the way he is... and you learn how to adjust to each other.”</i>
<i>“The process of changing often goes with some conflicts; it is always like that when partners are in the process of accepting each other’s differences.”</i>

**Table 18**

**Trust in destiny**

**“Going with the flow without planning”**

<p><i>“At the beginning, circumstances were the most important... Later, money became a problem.”</i></p>
<p><i>“Problems in a relationship can often be caused by the lifestyle of the partners, but they need to be discussed openly.”</i></p>
<p><i>“When partners enjoy their sex life, everything else is easier to overcome... and that’s something you can be aware of at the very beginning of the relationship.”</i></p>
<p><i>“It’s not always possible to make the perfect choice... simply put, there is not a lot of choice, it just happens, spontaneously, by instinct... Some people call it – a leap of faith.”</i></p>
<p><i>“Marriage is a state of mind... connection with the family on your side... something that just happened. I choose this marriage and this family, and that’s it.”</i></p>
<p><i>“Before making a decision to get married partners have to think it over if they could spend the rest of their lives with each other... In my opinion, sexual compatibility is the most important for a relationship.”</i></p>
<p><i>“There aren’t many people any more who believe in a long term relationship... But if partners are imaginative and loyal to each other, there is a chance for their relationship to last for a long time.”</i></p>
<p><i>“It is hard to change yourself profoundly, especially the inborn traits. When you are in a relationship, you have to accept and love your partner with all his virtues and vices... It is all the matter of your ability, as well as your readiness to be tolerant.”</i></p>
<p><i>“I prefer how it is in this moment!”</i></p>

<p><i>“Marriage is everything you were looking for in a relationship! I think that it is very important for the partners not to be aware of what attracts them to it so much... Just think about it as a special relationship between two people who love each other.”</i></p>
<p><i>“Strong, intensive emotions are very important... Partners should be approachable and open to each other... They should be able to make fun of what they discovered about each other, but also, they have to be aware how important it is.”</i></p>

**Table 19**

**Uncategorized, idiosyncratic answers**

<p><i>“I would like to have another son.”</i></p>
<p><i>“It is good to see a funny side in everything; it helps a lot in a hard situation.”</i></p>
<p><i>“There are many more bad than good qualities in our relationship.”</i></p>
<p><i>“We are not happy with our jobs, but we are happy with our relationship.”</i></p>
<p><i>“We have chosen to live on our own! It’s much better when we are alone, there is no tension.”</i></p>

**Comparison between Responses of Satisfied and Dissatisfied Couples**

The initiating question for the following part of the discussion is: What are the social rules, conventions, and beliefs which direct partners/interviewees in their conversation about autonomy and other aspects of relationship? In a discussion on the results, conducted in the form of a comparative analysis, I aim toward learning from the possible differences in perspectives among participants that are related with the degree of relationship satisfaction.

### *Comparative Analysis of Beliefs, Rules and Conventions on Autonomy and Partnership*

The analysis of the subsamples, the satisfied and the dissatisfied couples, was performed for the purpose of a comparative analysis of beliefs, rules, and conventions forming the foundation of the conceptions of autonomy offered by the participants. Throughout further discussion on this analysis, I refer to the categories listed in the preceding text (Vide pp.157 -161).

First, on the subsample of satisfied couples, it has been ascertained that all the offered responses on the subject of partnership and specifically on the subject of togetherness and autonomy, hold richer content than the responses obtained on the subsample of dissatisfied couples. Namely, by abstracting responses into categories, a greater number of categories were obtained from the subsample of satisfied couples. This finding opposes the Anna Karenina principle, cited before the exposition of the results, which asserts that there is only one way to be happy, while dissatisfaction is varied in its expressions. On the contrary, I have concluded that the couples analyzed within this study expressed more differences in opinions, values, rules, and expectations on the level of satisfied couples, as opposed to the dissatisfied ones.

Apart from the quantitative differences I have also ascertained significant qualitative differences in terms of beliefs and rules. On the subsample of satisfied couples the largest portion of received responses can be subsumed under the category entitled “**ethical principles**”. The responses belonging to the mentioned category reflect the expected desirable behaviors of partners, which are, before all, demonstrating respect and honesty within the relationship. We find that honesty is a value placed above love (Vide p. 164). “**Moral principles**”, as a similar category of responses, also the most numerous of all, has been recognized in the dissatisfied couples as well. An important difference that I have recognized



when looking at individual responses is that **respect and honesty** appear more frequently than the enumerated undesirable modes of behavior by the dissatisfied couples. The readiness to elaborate on the desirable behavior in partnership is greater in the sample of satisfied couples. In other words, partner exchange led by affirmative beliefs, such as the ethical ones, is encountered among the satisfied couples. On the other hand, among the dissatisfied couples, instead of ethical reasoning, we come across a less developed form of morality, one founded in a cluster of clear rules, injunctions, and prescriptions.

As autonomy is the focal subject, I did not go further into researching the foundations for constructing the ideas of respect, honesty and love, nor the multiplicity of potential meanings that they carry. For that reason, apart from stating the obvious, I go no further into the interpretation of the obtained differences.

On the subsample of satisfied couples, the following category according to size, i.e. the number of responses it encompasses, is the category I have entitled **observing the broader influences on the partnership**. This is the same position in which autonomy is defined as freedom from the outside influences. What is common to the responses in this category is the readiness to position the problem adjacent to the partnership, outside of it. In other words, I recognize here an attempt to externalize any problems and put them outside the borders of the partnership. Let's look at the example when the participants from the subsample of dissatisfied couples speak of the challenges and difficulties with which they contend as a couple, but also their positive expectations from the partner and the relationship. They stress their **confidence in "fate"** which, instead of them, directs the current but also future occurrences in their relationship as well. From this we can see that the dissatisfied couples waive their possibility to experience and consider autonomy on any level of their functioning, whether that of the partnership or that of their personality. The next category according to the size among the dissatisfied couples encompasses responses which reflect the

**feeling of commitment and responsibility** which determines their behavior in the relationship. This category, seemingly incongruent with the previous one, reveals a similar pattern of being intellectually closed to questioning and reconstructing the rules that govern the relations within the partnership. Thus, we can notice the participants are closed off to examining and creating the conditions for the desired change.

If we choose to underscore the differences between the two subsamples on the basis of the conducted analysis of the responses, we could use as the starting point the responses noted in one, but not the other group of couples. Following this line of thought I have concluded that the satisfied couples are **directed towards the same goals**, active in their attempts to perfect the **skills and quality of communication**, open to learning on past mistakes and with the purpose of conflict prevention or resolution. From the responses we can see that there is a tendency to analyze others' mistakes rather than one's own, presumably with the goal of avoiding similar mistakes in one's own experience. Others' mistakes include examples and situations outside of the current emotional partnership. When they make their values in the partnership explicit, they do so in the form of a **shared ideology**, colored with religious, Orthodox elements. However, even then they are more directed towards defining what is positive and desirable than what they disallow, judge, or despise.

On the other hand, a category noted among the responses of the dissatisfied couples was one where there was an apparent **attempt to evade the issue**, to negate the significance of discussing the topic of partnership and the lack of readiness to think in terms of togetherness and mutual rules, definitions, and expectations.

*Identifying oscillations or possible differences in expressing their individual powers during interaction, depending on the subject: Partner’s equality? <sup>6</sup>*

*Satisfied couples*

**Table 20**

**Examples of behavior: Partners’ instructions for “good communication”**

<i>“I was in love with somebody else for the entire year, but I married another man. When I met him I realized he was the person I could share every single emotion with at any time, and that I was relaxed when we were together.”</i>
<i>“When I am in a bad mood he tries hard to make me feel better, to make me laugh, to get me to talk to him and tell him what is wrong. He never leaves me alone with my worries.”</i>
<i>“When I am angry about something I want him to know that, he can see that by my behavior.”</i>
<i>“We can always sit down together, listen to each other and make a decision that is best for the both of us.”</i>
<i>“I don’t have a problem to tell him that my opinion is different.”</i>
<i>“We are always waiting for the right moment to talk... when both of us are ready for conversation. When you are tense for some reason, or tired, you can tell something you usually would not.”</i>
<i>“Yes, I love when he smiles, I do not like to offend him, and I want to be nice to him. I like to discuss things and find out who is right, to avoid hurting each other.”</i>
<i>“She was determined to make a change, and she did it.”</i>

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<sup>6</sup> Answers from the total sample of couples, categorized according to the questions and the level of satisfaction with the relationship

<p><i>“I have to admit that I criticized him and complained about his behavior a lot... but he didn’t pay me any attention at all and I had to tell him all over again that I did not like what he was doing. But we fixed that, I am not complaining anymore.”</i></p>
<p><i>“Well, I think about my husband, I know exactly what he likes, I think about how I should behave. It’s hard to answer that question, but I have been thinking a lot.”</i></p>

**Table 21**

**Attitudes toward gender roles**

<p><i>“Father (Reverend) Porfirije said that the house chores were not divided according to the gender but according to talents and preferences.”</i></p>
<p><i>“I don’t like when people divide roles according to gender. We are both human beings... And that kind of fluidity and flexibility of roles and responsibilities is what I really like.”</i></p>
<p><i>“We do not divide roles on male’s and female’s... We usually don’t pay attention to those things.”</i></p>
<p><i>“Well, when I got married it was really hard for me and I cried for a month...” “I understand that, she is an only child.”</i></p>
<p><i>“I have no problem working around the house, fixing things, doing dishes and laundry, it is not difficult for me, I did all that in my house as well... I used to tidy my room to... We share work in our house to have more time for us.”</i></p>
<p><i>“There are things that men talk about only between men, and women between women.”</i></p>
<p><i>“In a traditional sense, I expect the protective role of my partner to be a little bit more pronouncee. That doesn’t mean that I am a victim, and he is a great protector, not in that sense.”</i></p>

<p><i>“This can be an example of differences in the roles by gender: When I graduated from university, I was looking for a job for a year. I had a hard time and, as a man, I felt extremely bad, incompetent. But she was very supportive all the time. In the meantime, she graduated and I found a job.”</i></p>
<p><i>“In my opinion, men and women think differently. Men usually try to find easier paths to everything, while women are more practical... She contemplates more than I do.”</i></p>
<p><i>“Well, I listen to him, he is a man, he is smart, he knows better... ha, ha.”</i></p>

**Table 22**

**Strategies for avoiding conflicts**

<p><i>“He gets annoyed very easily, but that doesn’t last long. I am not angry at him... It’s his temper; it’s hard for him to control that.”</i></p>
<p><i>“If we are both angry at the same time, we keep quiet and leave each other alone, but if only one of us is angry, the other one tries to comfort and cheer him up.”</i></p>
<p><i>“I need some time to calm down... Both of us get angry sometimes... That happens usually when she is not in the mood, or something isn’t working. I just let it go and we talk later. It’s not often, but it happens. We talk when she calms down.”</i></p>
<p><i>“I wait for him to get over it, and when he is ready to listen, I can say everything I think.”</i></p>
<p><i>“We are very compatible. It often happens that one of us start a sentence and the other one finishes it.”</i></p>
<p><i>“I am fascinated that we have never had a fight, never!”</i></p>
<p><i>“There are arguments between us, but they are usually constructive ones.”</i></p>
<p><i>“We try to avoid conflicts but if it happens, we usually resolve it fast. I would rather talk and exchange some experiences then to argue with him.”</i></p>

<i>“When one partner has a problem, the other one has to show understanding and support.”</i>
<i>“We agreed that there is no topic we can’t talk about (unfaithfulness, lying)... Everything can be discussed.”</i>
<i>“I am very happy that there are no conflicts between us... I don’t know what I would do if I had to argue with him every day.”</i>

**Table 23**

**Trust in compatibility: Harmonized personal characteristics**

<i>“Nebojsa is a real emotional support for me; he is stronger and better in making decisions than I am... He really knows what he wants.”</i>
<i>“I can’t imagine being without him.”</i>
<i>“We grew up together, like brother and sister.”</i>
<i>“We trust each other.”</i>
<i>“I start to worry if something is different than the usual between us.”</i>
<i>“I like him as a person... I think that he is very smart and very pretty, and the best... and I would like him to stay like that.”</i>
<i>“She complements me with her seriousness... That is very important for me, because she keeps me grounded... I usually follow my heart in a lot of the things I do.”</i>

*Identifying oscillations or possible differences in expressing their individual powers during interaction, depending on the subject: Partner's equality?*

***Dissatisfied couples***

**Table 24**

**Attitudes toward gender roles**

<i>"Women are much better as parents, it is natural for them. Men need more time to get used to a new situation."</i>
<i>"I am not for dividing jobs to male and female ones... No matter how difficult a job is, it's easier when we do it together."</i>
<i>"When I gave birth we were doing everything together, Branko was included in everything around the baby... I am very happy that both of us are there for our child."</i>
<i>"We are not dividing roles at all, we are doing everything spontaneously and we share jobs according to preferences."</i>
<i>"It is normal and common for the fathers to have authority, to be strict... It is their role."</i>
<i>"When we have a decision to make, of course, he is there."</i>
<i>"We always fight when I try to impose the hierarchy in our relationship."</i>
<i>"I let him solve problems, I know he'll do everything right. He knows how to set boundaries. That's why I always ask him."</i>
<i>"There are some things she does better...cooking, for example."</i>
<i>"I don't think that it is a man's job to work around the house, except some physical work which is hard for women to do."</i>
<i>"We want a male child, we agree on that... Males are stronger and do better in life."</i>

<p><i>“When there is infidelity in a relationship, it does not necessary mean that there is no love, people simply make a poor judgment, especially men. I, certainly, wouldn’t like that to happen to us.”</i></p>
<p><i>“A lot of people accept the relationship of domination and subordination... The consequence might be an affair, or mistreatment.”</i></p>

**Table 25**

**Statements that reflect attitudes and a rigid life style (script)**

<p><i>“I decided to leave my hometown and everything I had there for our relationship... I expected us to live on our own, just the two of us, not with his parents. I think that I deserve from him to fulfill my expectation. Living with his parents is out of the question.”</i></p>
<p><i>“I have no tact at all, that is my temper.”</i></p>
<p><i>“There is no one better for me then he is!”</i></p>
<p><i>“She has understanding for my grumpiness.”</i></p>
<p><i>“When he is not at home, I go crazy. Even if he doesn’t do anything, I just want him to be with me.”</i></p>
<p><i>“Most of the time she is the one who is wrong, but when I make a mistake, I don’t try to run away from it.”</i></p>
<p><i>“I’m always there; I support him in everything... unconditionally!”</i></p>
<p><i>“Infidelity is absolutely unacceptable.”</i></p>



**Table 26**

**Distance, passive withdrawal from the partner**

<i>"I don't know, Marija will do it, I am a little bit tired."</i>
<i>"I give suggestions, but I do not force my will. I have the freedom of making my decisions, so it is fair to let him make the decision who is a good friend for him and who is not!"</i>
<i>"If we have agreed to come to the interview, then you should participate!"</i>
<i>"When I am in a bad mood, I don't want my wife, or anyone else, around me."</i>
<i>"I trust her, so I usually give up and let her do everything her way."</i>
<i>"It's not important for me to save anything, but it is for Vladimir. I would include him in my entire life, but it is not the case with him... Once he went to visit his colleague without even asking me if I wanted to go with him... I would never do that."</i>
<i>"It is difficult for me to understand him... I see a million persons in Vladimir and I accept that."</i>
<i>"Vladimir does everything; he is more meticulous than me."</i>
<i>"The fact that we can never talk about the future makes me crazy... I can't see us in the present either... It seems to me that we are together because it is convenient for us."</i>

### *Comparative Analysis on Power Issues in Relation to Personal Autonomy and Partnership*

The initiating question for the following part of the discussion is: What kinds of oscillations or potential differences in the expression of power exist in the course of interaction, depending on the topic and the degree of relationship satisfaction among partners?

A comparative analysis of the contents of the responses between the subsamples was also conducted, with the purpose of identifying different patterns in the distribution of power within the partnership, which shaped the interaction and the obtained responses.

I have also placed the responses by *satisfied couples*, which contain elements relevant to this type of analysis, into a number of categories according to their superordinate topics, or the common denominator of the responses, as it is presented in the preceding text (Vide pp. 178-182).

Further analysis has indicated that the most numerous responses are those that belong to the category **rules of behavior – instructions for “good communication”**, followed by the category entitled **strategies for overcoming conflict**. I have noticed that the couples perceived a satisfied partnership as a dynamic process, which requires constant adaptation. During the course of the interview, in a direct interaction with the researcher, one notices an equal participation of the partners in the conversation. They are active in their efforts to be correctly understood by the interviewer. I would assume that the communication skills and readiness to advance them is something shared by all the couples in the satisfied group. This was not the case in the group of dissatisfied couples. A firm division of roles, founded before all on gender differences, was apparent, not only on the level of the contents of the responses, but also in their conduct during the interview.

In the thematic analysis of the contents of the responses of *dissatisfied couples* a citing of rigid positions and roles has been noted (Vide p. 183). Not only had the

understanding of autonomy as the central topic of the conversation, but also the very conversation about partnership as such, provoked in dissatisfied couples an exposition and defense of their rigid position on family roles. This was noticed mostly in accordance with the dominant patriarchal pattern. I cannot speak about the cause of the perceived tendencies, nor is this the goal of the study. We can only stress what has been perceived as a difference in the contents of the responses between these two groups of participants. Apart from the fact that among the dissatisfied participants the responses are sparser in content and volume, several additional conspicuous differences have been noticed.

Firstly, dissatisfaction is associated with the withdrawal of personal investment from the relationship, distancing oneself from the partner, and with the unwillingness (or inability) to put oneself in the partner's position. Taking a systemic stand, I have decided to observe and interpret the perceived behavior using the principle of circularity or, in other words, without speculations as to whether the distance is the cause or the consequence of the dissatisfaction. Based on my perceptions throughout the study, I will tentatively argue that conforming to a conventional division of roles, with a complete identification with the assumed role, with no insight, questioning or critical stance towards the behavior which stems from this, allows for only a certain level of intimacy between partners. An opposite tendency has also been noticed in the form of resisting a pre-existent, pre-structured mode of partner relationship without a rational insight into it, which is directed towards resisting the partner and the idea of togetherness. The perceived tendency on the subsample of dissatisfied couples could be termed "rebellious flight into autonomy". In other words, living in roles means living according to the rules which are not a result of good communication, dialogue and adjustment. When I take into consideration the fact that the compliance with the tradition is a consequence of a decade-long political isolation, I would argue that the psychological explications of dysfunctional dynamics are insufficient. Moreover, interpretations of partner

dissatisfaction should be sought in the external influences on the couple, such as socio-economic conditions of life, conditions on the job market, professional affirmation, potential for being acquainted with different cultural patterns, and the like.

Secondly, a tendency to divide roles within the partnership has, to some extent, been noticed in both participant groups, though comparatively more so among the dissatisfied couples. However, it has come to my attention that this division is attained via a process of negotiation among the satisfied couples, whereas one enters the partnership already with a “role” among the dissatisfied ones. In that sense, the satisfied partners interpret the existing division of roles as compatibility, a practical division of duties and the like. With the dissatisfied couples I have observed that the division is not questioned, or changed, or experienced as a matter of choice. On the contrary, as has been noticed in the analysis of the responses, entering the partnership marks the beginning of one’s orienting and evaluating one’s behavior through the categories of morality, responsibility and duties.

### **Part Two: Deconstructing the Fundamental TA Concept of Autonomy**

The **second part** of the discussion includes a deconstruction of the dominant theoretical interpretations by the prominent theorists of the Transactional Analysis. The deconstruction is performed from the position of social constructionism. The specific deconstructive questions, which I raised for the purpose of the conceptual analysis, are as follows:

- 1) Where is the center, the source, that is, who is the author of this narrative?
- 2) Is a social group marginalized when this theory is put into practice?
- 3) What kind of power does this theory delegate to the clients and practitioners?
- 4) Does it leave room for optional narratives or are they displaced and subordinated?

The power of language is reflected in the fact that it legitimizes everything it signifies and names. The ideology which forms the values in TA, as well as their practical implications, resulted as a reaction of its originators (mental health practitioners) to the social problem of the specific culture. At the same time, it reflected the psychopathological profile of the clients back then – also representative of an age and a context and, finally the personal position, social role, status, and social network to which the founder of the movement, Eric Berne, belonged to himself. As opposed to the interpretative openness of visual materials, written and oral texts have a certain repressive function since they are saturated with the ideology and moral of the society in question (Barthes, 1970). The community of TA practitioners has, from its inception, shared and transferred the knowledge that the key concepts of TA arose out of a rebellious review of the standards and practice of psychoanalysis. As an example, the contract as a methodological innovation in psychotherapy

equates the significance of the language and terms that the clients bring into psychotherapy with the language of the analyst (Berne, 1966). In other words, for change to take place, it is not necessary to know the language of theory as much as it is significant to explore and recognize the zones of conflict within the clients' referential frameworks – and the way in which they present it themselves. The social network and the quality of communication form the field in which psychological disturbances arise are analyzed, and then eliminated.

Precisely for the reason of accentuating good communication and understanding between the therapists and the clients, Berne (1969) introduced colloquial language into his theory. It was done not with the idea to simplify psychoanalysis or commercialize psychotherapy. It was a provocative challenge to the academically oriented psychoanalysis, at the time the dominant psychotherapeutic modality, and had the aim of strengthening the position of the client/analysand accountability. When we take into consideration the inceptive ideas in TA, we see that TA can only reach these originally set therapeutic goals when the interpretation of its terms is not closed to further interpretations by the practitioners who apply it in their work.

When I speak of the time and state of psychology in the period of the TA genesis, it is that of late modernism, after a period of the dominance of science over man. It brings a return to intuition, ethics, and empathy - or put more simply, the humanistic values introduced from philosophy, art, and literature into psychology by Rogers (1961) and Maslow (1962). TA belongs to this same paradigm, with one specificity: its inherent distrusts of the same values it glorifies. This is the subtext that follows all original works by Berne in which he talks about the inevitability of the script. It is precisely in this conflicted attitude of his that I find the hints of what we today think of as discursive identity. It is a position that emphasizes that the idea of the self is developed through oral and written expressions, that is, through language as the basic carrier of culture. This is not necessarily in the form of a linear, coherent story, but frequently in the form of amalgams of narrative fragments which describe different

experiences of the same person. None of the fragments of an identity perceived in narrative terms is considered to be more dominant than the others and each can potentially be experienced as an “authentic self” under certain conditions (Sermijn, 2008).

Berne (1972) never contested the fact that an individual reflected a history of interrelatedness with others, a family tradition, and the influence of the culture; he, in fact, himself used the metaphor of the pianola<sup>7</sup> to present his view of man and his place in society. Using the analogy of a piano player, Berne wondered if he was actually playing the piano or if he was mostly sitting there while a piano roll determined the tune. The conflicts between the individual expression and the family and societal pressure are apparent throughout Berne’s writings (as cited in Cornell, 1988, p. 270). Furthermore, the insistence upon autonomy as liberation from the script – the script cure, problematizes and limits the significance that this metaphor introduces into the therapeutic discourse. Another noteworthy conflict present in Berne is the dialectic of intuition (knowledge without experience) and reason (ratio) as modes of understanding in reference to the cognitive powers and capacity for self-discovery in the therapist and the client. Intuition and a skillfully conducted interview is, according to Berne (1977), the basic diagnostic method in the discovery of the intrapersonal. On the other hand, he tries to regulate interpersonal relationships and the principles which apply to them with formulae and laws of logic which lead to a predictable outcome (pp. 147 - 156). From another referential framework, the concept of games could also be interpreted as the par excellence example of relational (joint) responsibility, responsibility for oneself in the relation, for the other, as well as for the quality of the relationship itself. This methodological inconsistency could also be interpreted as a way to legitimize and accept in practice both modes of

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<sup>7</sup> mechanical piano, a mechanically operated piano that uses a roll of perforated paper to activate the keys

understanding and thus expand the modus operandi of the clinician, as well as the clinician's power to act. Additionally, what connects the intuition and the ratio which he speaks about is a certain confidence. This is the confidence that through intuition as a cognitive channel akin to the childlike modes of cognition, along with a ratio which enables metaperspectivity to an observing adult, external influences in the formation and socialization of personality can be overcome and perceived. Naturally, this comes with the presumption that the psychology of the child is not shaped by culture or tradition and that cognitive functions are the product of the nervous system development, rather than the symbolic interpersonal exchange. From the perspective of social constructionism, these very premises before all represent the bone of contention in TA. Both of these, the intuition and the ratio, can be misinterpreted and misused in the work with clients. How? A clinician's intuitive assessment of a client, without argumentation, without external validation and exchange, as well as the decisions that stem from that, places the clinician's mentalization ahead. Doubt in the decisions, with self-questioning, would in that case be considered proof of the clinician's lack of autonomy. What we call rational decision-making, if we are to apply the metaphor of the computer which Berne introduces to illustrate the work of cognition – is always programmed in synchronization with the social determinants and values within which the decision is made. In other words, both of these, the ratio and the intuition, write off the important fact of social determination of man and therefore also of certain limitations to the man's powers of "independent mentalization". Therapists are not exempt either, although the theory would suggest otherwise. It introduces into the therapeutic discourse ideas frequently disparate from the reality of the client, ideas of self-determination and free will, through the representation of the figure of the therapist as a living externalization which reifies what the theory only hypothetically asserts. The therapist, according to this understanding, in his Adult ego state, with no personal investment, objectivistically processes information and orients himself in his



actions according to the laws of probability. Foucault (2005/2003) has noted, on the subject of the limits of psychoanalysis, the same perception that can be applied here. If we imagine this hypothetical situation, which identifies optimal human functioning with that of a computer, as real, we see that it is actually limiting to a practitioner. This is the case since from the position of superior rationality the logic of the irrational remains unrecognized, unacknowledged, and consequently unanalyzed (pp.170-191). In other words, the very thing that should be the object of interest and analysis eludes a skilled analyst – human irrationality.

A naïve belief is that there are aspects within a person outside the influence of what could be traditionally named the external factors (family, language, culture etc.), which is equivalent to the pedagogic view of a child as a blank sheet of paper. Along with this belief Berne, as well as other TA authors, always emphasizes the decisive significance of parenting styles in the shaping of an autonomous personality. In other words, in order to even experience highly elusive autonomy, special upbringing efforts on the side of the parents are necessary. In that case, one must ask the question to what extent autonomy is the achievement of the person practicing it and to what extent it is an issue of social agreement, that is, a communal product. Although Berne values communality less than autonomy, for the realization of therapeutic goals, but also for mental hygiene, from these premises we could see that cooperation is necessary – “cooperative child rearing for autonomy” (Steiner, 1974). For the development and practice of autonomy, as a distinct type of resistance to oppressive influences, it is not sufficient that an individual possess free will. Neither is it enough that the household the individual belongs to is significantly different in its values from the dominant tradition. Starting precisely from that, Steiner places autonomy on the plane of societal projects and tasks. I have found the same interpretation in the theoretical work of Erskine (1997), who considers nurturing autonomy in the children to be a parental obligation and task. Here, we can see the ideological coloring and cultural specificity of the dominant conceptions

of autonomy. In other words, parents who are themselves not autonomous, whether owing it to life circumstances, political or religious ideologies, or other limitations, are unable to raise autonomous offspring. Is, in such circumstances, the autonomy of which the cited theorists speak even necessary to anyone in order to function optimally and experience satisfaction with themselves and the relations they belong to? The same question is raised by Erskine (1997) himself after which he elects to replace the concept of autonomy with that of interdependence which encompasses, apart from personal freedom and responsibility, also relational responsibility (p.188).

The greatest semantic confusion of the concept of autonomy can be found in the later developments of Berne's ideas by James (1971, 1981) and Steiner (1971, 1974). On the one hand, Steiner (1971) advocates the paradigm of external pathology, in which case psychopathology is understood and treated as a transactional (communication) problem which protects the person manifesting the symptom from stigmatization and discounting (pp. 32-39). Simultaneously, present in his writings are a negativism and skepticism on the question of social influence on an individual. The social situation is viewed as the field in which the problem occurs and in which it is analyzed, but it is not also viewed as the field which carries the potential for change. What he sees as human potential supersedes the limitations of the social and enters the domain of the transpersonal and the spiritual. This introduces a new dimension through which he attempts to overcome the contradictions inherent in Berne's texts on the subject of autonomy. Remaining thus consistent in the view that social influence is naturally negative and damaging, he sees therapeutic potential in what is a universal human characteristic, like natural categories – biology and genetics. He also sees potential in what is transcendental to the personal story and the cultural tradition and that is, according to him, the spiritual aspect of existence. As he claims: "Graciously, Mother Nature in this way guarantees

ever renewed hope for humanity; without hope for the whole human race there can be no hope for individual members of it.” (Steiner, 1971, p.115).

In her interpretations, James (1971/1992) overemphasizes the role of the individual in a society, developing to an absurd extent the concept of autonomy. According to her, a person is able, at will, to reject the compulsion to live the predetermined lifestyle, be liberated from the influence of instincts, urges, heritage, and environment (p.166). The psychotherapeutic contract is a practical implication of these assumptions and a tool that serves for the materialization of what theoretically seems to be possible according to these interpretations. With her rigorous assertions, just like Steiner, James approaches spiritual and ethical dimensions, but also pragmatism, when she speaks of autonomy in the context of personal development. Autonomy is, therefore, achievable via a change in the value system, as well as pragmatism and utilitarianism in one’s choices. The Parent ego state is considered to be a less valuable ego state, the part of the intrapsychic experience that needs to be changed. James (1998) asserts that the Parent ego state lacks the autonomous quality of both the Adult and the Child. It seems to have been modeled after an outside influence and has an imitative flavor (p. 20). Just like in Steiner’s views, autonomy becomes a lifestyle and an aspiration, and not a goal. Intuition, courage, self-confidence, changeability and flexibility are the traits of an autonomous person, according to this interpretation. An autonomous person, according to James, lives in the present and the near future with a critical view towards the past. English (1971), as well as Erskine (1988), starting from the same understanding and time determination, intensifies this contention even further, claiming that all experiences, even emotional ones, which are nurtured by previous ones, are unreal experiences (racket, false) (English, 1971, pp. 27-33). I could further infer, from the aforementioned premises, that every moment spent in the Child or Parent ego states, without a cathected Adult managing the situation, is a direct manifestation of the script and represents a non-autonomous mode of existence (Lapwort, Sills & Fish, 1993).

Apart from the fact that the problematic aspects within the theory are numerous, especially those which have become incompatible with the post-humanistic state of contemporary life, even within the original sources a space for an optional narrative is visible. Namely, Berne (1961) himself does not view life according to the “script” as a failed project. On the contrary, as he says, roles can be cast in a way that is satisfactory to all the participants (p.117). The autonomy that he envisages as exiting the script, he himself calls an illusion, reducing interpersonal relations to power games from which it is impossible to emerge as a winner, especially in family and partner relations which are supposed to be radiating intimacy. Interpersonal games are thus one of the recognizable obstacles to aspirations towards autonomy. Likewise, the games, that Berne so devotedly analyzes and dissects, represent the basis for accentuating the significance of relational responsibility and autonomy. Social roles define the individual and shape his/her reality. Constructive, as well as destructive games are only possible in relation and cooperation with other participants. When he speaks of the possibility of exiting roles, Berne (1964/1998) does not fail to emphasize the subsequent change in the entire perceptive and referential framework of the individual. The individual, outside his or her role, ceases to exist within the relation in the same way, and the relation thus loses in significance to the individual, but he or she also loses importance to it (p.61). Furthermore, I have found an alternative interpretation also in Steiner who, as I have already stated, considers the practice of autonomy to be a co-creation and a consequence of a social agreement on the level of micro and macro social communities.

In order to further reconstruct the concept of autonomy, I now present the answer categories obtained after analyzing the content of the focus groups conducted with the clients in the pilot phase of the study, as well as the answers of the surveyed therapists. Upon the presentation of these results, the discussion is continued.

***Focus Group: The Research Pilot Phase***

The general questions that have provided provisional structure for the course and content of the discussion by the focus group participants were: “How can personal autonomy be recognized? Is it important to you?”

I have classified various answers according to the common elements and themes. The 9 relevant categories of answers, in the form of central topics extracted after the analysis of the answer content, are presented in Table 27.

**Table 27**

**Focus group results**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Statement examples</b>
<b>Self-evaluation</b>	<p><i>“He would have the feeling that he is valuable... and that he needs to develop himself.”</i></p> <p><i>“In a difficult situation I wouldn’t feel sorry for myself...”</i></p> <p><i>“I think we need equality and that nobody is self-sufficient.”</i></p> <p><i>“Respect for one’s authenticity, temperament...”</i></p>
<b>Financial independence</b>	<p><i>“When a man makes his own decisions about his finances so that no one else decides for him, to decide by himself on how to conduct himself etc.”</i></p> <p><i>“A person free from compulsion...”</i></p> <p><i>“... and financial independence, supporting oneself.”</i></p> <p><i>“Well, when, like in my case, you depend completely on your parents, you don’t have the right to complain about certain things, for everything you get you need to give something in return.”</i></p> <p><i>“When there is no constraint by others...”</i></p>

<p><b>An unattainable ideal and other idealistic descriptions</b></p>	<p><i>“Autonomy is a goal, a desire.”</i></p> <p><i>“Autonomy is an ideal.”</i></p> <p><i>“A value-neutral category.”</i></p> <p><i>“I do not know a single person I would call completely healthy, perfect, autonomous...”</i></p> <p><i>“This is not a matter of healthy/ill, but developed/undeveloped.”</i></p> <p><i>“I think that a mentally healthy person has an inviolable autonomy, nothing can jeopardize that, not even being in prison or being financially dependent... and for that person to be guided by community and closeness.”</i></p> <p><i>“And this ability to move to one’s own scale is autonomy, that’s important...”</i></p>
<p><b>Insensitivity and unresponsiveness</b></p>	<p><i>“I think that it is freedom from having to react by compulsion, as other people say, I don’t have to cry and I don’t have to think about it... I feel nothing. I simply think it is not true.”</i></p> <p><i>“Yes, it doesn’t concern me.”</i></p> <p><i>“Not that I’m insensitive, but it doesn’t concern me that much what other people say”</i></p> <p><i>“I wouldn’t accept that, he wouldn’t be bothered, he would analyze...”</i></p> <p><i>“Yes, being liberated is – an internal thing! If on the inside we feel liberated, we don’t have to ask for anything and get anything from anyone, we can be independent...”</i></p> <p><i>“A freedom, peace, but also coldness...”</i></p> <p><i>“That is a person who doesn’t give up on his internal freedom under any circumstances.”</i></p> <p><i>“When somebody is his own person, when he behaves in accordance with his feelings and nobody influences his opinion...”</i></p>

<p><b>Negative association and establishing opposites</b></p>	<p><i>“To my mind, dependence is the opposite.”</i></p> <p><i>“The more we talk, the less I like autonomy (laughter).”</i></p> <p><i>“To my mind, it all seems exclusive. Like, you are your own person but you’re not connected. It is sad, unnatural.”</i></p> <p><i>“I have political associations (laughter).”</i></p> <p><i>“If internal structures change, then it is negative.”</i></p>
<p><b>Flexibility</b></p>	<p><i>“Autonomy is flexibility.”</i></p> <p><i>“Autonomy is a dimension. There are extremes. A person can be cold, like this or like that, but she can also be mature, happy, connected to other people.”</i></p> <p><i>“I think that the ideal in this sense is not a point but flexibility. To be able to function completely independently and to be connected when it is necessary.”</i></p>
<p><b>Sincerity and authenticity</b></p>	<p><i>“To be sincere and feeling free to express that.”</i></p> <p><i>“Be authentic, sincere.”</i></p> <p><i>“Truth and security.”</i></p> <p><i>“Given by nature...”</i></p>
<p><b>Difference</b></p>	<p><i>“Idiosyncratic...”</i></p> <p><i>“Somebody different, who has his own thing going, difference...”</i></p> <p><i>“I don’t want us to negotiate autonomy and then end up with the same opinions as before... that’s not autonomy.”</i></p> <p><i>“Everyone has a different concept of autonomy... it’s a complex concept. It’s important to be aware that we have different opinions.”</i></p> <p><i>“Everyone here has a different personality.”</i></p>

<p><b>Adaptation</b></p>	<p><i>“If you make a decision in order to adapt, if you decide from a healthy part of you to change.”</i></p> <p><i>“A tree adapts to survive, it sheds leaves to survive winter and so, in its essence, life is adaptation.”</i></p> <p><i>“Adaptation to conditions, people... that’s necessary.”</i></p> <p><i>“I think that social intelligence is the most obvious in the degree to which someone can adapt to a certain situation.”</i></p> <p><i>“Often, we are not even aware of all those changes... That’s not clear to me, but if it is in harmony with my being and is useful... alright.”</i></p>
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***The results of therapists’ survey***

Based on the interviews conducted with TA therapists, as an “expert” group available from the public, I have identified nine central topics around which the obtained answers to the first question have been grouped. This is followed with additional eight themes, representing answers to the second question. The exact responses of the therapists are quoted below in italic, by category.

The first question was: “I most often explain to clients the concept of personal autonomy as...?”



### **Box 1**

#### **Personal responsibility**

*“Taking responsibility for what happens to them in life... responsibility for every action... making an independent and responsible choice... personal responsibility that our choices are for the benefit of ourselves, the other, and the environment... being personally responsible for one’s thoughts, feelings, behavior, and decisions, 50% of our lives can be attributed to the environment.”*

### **Box 2**

#### **Freedom of choice**

*“Being free of behaving and making choices under duress... awareness of options, the freedom to test new choices... an adult has choices, he can choose what kind of environment he wants to be in... the readiness to decide on one’s own destiny and to live in accordance with one’s goals... the freedom to choose what they need by themselves.”*

### **Box 3**

#### **Independence from the environment**

*“Not depending on opinions and beliefs of others, independent decision making, an awareness that they have the right to identify their needs, no matter what others think about it... you are true to yourself if you sincerely believe in something, and you don’t give in to the surrounding pressure; changing attitudes towards the environment and codependency with the environment at any age, keeping a fine balance between being alone and being with others.”*

### Box 4

#### Self-respect, assertiveness, equality:

*“Relying on one’s own judgment, respecting oneself and others (reaffirming the ok - ok life position), accepting yourself as you are –to love yourself unconditionally, being equal with others, assertive, exchange of emotions, clear demands and requests towards others, without the obligation of support from the others.”*

### Box 5

#### Overcoming symptomatology

*“Stepping out of the script pattern... for “psychoses” autonomy means being able to live without symptoms occasionally... without good biology there is no autonomy... tolerating fear, leaving inhibitions behind, autonomy does not mean that they will always be happy and fulfilled, and consequently socially accepted.”*

### Box 6

#### Readiness for change

*“Exploring various life scripts... moving out of a rigid, inflexible position in which the problem seems insoluble... exploring new things without fear... the possibility of change and, above all, the readiness to accept changes.”*

### Box 7

#### Introspectiveness, spirituality, humanity

*“Focus on the spiritual rather than on other potentials... being in touch with one’s desires, needs, and plans, monitoring one’s processes, being present in one’s life, moral values, being concerned for the welfare of the environment and the Universe.”*

**Box 8**

**Autonomy as a myth and an ideal**

*“I do not know a single fully autonomous person... to learn how to live and accept the parts of the script that we cannot or do not want to change... identifying one’s power and limitations... working on autonomy is possible for healthy (neurotic) clients... an ideal, a tendency, but not a goal in itself.”*

**Box 9**

**The affirmation of “the naturally given, native” – humanistic principles**

*“Closeness, spontaneity, intimacy: By full acceptance and support, the Free Child is liberated (the inborn capacities) and the person is much more aware, spontaneous, and capable of closeness... the affirmation of capacity for awareness, spontaneity, closeness... openness to non-manipulative relationships, reinvigorating the natural capacities of human beings for spontaneity, awareness, and closeness ... the process of alternating between occasional closeness, even “becoming one”, or distancing oneself from the significant other.”*

The second question posed to the therapists was: “I have learnt from clients that autonomy is...?” The central topics identified in the answers are presented in Table 28.

**Table 28**

**Therapist survey results**

<b>Economic independence,</b>
<b>Solitude,</b> <i>too big of a “bite”, provokes negative associations (self-sufficiency, guilt, complaints, a prelude to an existential crisis),</i>
<b>Optimism</b> <i>(I’m ok even when I am not), enthusiasm</i> <i>(the glistening eyes and radiant smile, low self-criticism),</i>
<b>The ability to see a situation in a different way,</b> <i>commitment to one’s goals and decisions, coping with one’s limitations,</i>
<b>Achieving internal balance,</b> <i>focus, openness, and simplicity in life,</i>
<b>The capacity for change</b> <i>at any age, the ease with which to make important decisions in life (e.g. stopping the therapy),</i>
<i>Autonomy is a different thing for everybody, everybody has the right to have their own concept and experience of autonomy, people sometimes need to be supported when they are dependent in order to be able to achieve it...</i>
<i>Biochemistry limits autonomy, facing one’s “insufficiencies” – weaknesses.</i>

### **Alternative Interpretations of Autonomy Learned from Clients, Therapists and Dominant TA Voices: Implications for Theory on Autonomy**

In the following text I go back to the second goal of the dissertation which is a generative reinterpretation of the TA concept of autonomy with relation to social constructionism. Alternative interpretations of autonomy to dominant TA voices are grouped around three different themes and supported by what I learned from couples, as well as from all the other sources used in this study.

#### ***“Personal Development” and Spiritual Aspects of Autonomy***

The spiritual aspect of autonomy that can be encountered in some theorists after Berne also provides a foundation for an alternative interpretation of autonomy as a “third self” or a “strong urge to belong and interact with others in a meaningful way” (James, 1998. p. 237). The interdependence that Erskine (1997) speaks of also emphasizes the importance of relational limitations to autonomy. Therefore, autonomy in its own right, without considering its practical implications and the ways it is practiced in a mutually beneficent way within a relation or a social network, has no psychological or social importance. According to the traditional interpretations of autonomy, which I have considered here, the differentia specifica of autonomy is rationality, calculation, prediction, control and the like. Unlike these interpretations, there are also those that view autonomy as the courage to plunge into the unknown and to successfully find one’s way in the space of instability between order and chaos. This encourages self-reflexivity in relation to one’s actions and preconceived notions (Sills, 1997). Gilligan’s (1982) critique of the dominant theories of development has been accepted by the theorists of contemporary TA schools, primarily Cornell (2008) and Allen & Allen (2005). Namely, based on following the psychosexual development of men, thus from the starting point of masculinity as the norm, general psychological standards have been set.

Gilligan's research shows that well-known developmental theories were all based on studies of boys (James, 1998, p.144-145). The purpose of such standards is to offer a universal description of human development and psychological functioning, which includes, among others, aspirations towards individuation, separation and autonomy as developmental goals. If I set the masculine version of autonomy as the standard, interdependence and care for others lose their developmental significance. We know, nevertheless, that the development of an individual can by no means be considered to be a single person's achievement (Cornell, 2008). For the same reasons, Allen & Allen (2005) espouse an expansion of the ethos of the Transactional Analysis. Apart from autonomy as a value, the new ethos should also encompass interdependence, empathy, responsiveness, connectedness, and active participation in the community, tolerance, with highly developed decentering skills necessary to perceive another person's perspective. Starting from the assumption that we all live narrative lives, these authors redefine the concept of autonomy as a specific experience of authorship over our life stories. This brings a new kind of responsibility, and that is the responsibility for the reality we create. "True autonomy", in that interpretation, liberates us not so much from the script as from the traditional limits of reality (p.348).

### ***Psychotherapeutic Healing and Power***

The next dilemma opened by a deconstructive discussion of the implications of traditional interpretations of TA concerns itself with the marginalization of certain social groups or categories of psychotherapy clients. The complementary problematic includes a consideration of the power which the practitioners within this discourse wield.

The alternative readings of TA which have been offered so far already contain answers to these questions. Traditionally, an analyst is through theory, training and

supervision encouraged not to abandon the position of rationality, assessment and evaluation. A powerful identification with the modality which ensues after many years spent in training, sometimes even longer than the duration of formal education prior to the specialization, leads to a situation where theory and personal morality intertwine. This additionally impedes self-reflection. Acting in accordance with the implicit values of TA, it is given other names in practice, or, rather, therapeutic interventions – confrontation, decontamination, re-parenting, and the like. Notwithstanding the fact that the analyst starts from the contract as the basic technique in his work, learning a new language, the language of TA, is considered to be a necessary part of the process in the method of psychotherapeutic healing. As James (1974) claims, the role of a TA practitioner consists of strengthening the Adult ego state in a client, restructuring the Parent ego state and encouraging the client to abandon destructive transactions, games, and the script for the sake of “authenticity and autonomy” (pp. 32 -39). Even according to the traditional understandings of autonomy, this mode of relationship between a therapist and a client resembles more the relationship between a teacher and a pupil. It can hardly be thought of as conducive to an essential advancement in independence and initiative with further generation of novelties in thoughts and choices on the part of the client. One artifact emerging from the application of such practice is a very pronounced disproportion in the division of power between the client and the therapist. This is noted even in those cases which usually would not lead to social isolation and devaluation, such as clients with neurotic symptomatology or family or partner difficulties. The idea of autonomy, as interpreted by the clients with whom the focus group was conducted within the preliminary explorations for the study, is automatically associated with economic independence. Considering the fact that outside the psychotherapeutic discourse, which is unknown to them, autonomy for them also implies economic power, their first associations are usually negative, because they confront them with their dissatisfaction with their own financial situation (Vide

p.198). This is stated as a generalization as this was the first association that appeared in the focus group, but also because the average wages in Serbia at the moment when the research was conducted, in 2010, were far below the European average, and even below regional average. This fact alone causes the connotations which arise from the therapeutic goal set in this way and which clients themselves term unattainable and idealistic, to be unable to represent an encouragement in the process of self-work. After psychotherapy is well under way and the initial discomfort over the lofty goals is overcome, the meanings that clients gladly ascribe to the idea of autonomy are **self-esteem, flexibility, sincerity, being different and being adjustable** (Vide p. 198-202).

I have included the data obtained from the therapists with the intention of answering the question we posed at the beginning of the research. That question is “To what extent does the TA framework generalize, narrow down the field of experience and exclude the specificity of the context to which the client belongs? Otherwise, to what extent does it, through its concepts, make a difference to the experience of the clients and the families, transform and expand their reality?” Namely, I have analyzed the contents of therapists’ replies to the question how they define and use in their work the concept of autonomy. The obtained replies were classified and grouped under major themes, or categories of interpretation (Vide p. 198). Three out of the nine identified categories of interpretation follow an existentialist understanding of responsibility (independence from one’s surroundings, freedom of choice, personal responsibility). Then, three categories are close to a humanistic understanding of the essential human nature (introspection, spirituality, and humaneness; affirmation of inborn potentials and an idealistic description of autonomy as a striving for self-actualization). The remaining three are pragmatic and concern themselves with the psychotherapeutic goals (overcoming the symptomatology; readiness to change; self-respect, assertiveness and equality). It is only with these final three categories of responses



that I have found a partial overlap between the responses given by the clients (adjustment, flexibility, honesty, and self-esteem) and the ones given by the therapists. When asked about what they have learned from their clients about autonomy, the therapists from my sample offer a wealth of connotation and meanings which largely overlap with what I have obtained from the group of clients themselves (economic independence, solitary position, difference, self-acceptance...). The responses to this question significantly differ from those that I have obtained with the first question. This leads me to conclude that loyalty to the therapeutic paradigm is preferred over the referential framework of the clients themselves and their capacity to participate in the co-construction of the concept of autonomy. The therapists of the TA orientation from the sample are aware of the fact that the clients they work with have different understandings of the core concepts of human development and mental health that they represent to them. However, they exhibit no initiative to adjust the theory to the context to which they belong, not even on the level of practice. Their position of power, which belongs to them as a matter of course, is thus supported even further and the voices of their clients are marginalized even more profoundly. Especially disturbing is a category of responses from a group of clients according to which autonomy is understood as **insensitivity and unresponsiveness**. I wonder whether these connotations emerge as a result of the nature of the relationship between a TA therapist and clients. Is it a reaction to the way in which therapists describe a mentally healthy person, despite the cultural values and accepted communication styles within the community in which they offer their services?

An insight into the responses and interpretations of therapists on the subject of autonomy in relation to which they define psychotherapeutic aspirations has offered an observation. Unlike the general meanings contained in older and newer theoretical TA sources, practitioners notice limitations in the application of traditional interpretations and the implications of autonomy in the specific context. The problem I have come across during this

study is their low valuation of that awareness, and consequently the lack of readiness to question the original interpretations which still dominate their interpretative repertoire. One can see that the awareness of the practical limitations of interventions, in accordance with the values of the humanistic paradigm to which belongs the TA definition of autonomy, only appears after all the other meanings and connotations ascribed to autonomy, mostly supported by the accepted theory, have been exhausted (Vide p.198-202).

### *“Autonomy” in Different Contexts of Practice*

Let me return to the theory with a new understanding. The therapeutic strategy, as it has been elaborated by Erskine in the spirit of existentialism, encompasses as an integral part of the therapeutic process the phase of self-blame. During this phase, for the purpose of healing, the client perceives him- or herself as the source of the problem: “I wrote my own script!” (Erskine, 1997, pp. 229-230). The other phases also imply an inferior position of the client who is expected and helped to exhibit, during the course of therapy, regressive behavior, defensiveness, insecurity, confusion, weakening of social ties, anxiety and guilt. The contract, as it is traditionally applied, fails to protect the client from this prescribed, turbulent psychotherapeutic course. The contract itself is defined on the basis of two very narrow frames of reference. One is the therapist’s – limited by theory, and the other is the client’s – limited by the current problem. Such an application of the contract guarantees nothing more than a first-order change, with a temporary absence of symptoms, or their replacement with another kind of symptomatology, ego-syntonic in relation to the incorporated theoretical assumptions. The contract could realize its full meaning, which would lead to the achievement of a second-order change, if it were understood and applied by both sides as an invitation to a dialogic mode of relationship akin to Bakhtin’s (1981) dialogic

understanding. It leads to a constant questioning of one's values and assumptions, confrontation, familiarization, and appreciation of different perceptions of the same problem, in a word, transparency in thought and decisions (as cited in Parry, p.119).

Transactional Analysis stands out from other humanistic movements in that it accommodates its therapeutic approach, through different schools branching around the original teaching to working with the broadest opus of biopsychosocial problematic. There is no clear indication or limitation for the application of TA. Equally to the therapeutic, a legitimate context of the practice is the organizational and pedagogic psychology. In such a broadly set field of practice, a frequent occurrence is that complex social phenomena are approached with a reduced capacity for insight and understanding. This is imposed by a limited interpretation of the concepts with which one approaches the work. The lack of critical thought in recognizing the extent of explanatory powers of theories invites the object of analysis, whether an individual, a group, or an institution, to invest an intellectual effort. The effort is invested into finding yourself in the labyrinth of theory which positions itself opposite one's own presentation of the problem. When the object does not find the answers within the offered framework, the existence of resistance, unreadiness to cooperate or feebleness of the capacity for imagination is assumed. Thus, almost any client can potentially be marginalized under certain work conditions, unless the exceptions to the theory can be valued as such, instead of attempting to fit them into a discourse which is discarding them. Let's take the example of counseling work with emotional partners who define their relationship in complementary terms, with a strict division of roles as a part of their cultural heritage. Autonomy as a developmental goal set before such partners, without negotiating its meaning, deepens the status quo. It additionally victimizes the partner with less power in the relationship or another kind of power which does not fit into the idea of personal autonomy – and this is usually the woman in Serbian culture. The same would apply to individual work

with women outside of the partnership. Autonomy, understood in a way congruent with masculine traits, does not encompass all the wealth of the feminine identity which can, but does not have to, be indissolubly linked with the family identity. Likewise, the development of a female identity that would follow a course alternative to the dominant traditional one cannot be considered a personal project. It would require social recognition and support in order to acquire legitimacy and be perceived as legitimate.

### **Part Three: Reflections on the Research Process throughout the Interview**

The **third part** of the discussion consists of a reflective review of the interviewing process. In order to conduct a transcript analysis in a collaborative fashion and to learn about the qualitative research potential to produce therapeutic effects, I included interviewees from the group of dissatisfied couples in the data processing phase. In the process of writing the report I asked them to comment the preliminary conclusions and interpretations which concerned them. The reflective stance in a discussion on results includes the consideration of the interview effects and the complexity of the relation between different roles in a research situation. This can encompass the relation between the psychotherapist and the researcher, as well as the relation between the two researchers who are psychotherapists practicing TA therapy with the couples.

#### ***The Research as Psychotherapy – Implications for Research in Psychotherapy***

On the subsample of dissatisfied couples, apart from the thematic analysis of responses, I decided that the process itself was to be systematically followed and discussed, as well as any effects of the interview. The reason for this decision is found in the supposed effects that the research situation could have on the dynamics of the couple, as the research conversation involved psychotherapists as the researcher (De Haene, 2010). The interview results also include a part containing an interpretative-phenomenological analysis of the couple referential framework. The narrative reports, that I constructed, offer a more picturesque representation and an expanded understanding of the partner social reality, compared to the transcripts and the thematic analysis (Vide pp. 266-281). In the narrative reports on the couples the focus was shifted from the partners, as individuals, to the couple, as

an existential unit in its own right. This shift was introduced through the analysis of the discourse that determines the partners' interpretative potential.

The topic of autonomy, a broad existential topic, was a concept that had no practical meanings for the partners at the beginning of the interview conversation. Rather, it was experienced as an invitation to re-examine the rules, mutual and individual values, the dynamic of the relationship and anything else they were able to spontaneously associate with this concept. In other words, this is how the couples began their couples' in-depth exploration of everything that comprised the very essence of their partnership reality.

In order to ensure an uninterrupted, safe, and respectful interview with the couples dissatisfied with their relationship, as well as for the reasons stated above, I chose to intervene therapeutically during the second interview.

Following are eight interventions that were identified during the reflective analysis of the interview:

- Positive connotation – For example, recognizing a successfully overcome crisis in adjusting to the role of parents, or interpreting jealousy as an expression of a powerful perception of togetherness.
- Introducing the possibility for change by an invitation to question the status quo, by shifting the focus to an imagined future or by re-interpretation, finding the good sides of the relationship, and the like.
- Communicating acceptance and interest, with respect for the significance which the existing problem has for the couple.
- Shifting interest from the dissatisfaction to the successful elements of the relationship, asking questions about the positive examples in their understanding.
- Support in introspection and defocusing from the partner to the self, citing the examples of autonomy as an incitement for further discussion.

- Initiating a shift in perspective, defocusing from the role of a parent to the partnership, from the dissatisfaction with the partnership to the influences that act without the partnership, and the like.
- Motivating the more passive interlocutor partner to participate in the conversation, by reformulating the question.
- Redefining the phenomena discussed with the goal of encouraging creativity in thought and expression, imagination in responses, freedom in thought and associations.

During the interviewing process with the dissatisfied couples there were certain moments when they openly expressed their dissatisfaction. In the course of this interview I noticed that I, as the researcher and as a psychotherapist, and also the research assistant, were enticed to act therapeutically in these cases. This tendency rises with the dissatisfaction manifesting degree of the couples. If I am to explain the noticed tendency, I could say that the clinical experience as well as the high degree of sensitivity to issues of professional integrity, ethics and responsibility, testifies to the fact that the quality of the conversation outcomes depends on the way that both sides participate in the conversation. Pure observation of persons in distress by skilled practitioners without providing any feedback, reaction or intervention, can be experienced in some sense as similar to passivity and an unethical position of the therapist. Another observation that further supports this impression of mine, throughout the interviewing process, is the therapist's responsibilities interpreted in line with the humanistic principles as grounding for the TA code of ethics. Although it was not purposely planned nor anticipated, it became evident to the researcher in the course of this study that the psychotherapist identity and the professional ethics take precedence over the researcher role when they are in conflict. This is especially the case when these two roles are combined in the same person.

### *The Relation between the Two Researchers*

The decision to involve an assistant (a psychotherapist in a graduate education program) in the study was based on multiple reasons. The first was practical in nature. Considering the demanding processing of an abundance of materials produced in a qualitative research, an additional researcher could accelerate the process of gathering and coding the data. Secondly, the trustworthiness of the gathered data, within the methodological triangulation is, among other things, supported by the intersubjective agreement (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). I refer here to the registered and transcribed contents of the responses, but not their interpretation and elucidation. When it comes to the interpretation process, important differences can be perceived depending on whether the researcher is acting from the position of a psychotherapist or a researcher. Thus, there are differences in the role and the related responsibility he or she is leaning toward at the given moment, such as researching versus a psychotherapeutic responsibility. I do not mean to suggest by this the existence of exclusivity, in the sense of implying that the studiosity and focusing on research goals liberates us from any responsibility for the welfare of the participants. On the contrary, the European Association of Psychotherapy (EAP) Code of Ethics proposes that a psychotherapist conducting a research study is faced with even loftier ethical standards compared to researchers belonging to other profiles, since participation often includes persons in distress (EAP, 2002). I am referring to the difference in the way the gathered materials were organized, coded, and analyzed between the researchers. The assistant researcher was responsible for only a part of the entire research process, the part involving the observation of the quality of conversation with a reliable cataloguing of the responses made by the participants. Unlike me, the assistant researcher participated in the research with no knowledge of the social constructionism perspective and with an exclusive theoretical



background in Transactional Analysis. The need to understand the narratives of the participants in light of the available hypotheses of the psychotherapeutic modality leads towards selectivity in hearing and accentuating the participants' responses. Thus, adding to the story told by the participants, under the influence of theoretical preconceptions, the adjustment of the participants' narratives for the purpose of theoretical explanations was not recognized or avoided by the assistant. It can be interpreted as the assistant's spontaneous orientation towards the assessment of the quality of partnership as presented by the couples. That is why the reports given by the assistant researcher have the form of an exposition of the therapeutic strategy or prognosis (Vide pp. 275 -276). In the same reports many instances of the recognized effects of the interviews are also stated and one is therefore under the impression that the assistant researcher assumes the role of a "promoter of change". This could in part apply to me as the researcher. The orientation towards the research issues and the direction towards exploring the differences and exceptions from the theory represent the part of the responsibility to which we assigned the working definition of responsibility towards the research method, i.e. expanding or amending the existing knowledge. Segments of the story that was presented by the participants were selected and accentuated by the researcher. After the follow – up interview the preliminary research reports were altered in relation to the corrections and interventions made by the participants.

As can be seen in the presented reports as the Appendix C to the dissertation, nearly every topic was deepened from their side.

I noticed that the assistant researcher, in her report after the follow-up interviews, reflects on what, in her interpretation, needs to be addressed in the prospective psychotherapy work with the particular couple. For example, in one interview, even though a visibly more optimistic presentation of the partner dynamics by both partners is perceptible, the assistant researcher observes and emphasizes in her report that the female partner dominates the

conversation. Therefore, according to her, the female partner dominates the relationship as well. She further problematizes this observation in her report (Vide pp. 275 -276). I have chosen to emphasize this particular comment since it demonstrates the implicit influence of the therapist values in the process of clients or relationship assessment. The general tendency present in the assistant's reports is a spontaneous following of the "diagnostic course": this suggests the theoretical modality which she uses in her work, focusing and observing the individual first and the couple second. I wonder how it is possible to leave aside a part of one's professional identity, not to mention one's real personal issues, for the sake of getting to know another person better, in this case the client. In this study one can see that neither the research context, nor the researcher roles and procedures contributed enough to a disregard of the theoretical preconceptions among the researchers. Since this notion was quite perceptible, I wonder to what extent in everyday psychotherapeutic encounters the client's experience is distorted or discarded for the purposes of maintaining "the truths about human nature"? Undoubtedly, some expert- knowledge oriented therapists wouldn't even construct this as a lack of contact or failure in understanding. Putting aside certain values and traditions always occurs from the position of advocating other values which are not subject to doubt or critique at a given moment.

### ***Follow-up Interviews***

Owing to the specific nature of the subject and the process of the research conducted by the psychotherapists, I had anticipated, even before proceeding with the interviews, the possibility of consequent therapeutic effects of the interviews. In a follow-up analysis I conducted follow-up interviews with three of the couples and registered the following developments within the partnerships:

One couple, the youngest in age and childless, ended the partnership six months after the interview. The couple's separation cannot be interpreted either as a negative or as a positive outcome, in its own right. Likewise, there is no solid basis for any further discussion on the connection between this decision of the partners and their participation in the interview. However, bearing in mind this feedback, I may conclude that the instrument used in the selection of satisfied and dissatisfied couples has proven to be adequately discriminative in application. It could represent a satisfactory first diagnostic choice when a quick assessment of the quality of a relation needs to be made. In the section on methodology we have already elaborated on the validity assumptions and methodological choices regarding the use of the instruments for participant selection. By way of reminder, in the previous quantitative studies dealing with similar topics, after the data collected in the KMS and IMS questionnaires was processed, the differences between partners relative to the numerically represented degree of satisfaction were shown to be insignificant. More specifically, not a single case was registered in which the partners would be placed in different categories based on whether the subjects were satisfied or dissatisfied with their marriage (Brajovic Car, Hadži Pešić, 2011). It is for this reason that, within this research, the comparison between couples relative to the calculated average score of marital satisfaction for every married couple should be considered methodologically correct.

In the other two couples, there were indications of certain changes in the perception of partnership, which had taken place between the two interviews. The changes that I am discussing are based on the researcher's observations and the interpretation of partnership dynamic. Partnership is in itself a dynamic category and musings on any causalities between the noticed changes and the interviews are therefore of little use. I must point out here the potential weaknesses and limitations of partnership diagnostics, especially bearing in mind the fact that, in one of these two couples, changes in the perception of partnership occurred within

a short time span between the two interviews. It should be noted that, in this time span, they also experienced a change in their life circumstances. Namely, the wife returned to work after maternity leave and the husband was less busy at his job due to the seasonal reduction in the volume of work in his construction occupation. This is, therefore, a case of “spontaneously occurring changes” which I could neither associate with the interview itself, nor with the psychotherapeutic interventions. Nevertheless, on the basis of what they themselves openly state and associate, I observed that interest shown in them as a couple, and not individually, led them to insist more, in the second interview, on **cooperation** as something they would like to advance in their relationship. They feel that they are best described in the narrative report on the contents of the interview which represents their matching views, i.e., the adjacent fields between the two perspectives (Vide pp. 270-271).

Let me draw a comparison between the satisfied and the dissatisfied couples, on the level of the initial division into subsamples, but also the perceived differences between the two interviews with the couples originally categorized as dissatisfied. I notice that, with the degree of satisfaction, the motivation to harmonize the narratives and to present the partner reality in a more positive light grows exponentially. With the couples who again, in the second round of interviews, maintain that the relationship is unsatisfactory, I can still notice certain changes in the mode of presentation. As the first round of interviews had, among others, the function of “emotional discharge”, both of the anxiety provoked by the interview situation itself and its topic, the space was open for toying with different interpretations. In that sense, in the follow-up conversations, I registered a distancing from the position of criticism, a relativization of the idea of “a complete match” as a necessary precondition of partner satisfaction and a readiness to respect and tolerate the acknowledged differences. The analytical approach to their relationship encouraged them to further deepen this kind of interest and to perceive the beauty of the specificity of their experience and story, and then to

continue on their own with re-examining and recreating their reality. One of the couples, as can be seen from the results (Vide p. 273), was surprised by a noted fact that they viewed their partnership as something that took place, in their words, “spontaneously, naturally”, thinking that this was a universal characteristic of all partnerships, and not of their own specifically. In the couple who continued to present a negative image of the relationship, one of the partners expressed a readiness to consider continuing with his individual psychotherapy, with a clearer picture of the areas he would like to resolve. His conclusion is that psychotherapy does not necessarily have to mean facing the guilt and responsibility that formerly used to worsen his condition and aggravate his rebellion (he is referring to his experience within the gestalt psychotherapy). He acknowledges that another course of psychotherapeutic conversation, less confrontational, could facilitate the progress on issues like low self-esteem, a high degree of self-criticism, a lack of initiative and a willingness to change the unsatisfactory modes of family exchange. Apart from this insight by one of the partners, on the level of the couple, a more intensive and free confrontation took place and therefore the follow-up interview assumed the form of a therapeutic session. It appears that the report they were invited to verify and comment on became an introduction into “deeper work” and a new re-examination of what was presented as valid in the first round. The exchanges in the second round of interviews with some couples were more intense and tempestuous than was the case in the first round. Despite this intensity, I noted more optimism and readiness to talk, as well as relief with the cessation of rumination on the possible conclusions, assessments, and evaluation by the researcher-psychotherapist.

## Chapter 8

### Concluding Remarks

#### *Considering a Relational Alternative to the Traditional TA Understanding of Personal Autonomy within Partnership*

As the discussion has shown, the results of the research have led me into new areas of inquiry without clear answers to the posed research questions. Here the reader must be reminded that provisional conclusions and interpretations have only limited significance and that their validity is checked only in the application. I lay out the following conclusions cautiously, bearing in mind that they do not represent “new truths” but rather an alternative narrative on autonomy, inspired by social constructionism and transactional analysis, which we constructed hand in hand with the couples who were the research subjects. As we are reminded by Maturana and Varela, linguistic metaphors such as “free will” or “personal autonomy” do not have the ontological status of biological reality (Maturana & Varela, 1987). Their meanings are revealed and established only at the level of concrete social practice and the consequences of a certain practice. The problem with the concepts such as “free will” and “self-determination” is that they create a false impression that humans have sovereignty over the course of their lives. Truly, a human being has no more control over his or her life than do other living organisms. The Postmodern critique of the humanistic version of the autonomous subject points that this idea of control is not a benign anachronistic remnant of the epoch of Enlightenment. It also points to these concepts as the mechanisms of the hegemonic structures of domination and subordination, whose effects can oppress others – women, minorities, religious and cultural differences, and all others, who seem to be incapable of practicing the rational powers of self-regulation (Halliwell & Mousley, 2003). I consider this critique beneficial to the extent that it does not require the dismissal of the concept of autonomy. It

instead draws attention to the need for a different, more multifarious understanding of autonomy, as well as a psychologically more complex and broader (more varied) understanding of an autonomous individual.

On the basis of the study one could see that the meaning ascribed to the idea of autonomy and/or script does not directly derive from either the representation of mental images of these concepts that people carry within them, or from the dominant theoretical principles that describe them. There is no meta-language that can adequately name or describe the emerging connotations provoked by a certain concept (Barthes, 1970). Instead, the exploration around the meaning of an idea becomes simultaneously the goal and the intermediary of a specific social interaction, whether the interaction is between intimate partners, the therapist and the client, or the interviewer and the interviewee.

To begin reconstructing autonomy in light of the results of the conducted research, I will start from considering the standard, denotative meanings of the concepts that I discuss. The psychological discourse situates autonomy within persons or groups of people as the capacity for inner control (an internalized locus of control) and self-regulation, as opposed to a heteronomous subject controlled from the outside.

The most frequently used synonym for autonomy in the context of personal capacity is independence. In terms of statistical terminology, this would imply the absence of any interconnection or association between these two occurrences, namely the individual, or the individual and his or her social and material environment. Therefore, changes taking place in one of these variables are not followed by systematic changes of the other variable. According to the theory of probability, the frequency of occurrence “x” is not necessitated by the occurrence of “y” and vice versa. In logic, the veracity of an assertion is not dependent on the veracity of other premises. To conclude, the position of autonomy in psychology is that in which a person is (relatively) free from the influence of the judgment, opinions and

convictions of other people. In this assertion, contained in an internationally accepted dictionary of psychological terms, one can find a trace of an alternative interpretation of autonomy as the **relative freedom of an individual** (Reber, 1995). A sharp confrontation with an individualistically understood autonomy, such as the above cited description which can still be found in textbooks and encyclopedias of psychology, comes from Annette Baier (1985) as a metaphysical critique of autonomy. Her view puts the individual in the position of the “other person” (the self as the other in a relation), which means that the development of a personality inevitably implies the existence of a relation of dependence on another person (pp. 84-85).

This opens up further questions, as it becomes obvious that the capacity and aspiration towards autonomy are only acquired through life in a community and is not a preprogrammed outcome of psychosocial maturation. Seyla Benhabib (1992) stresses this in a picturesque way through the “metaphor of the mushroom” with which she hyperbolizes the autonomous existence of an individual, just like a mushroom springs out of the ground on its own, suddenly and out of nowhere. According to Benhabib (1992), such interpretations potentially marginalize the female role in the family and her working contribution both to the family and to the broader community: without this silent support, the ground would not be fertile enough for these “self-sprouted mushrooms” (p.156). In other words, dependence never stops. From our early beginnings to adult years, we are constantly depending on others in our attempts to reach autonomy, in whatever way we choose to define it (Shotter, 1984).

Autonomy, originality and creativity, are based on interdependence. Each would be made more difficult and eventually lost in the world of internal confusion if they were not somehow related to the language and understanding of others, i.e. being communicative. Moreover, according to Habermas (1975/1971), the goal of reaching compromises and mutual understanding is the foundation of intersubjective togetherness, common knowledge, mutual



trust and congruence (as cited in Stojnov, 2005, p.152.). Theorists of feminism are abandoning the egocentric vision of a human being's primal motivation, and replacing it with a view of human motivation as social in its basis. Berne himself postulates that social stimulation and time structuring through social contacts form the essential components of human reality. Also, among the contemporary theoreticians of psychoanalysis, one can find the prevailing acknowledgement of "relational self" that is based on the need for interpersonal intimacy, on the inherent human need for engagement, affection and mutuality (Fiscalini, 2004, p. 77). Respecting gender differences, Evelyn Fox Keller (1985) develops the concept of dynamic autonomy which she uses to oppose to the static understanding of autonomy. She views autonomy as a skill. In other words, to avoid the atomistic, asocial illusion of a "self-creating individual" inherent to the traditional view of individual autonomy, we could see personal autonomy primarily as a skill, rather than a substantial quality. The fundamental difference between the dynamic and static views of autonomy is the difference between the skills that support and strengthen the **awareness of the self**, and, on the other hand, the skills used with the aim of dominating, negating interdependence and defensive isolation (as cited in Mackenzie & Stoljar, 2000, p.9). Thus, dynamically understood autonomy simultaneously denotes being connected, but also differentiated from the other (Keller, 1985). As the couples participating in the conducted research testify, autonomy is in fact an integral part of togetherness. How? It describes the very essence of emotional attachment and relational stability via the existence of the elements of separateness and difference within the partnership. This essence is also explained via positioning the idea of independence outside the partnership into the field of potential external influences and determinants (tradition, customs, language etc.). In collectivistically oriented cultures they powerfully shape the partnership reality.

According to the procedural model of autonomy, personal autonomy is recognized as a specific practice of reflective self-comprehension or internal coherence accompanied by an absence of the use of manipulation by others (Dworkin, 1988). The exclusion of the influence of others in this understanding is not a necessary trait of the person who is practicing autonomy. The very process of developing **autonomy as a learned skill** takes place in the context of the values, meanings and methods of self-reflection which cannot exist otherwise except as the products of social practice. Gergen (2009) connects the tradition of autonomy with a sense of fundamental separation, loneliness and narcissism at the expense of the relationship. In his view, if we consider and understand autonomy as an outcome of relational life, we are transforming tradition and at the same time inviting new forms of action, without embracing essential separation and alienation (pp. 27-28).

### *Capacity for Intimacy in Partnership as the Ability of Autonomous Persons*

Intimacy is most frequently defined as “what is private and personal”, or as “very close and familiar”. One could say that the idea of intimacy, even in its denotative interpretation, can have different meanings if the answer is sought from lexicons (Babcock, 1993). Different cultures and subcultures, and even different couples within the same subgroups, carry their own understandings of what is truly “exclusive, private and personal”. Lyman Wynne (1986), for instance, sees intimacy as a subjective, relational experience which takes place in verbal and non-verbal ways and on several different planes (pp. 382 -394). What does this actually mean? While for one couple the feeling of connection means sharing intellectual work, for another couple what is intimate implies sexuality, raising children together, selfless sharing and other things.

The arena for demonstrating intimacy varies depending on the life cycle. For many young couples, erotic intimacy, which involves a different set of rules that apply to verbal exchange, forms the basic element of intimacy. Humanistically oriented therapists usually direct their clients towards verbal openness and self-disclosure as “truly getting to know each other” (Berne, 1966, pp. 231-232, 310.). However, in practice, one could see the existence of situations in which “knowledge in itself does not further the relationship”. For example, erotic desire is enticed and fed by the hidden, the implicit and the mysterious. In actual life, the life outside of the boundaries of therapeutic relations, honesty is just one in a wide array of social values. In other words, it loses its absolute value and nobility (Scheinkman, 2005). A person may strive to be honest, but, in light of competing with other affective powers, may choose to be non-transparent in order to spare another humiliation or embarrassment. In a large number of cultures such as those of Latin American, African, and even European, I note the presence of the idea that the “truth” may cause harm, sometimes even permanently so. When deciding whether to tell the “truth” or not, one starts from considering the purpose of the revelation, as well as the potential consequences. Sincerity in the form of an absolute value is a trait of individualistically oriented cultures, such as the dominant North American patterns of emotional partnership. In some other cultures, such as those previously mentioned, avoiding confrontations, withholding information in the private sphere, even some forms of lying, occur in the form of protective activities. The goal is to protect oneself, the partner, the relationship, as well as to control the potential damage that the honesty might bring. As Carmel Tapping (1993) and her colleagues write: “Our secularized notions of psychological health, individualism and identity, structure and dynamics of the nuclear family, boundaries between generations, the “welfare” and parenting of children, can be very unjust and harmful to the people whose culture and spirituality are very different from ours (pp. 3-40).” One can assume that the cultures which highly value autonomy in a certain way support a specific type

and quality of social bonding, as well as a specific communication style. Before all, the stability and durability of voluntary friendships built in adulthood on the basis of shared values and attitudes is emphasized. However, traditional values, the primary family and early friendships become subject to re-examinations, or are simply abandoned. In cultures where individualistic interpretation of autonomy is not a dominant value, social conduct and choices are guided by other preferences that are equally “real” (right), meaningful and useful for members of those communities.

### *Autonomy and Cultural Tradition*

For the purposes of acknowledging the cultural context issues addressed in this dissertation, I will consider Christian, primarily Eastern Orthodox, views of personality and interpersonal relations. Why choose this particular cultural focus? Aside from the theoretical contribution to the re-examination of the concept of autonomy as the therapeutic goal of the Transactional Analysis, special attention has been given to the concept of personal autonomy and its role in the partnership dynamic. The research was conducted with couples from urban parts of Serbia, which represents a culturological framework significantly different from the culture that gave rise to TA. Therefore, in order to grasp and comprehend the “holy mystery” of male-female relationships more fully, Orthodox doctrine and its practical implications must be taken into consideration. Over 70% of the general population integrates the Serbian Orthodox Church and its customs into their daily lives, some occasionally, and others regularly (Gay Straight Alliance & Centre for Free Elections and Democracy – CeSID, 2008). The awakening of a national identity and war conflicts with a religious subtext, which took over the region of the Balkans in the 90s, have as a consequence the fact that today only 5% of the general population of the post-communist Serbia define themselves as atheists. It is

interesting to note that Orthodoxy, as the dominant religious ideology in Serbia, influences the treatment of psychological disturbances as well, along with crisis counseling. There is a widespread prejudice against psychological disorders and interventions by mental health care professionals. Considering this, along with the omnipresence of the Church in the society, it appears that Orthodox psychotherapy or pastoral counseling is a more accessible and more acceptable method of treatment for those who seek help. For this reason, I believe it would be a methodological oversight to neglect the principles of orthodoxy. Its influence on the shaping of male-female partner relationships, understanding of the relational issues and thus also the shaping of the locally present interpretations of individual strivings towards autonomy is not insignificant. I will quote the words of Archimandrite Hierotheos Vlachos (1994) who elucidates the Orthodox psychotherapeutic method and its aims:

The method of healing itself is holy hesychasm (a form of spiritual contemplation). Spiritual healing requires the greatest possible deadening of fantasy... Without engaging in an exhausting self-analysis one must live according to Christ's commandments, and exposing the "old man" within us, with all his passions, enables us to fight for the healing of our passions through asceticism. We should nurture within us the virtues opposed to our passions. By striving to live humbly, we are in fact fighting against pride. In such a frame of mind repentance can occur... There are two fundamental ways of healing; the first is renouncing high-mindedness, and the other way to heal is through sincere repentance. The coveting and affective energies of the soul create what is called an impassioned state of the soul. Through repentance, self-judgment, and humility, we transfigure our feelings into spiritual experiences... Thus true motherhood is for a woman associated with pain and suffering: it is a specific "cross" for a woman. The soul is in humanistic psychology not understood as

made in God's image, as is the case in Orthodox theology, but instead as mere of an "activity" of the body... Man's mind acts in accordance with nature when he blames nothing on others, but instead considers himself responsible for his bad thoughts. In this case, man understands where the causes for his passions lie. Then he, instead of blaming others, like Adam and Eve did, blames himself and fights to be healed spiritually (pp. 97 -127).

I must wonder whether the resistance to gestalt therapy of one of the partners with whom the research interviews were conducted (Vide p. 281) is perhaps the resistance to the same kind of dogma, only under a different name. This is the dogma of "humanistic purification" through confrontation with one's shortcomings and responsibility. If no account is taken of the traditional views on autonomy, the psychotherapeutic discourse puts the clients into a situation known as the double bind challenge (Bateson, 1972). In other words, it is a conflict situation in which a satisfactory choice is impossible to make.

The illustration of an Orthodox interpretation of mental health and family relations is given for the reason that, among the clients' responses on the topic of autonomy, a category that especially stands out is the one in which autonomy is perceived as **insensitivity and unresponsiveness**. I wonder if these connotations occur as a result of the nature of the relation between TA therapists and clients. Is it an affective reaction to the way in which therapists insist on the description of a mentally healthy person, despite the cultural differences, local values and accepted communication styles within the community in which they offer their services? This criticism can also be aimed at the understanding of relations regulated by contracts, promoted by TA practitioners, as a constructive practice of an autonomous person, i.e. cooperation for mutual advantage. According to this interpretation of a functional personality, an individual focused on himself enters contractual relationships only for mutual gain and through a mutually profitable agreement, which exhausts the individual's

inherent social interest. A similar premise stands behind the contractually defined nature of the relation client-psychotherapist (Sills, 1997). Unless we see the contract as an invitation to a dialogic mode of relation, then empathy, relational reality, values and beliefs, all bow to the power of contractually defined roles and tasks. This dialogic mode of relation exists exclusively for the purpose of encouraging a dialogic understanding through transparency in thinking and decision making. Smail (1988), from his position of critique of the practice of psychotherapy, further elaborates on the subject discussing simultaneously the conditions and the practice of counseling and psychotherapy:

The model of the psychotherapeutic room primarily entices and magnifies the illusory idea that a man has the final word in the direction of his fate. There is a conviction that this relation is made up by two essentially autonomous individuals capable of encouraging profoundly significant changes through mutual negotiations within the framework of the time and space of the session. This encounter should be seen as nothing but another micro-social situation, a particle of an all-encompassing and complex network of power which by far surpasses the reality of the psychotherapeutic hour (p. 124).

The same paradox is also reflected in the concept of the therapeutic contract. As is the case with the secondary gain from the psychotherapeutic treatment, the treatment itself becomes a secondary, preferred reality to the client, one that displaces and negates all other external influences. However, if we were to, in some cases justifiably, recognize the influence and scope of psychotherapy, can we then also speak of moving towards autonomy of the client who neglects his or her resilience and the biological urge towards adaptability and autonomy? In a constricted humanistic interpretation, we cannot.

### *Autonomy and Ethical Aspects*

A deconstruction of the concept of autonomy in the theory of TA demonstrates that a significant number of theorists, of both humanistic and contemporary theoretical thought sidestep **the essential equality and individual freedoms as moral dimensions of this concept**. The part of the story relating to treating others ethically as a responsibility of the autonomous individual is not a central part of the content of theoretical definitions. On the other hand, the contents of the conducted interviews with couples offer an ethical extension to the concept of autonomy. My interpretation is that ethics, as a transpersonally developed degree of morality, represents a foundation for the consideration of these categories by the couples who are satisfied with the relationship. What I have encountered in dissatisfied couples, on the other hand, is morality on the level of operational thought, which is in keeping with the noticed lack of flexibility in thought and in the conversation on the subject of autonomy itself. Apart from avoiding the topic and a more impoverished participation in the conversation, an opposite tendency is also noticed in the dissatisfied couples of resisting a preordained structure of partner relations in the shape of traditionally divided roles. Simultaneously, the dissatisfied couples display no rational insight on this subject, but, instead, exhibit a general opposition to the idea of partnership and the current emotional partner. I have entitled the noticed phenomenon of resisting traditional roles on the subsample of dissatisfied couples the “rebellious flight into autonomy”.

I will remind the reader that no one is completely free from the script, but also that everyone has a capacity for autonomy to a certain degree, as Berne would put it (Bern, 1972). Unlike the much rarer tragic or dramatic life scripts, on the example of satisfied couples, patriarchy, as a banal script, does not appear to be ego-dystonic or uncomfortable or frustrating for the partners to the same degree. For example, the dominant female scripts are



mostly based on the social programming which imposes the myth of their dependence, incompleteness, or inadequacy. The accepted stereotypes of gender roles imply that the “incompleteness” of men is complemented by the culturally stereotypical women, and vice versa.

### *Autonomy and Gender Issues*

It is no wonder that precisely this economically intoned description of human motivation bears the brunt of the feminist critique of the traditional conceptions of autonomy (Mayers, 1987). It is difficult to imagine that the mother-child relationship, a patriarchal partner relationship, or caring for one’s aging parents can be seen as examples of “cooperation for the purpose of maximizing mutual gain”. Do we therefore deprive a woman of autonomy as an exclusively masculine privilege? Do we consider the woman who, intuitively registering the mentioned norms, whether they are wrong or not, rationally chooses interdependence as the more secure social path, to be non-autonomous or insufficiently emancipated? If we accept the possibility that an autonomous person can be motivated primarily by the feeling of solidarity, connectedness, and belonging to different causes, persons, and communities, in that case we expand autonomy so it can encompass the reality of female experience. If we, instead, go back to Kant’s glorification of the capacity for independent decision-making, we cannot fail to notice that all human choices are autonomous as much as they are social acts. Besides, the very adherence to the individualistic (moral-political) ideal of autonomy itself is not an autonomous behavior, as I have established on the example of dissatisfied couples. A meticulous consciousness in the form of a need for constant direction of cognition towards the re-examination of the logic or profitability of once made choices puts an individual not so much in the category of attained autonomy as in the category of anomy. If I apply TA to the discussion on this line of interpretation, perhaps instead of ascribing the previously mentioned

cognitive style and behavior to the highly cathected Adult ego state, I will more likely be confronted with a case of deficit in the Parent ego state. Or, perhaps, its exclusion.

Namely, every culture, just like every family, forms a specific construction of gender differences, which has as its purpose to define the male, female and mutual realities, simultaneously proclaiming specific convictions, prejudices, rules and expectations. It stands as a fact that gender is a fundamental organizer of personal, marital, and family functioning, and that gender roles, as well as entire patterns of inter-gender relations, have been generalized. Thus, dealing with this problematic in couples therapy, but also individual therapy, appears to be crucial. Let me start from the assumption that the effects of dysfunctional gender conditioning on the cognitive, emotional and behavioral planes have a major influence on the creation and perpetuation of the partnership problem. For example, from a gender perspective, different things are expected from men and women. Therefore, these two desirable, expected models are opposed to each other in relation to the requirements of living together. Represented in the language of logic, this would appear as follows: all the qualities possessed by A are not possessed by B and vice versa. However, the real life experiences of women and men disprove “either/or” type oppositions. However, these oppositions, despite the experience, remain on the ideational, broader plane of values. Among TA theoreticians on script analysis, Levin (1977) especially emphasizes that traditional stereotyping of male and female roles. He also stresses the ideas of unequal power associated with them limit both genders in the development of respect for each other, sensitivity for each other, and accepting one’s own responsibility for the development of the relationship (pp.121-127). The different “languages” of men and women, as a direct product of polarizing socialization, make mutual understanding and acquaintance with each other, which is a precondition for the solutions of difficulties, much more problematic. The traditional role of the man, still promoted by the culture to a greater extent than the image of a modern partner,

prescribes for men the evasion of intimacy, nurturing, empathy, exchange and responsibility for the relationship.

For example, let me return to the question of understanding intimacy which also implies reflecting on the powers in partner relations. In view of the fact that intimacy, position and power are in a relation of interdependence, sincere emotional intimacy requires an approximately equal balance of power. Achieving intimacy between people of different statuses requires the adoption of equality. Without social equality, script analysis alone does not introduce novelties into the relationship. Also, autonomy understood in terms of masculine traits does not encompass the whole plethora of the female identity. I have already emphasized the danger that autonomy, understood as a developmental goal set before complementarily positioned partners, in accordance with the dominant cultural model, deepens the status quo. It additionally victimizes the side wielding less power, or exerting different kind of power in the relationship.

Results and interpretations of this study point out that the replacement of a single concept, idea, understanding or a symptom by its opposite within the same discourse does not lead to a meaningful, ongoing relational change (Hosking, 2004). Instead, as Anderson & Goolishian (1992) emphasize, curiosity and the openness to inquiry enhance the potential for narrative development of new forms of actions and personal freedom (pp.25 -40). I close the discussion on relational alternatives to autonomy emphasizing the notion of personal autonomy as a competence to question, imagine and create.

### **The Conclusions and Limitations of the Research Study**

Two basic methods used in the study reported on were the interview and deconstruction. Both methods are part of the repertoire of qualitative methodology. Beside a potential richness of content and breadth of interpretation, qualitative methodology implies assuming a sceptic's stance in the conclusions, a critical assessment of the interpretations and a special caution in attempting to generalize and transfer the findings.

Here I present a number of significant limitations that I find important in the further reflections on the implications and the potential practical and theoretical usefulness of this study.

Firstly, the narrative reports on the couples from the results section do not reflect or represent the actual intimate experience of individual couples. The narratives are a result of the reconstruction of verbal answers, as well as other non-verbal elements that the interviewing process contains. In other words, with the research questions as a starting point, the conversation topic and the answers from subjects were selected and delimited with the aim of answering the questions asked. The collected material was verbally coded, as is often the case in interview processing. Here I may ask the question whether other aspects of the partner experience are thus neglected, aspects more difficult to fathom through language, such as the actual emotions, empathy, non-verbal indicators, behavioral rituals, conventions etc. Partner reality goes beyond the confines of an isolated part of the experience contained in this research, which I presented in the spirit of intellectualism and cognitivism for the purposes of further academic communication (Kvale, 1996, p.292). As was pointed out in the section on methodology, partnership represents a dynamic category, so a static outlook or interpretation of any kind also means limiting the validity and significance. The very process of interviewing, as it was shown in the discussion, introduced certain novel elements into the

partner realities. The object of investigation thus became even more elusive and less amenable to analysis.

As was initially planned, the reason for choosing the interview as the method and the couple as the unit of the analysis was an attempt to achieve a polyphony of voices in the results. The aims set in the theoretical section of the thesis implied a search for alternative interpretations of autonomy and therefore polyphony. Alongside the combination of various data sources, it was the fundamental methodological choice. However, as Atkinson and Silverman (1997) point out, the de post facto analysis has shown that the interviewer and the interviewee collaboratively create during their investigative conversations a view of reality. This view of reality can become monological and lead to the narrowing down of possible interpretations instead of expanding and generating alternatives in thinking (as cited in Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p.146). The convergence of views is especially notable in a situation where the subjects are interviewed by an “authority” on the topic in focus, e.g the psychotherapist-researcher.

A similar limitation pertains to the deconstructive analysis. Specifically, the deconstruction of autonomy, which as a concept is part of the Transactional Analysis discourse, was performed by a trained TA psychotherapist. On the one hand, situatedness in the discourse allows one to take an informed position from which it is possible to carry out a valid critical analysis. On the other hand, there always remains an open question – if, and to what extent, a thorough knowledge of the subject being analyzed determines in advance the scope of interpretation, reduces the amenability to alternative interpretations and diminishes perceptiveness for the identification of theoretical weaknesses that require revision.

Another specificity of this study seems to cancel out the aforementioned drawback. Namely, regarding the content produced in this research, and starting from the research questions as a sort of incitement, the collection and subsequent presentation were in the form

of a rhizome (Deleuze & Guattari, 1976). Instead of definite, unambiguous “answers”, the study has moved me in the direction of new questions, new perspectives, as is often the case in the narrative research practices.

### **The Significance of the Conducted Research**

Bearing in mind the theoretical issues as expressed in the research questions that were used as a starting point, I am of the opinion that progress has been made on a number of different levels towards the reconstruction and revision of the concept of autonomy compared to the original TA interpretations. Language, as any other product of social construction, has no other grounding in reality other than the social (Gergen, 1994). Linguistic categories, which are the key components of TA psychotherapy and counseling, have been scrutinized throughout the study in the light of their usefulness and potential to support the quality of social relationship. Social constructionism and Transactional Analysis seem to lie at two ends of a continuum, strictly theoretically speaking. One end focuses on the individual at the centre of a network of relations, while the other focuses on the social processes and the potentials of joint action (Cornel & Zalcman, 1984). The prevalent interpretations of autonomy in TA, subjected to deconstruction in this thesis, seem to strengthen this view. However, re-reading of Transactional Analysis through the prism of the social-constructionist paradigm and the research methods that emerge from it (deconstructive analysis, participatory research, the couple interview etc.) have opened up a space for identifying social-constructionist ideas within the TA discourse. In other words, despite the fact that the critical self-reflection and interpretative breadth are the weak points of TA in practice, by shifting the focus from the individual to the couple or the wider context, the expansion and re-examination of the theory are easily achieved as a consequence. From the results of the

conducted research we can conclude that the TA concept of personal autonomy is an idea that in psychotherapeutic practice requires extensive reexamination, the research interest of the practitioner. By research interest I presume always learning and studying about what personal autonomy means in relation to a specific partnership and the existing system of meanings. The meaning of the personal autonomy idea for satisfied couples comes from a combined agency and a mutual (consensual) partner ideology. On the same sample of satisfied couples I have noticed a tendency for setting the autonomy contrasted against the partner dependence, on an imaginary continuum. Concurrently, from the partnership satisfaction position the central part of the same continuum (moderately present personality autonomy) is considered as desirable. The interpretation span of the subject of autonomy is more diverse in content among the satisfied partners. One other important difference is noticed in the comparison of the satisfied and the dissatisfied partners. The observed difference is reflected in a static role differentiation of the dissatisfied partners. This is expressed through the representation of a rigid moral definition in the form of prescriptions with a firm appropriation either in the form of a rejection of autonomy or a dependence on the partner, as two imagined polarities. Unlike the preceding dominant interpretations of TA (Berne, 1977; Steiner, 1974; James, 1998; English, 1971; Erskine, 1997; Sills, 1997; Cornell, 2008; Allen & Allen, 2005), which were the starting point of this research, through the research results an implied overlap was obtained in the practice of the meanings of TA theoretical concepts of the personal autonomy and script. The unhappy couples, through “the rebellious escape into autonomy”, try to solve their existing problems. This makes the sole idea of autonomy become a script itself and the psychotherapist an accomplice in the pseudo change. I believe it would be inspiring for the future partnership researches in Serbia and the Balkans to continue facing the gap between the humanistic theory and the requirements of practice. This would entail exploring the concepts such as honesty, loyalty and intimacy by using a similar methodology.

Apart from the quality of the client-psychotherapist relationship, another important factor affecting the success of a treatment is the context in which the therapeutic process unfolds. Without an interest in the context, psychotherapy becomes an ephemeral situation that produces no effect, i.e. does not bring about change. It is for this reason that I tried to shift the interest in this research from the theory to the context and the people. Moreover, in a “bottom-up” approach I tried to re-examine and build further on top of the theory that served as the foundation of training and practice in TA-oriented psychotherapy. In order to overcome the hermetism of individualist descriptions and findings that belong exclusively to the domain of idealism, couple interviews were carried out instead of interviews with individuals, with the participation of two researchers. In this way, a more dynamic social interaction was achieved which contained a greater number of views on the same questions. The reports on the interviews were presented in a literary style, in the form of stories and narratives of the process, beside the individual quotes and answer categories. The existing link between the answer categories, the exact content of the interviews, and the description of an individual couple’s situation, which is possible to detect in reading the Appendix C, supports the multiple voicing and allows the establishment of the link between the individual and the general. In other words, the reading and interpretation of the study results can be approached from various different angles, theoretical (anthropology, psychology, sociology... social constructionism, transactional analysis) as well as practical (psychotherapy, social research, supervision), with any new reading.

In addition, it was possible to learn more in the conversation with couples not only about specific meanings, thinking and interpretations but also about social processes and the context from which opinions, beliefs, and choices follow. We have seen on the example of this research conducted in Serbia that personal autonomy is a concept one-dimensionally and consistently identified with economic independence and masculinity. Therefore, it requires a



necessary deconstruction in the psychotherapeutic practice. In other words, for the practitioner of psychotherapy this means that the non-questionable support of “personal autonomy” is an expression of ideological and political orientation.

I must also briefly look at the importance of interviewing couples by the psychotherapist. As Kvale (1996) states, the application of therapeutic interviews for the purposes of research has demonstrated that our understanding of the human situation, i.e. the understanding of the individual within the determining context that he or she belongs to, is made considerably more rich and profound through empathy and emotional interaction (p. 293). As I have already pointed out, the research took on certain elements of action research as it unfolded, although this was not the primary aim of this study. Specifically, following the broad definition of action research by Altrichter and collaborators (2002), action research pertains to 1) a reflection on and an improvement of one’s own practice by the practitioner, 2) a closely connecting reflection and an action, 3) presenting the gained experience to the persons who are worried over the existing situation or are interested in it (as cited in Stojnov, 2008, p. 248). All three components are present in various parts of this thesis. Above all else, the research was conceptualized and carried out by a practitioner, who took part in all of the stages of the process. All the produced reports, as well as the initial formulation of the problem, contained a reflective superstructure. Finally, the methodology was supplemented with the interviews with ten practitioners of the same psychotherapeutic orientation. The inclusion of the community of practitioners in this research had a significance, action-wise as well as theory-wise. I see this significance in the promotion of the culture of inquiry and dialogue among the interested practitioners, versed in the same areas of theory, fully acknowledging their voice and the knowledge they put in the research experience and theory building. The research results are presented in a reflective manner. The advantages and disadvantages (traps) of intertwining psychotherapeutic and research roles and skills are

pointed out through reflective reporting. Analyzing the research process, in order to identify the moment where the research takes on a psychotherapeutic character, makes a significant contribution to the field of qualitative research in psychotherapy. In other words, this study raises an important question whether it is possible to conduct a research without influencing the patients. Are open research questions, formulated by the therapist, a call for a change per se, and under what conditions can they be understood in that exact way? I have demonstrated that, when it comes to the strong identification with the psychotherapeutic modality, it is more challenging to curb psychotherapist identity for the sake of research objectives. Moreover, research interviewing of partners dissatisfied with their relationship can itself invite a change. Wonderment, a researching spirit and innovation are not features of the professional establishment of the profession that we, researchers, belong to in the society where this research has been conducted. On the contrary, elitism, intellectual exclusivism, a fight for such standards which benefit the providers of services and perceiving the professions from the mental health domain as “the voice of morality” are dominant narratives within the profession. In a transitional, post-conflict society which has its very specific dynamics, but also a historical-cultural background, receptivity towards “fieldwork” information is especially significant. It is the only necessary common denominator of the different schools of therapy. Keeping the channels for revisiting hypothetical concepts constantly open, recognizing the need to revise theory through eclecticism and integration, should all rest on the foundations of the social situation and the moment in time to which the practitioner belongs. I could say that the study, in this sense, contains clear implications for a collaborative supervisory practice in psychotherapy and a social research. This research supports, in all its listed elements, a joint participation of all the research actors in the creation of the final outcomes and knowledge (Anderson & Swim, 1995). Transparency in all the steps has contributed to the presentation of the process of social research, psychotherapy and

supervision as a co-construction, or an appreciative inquiry journey. This transparency spans from the choice of method and the presentation of the content and the process of interviewing, to drawing the conclusions in the form of interpretations supported by the available (exact) content of the interviews, in addition to reporting on them.

### Summary

The study, described and discussed in this dissertation, aimed to move personal autonomy beyond the classical, traditional interpretation towards its placement into the context of partnership. It also had as a goal to reconstruct its meanings through a multi-method approach. The research design of each of the methodological steps was planned in accordance with the idea to overcome the hegemonic aspect of a standard social research practice in Serbia that often produces the “single voice” (the researcher’s) interpretation of the social phenomenon.

Unlike the general meanings contained in older and newer theoretical TA sources, practitioners notice limitations in the application of traditional interpretations and the implications of autonomy in a specific context. At the same time, they manifest a lack of readiness to question the original interpretations which still dominate their interpretative repertoire. In this study, one can see that neither the research context, nor the researcher roles and procedures have contributed enough to disregard the theoretical preconceptions among the researchers.

The dissatisfied couples attempted to evade the issue, to negate the significance of discussing the topic of partnership and were unwilling to think in terms of togetherness and mutual rules, definitions and expectations. Besides that, the noticed phenomenon of resisting

the traditional roles on the subsample of dissatisfied couples has been interpreted as the “rebellious flight into autonomy”.

In cultures where an individualistic interpretation of autonomy is not a dominant value social conduct and choices are guided by other preferences that are equally “real” (right), meaningful and useful for members of those communities. Relational quality, placed in the research focus, is supported via the existence of the elements of separateness and difference within the partnership. It is also sustained via positioning the “idea of independence” outside the partnership into the field of potential external influences and determinants (tradition, customs, language etc.), which in collectivistically oriented cultures powerfully shape the partnership reality.

If we accept the possibility that an autonomous person can be motivated primarily by the feeling of solidarity, connectedness and belonging to different causes, persons and communities, in that case we expand autonomy so it can encompass cultural diversities, the reality of female experience, respect for children views and, in general, the uniqueness of human experience.

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## RECONSTRUCTION OF AUTONOMY IN PARTNERSHIP

### Appendix A

The purpose of the following questionnaire is to measure the degree of your satisfaction with your marriage, and therefore there are no rights or wrong answers. Please answer each question carefully and accurately, by circling the number that corresponds to your level of agreement with a statement next to each statement.

1-Never: 2-Very rarely: 3-Rarely: 4-Sometimes: 5-Often: 6-Very often: 7-Always	
1. My partner is sufficiently sensitive	1 2 3 4 5 6
7	
2. My partner treats me bad	1 2 3 4 5 6
7	
3. My partner truly cares about me	1 2 3 4 5 6
7	
4. I feel like I will never choose the same partner again	1 2 3 4 5 6
7	
5. I feel that I can have trust in my partner	1 2 3 4 5 6
7	
6. I feel as though our relationship is falling apart	1 2 3 4 5 6
7	
7. My partner absolutely does not understand me	1 2 3 4 5 6
7	
8. I have a feeling that my relationships is very successful	1 2 3 4 5 6
7	
9. Our partnership is a very happy one	1 2 3 4 5 6
7	
10. Our life together is boring	1 2 3 4 5 6
7	
11. It is fun when we are together	1 2 3 4 5 6
7	
12. My partner does not confide to me	1 2 3 4 5 6
7	
13. My partner and I are very close	1 2 3 4 5 6
7	
14. I feel like I cannot rely on my partner	1 2 3 4 5 6 7

## RECONSTRUCTION OF AUTONOMY IN PARTNERSHIP

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15. I feel the partner and I do not have enough common interests	1	2	3	4	5	6
7						
16. We are successfully dealing with our disagreements and arguments	1	2	3	4	5	6
7						
17. We successfully handle the household budget	1	2	3	4	5	6
7						
18. I feel as we should not have started this relationship in the first place	1	2	3	4	5	6
7						
19. My partner and I get along very well	1	2	3	4	5	6
7						
20. Our relationship is a very stable one	1	2	3	4	5	6
7						
21. My partner is indeed a real solace to me	1	2	3	4	5	6
7						
22. I feel like I no longer care about my partner	1	2	3	4	5	6
7						
23. I have a feeling that our relations have a bright future	1	2	3	4	5	6
7						
24. I feel that our relationship is empty	1	2	3	4	5	6
7						
25. I fell that our partnership is lacking the excitement	1	2	3	4	5	6
7						

**After each statement is given the scale from 1 to 7. Please circle the number that corresponds to the degree to which a given statement can be attributed to you.**

1 = Extremely dissatisfied

2 = Very dissatisfied

3 = Partially dissatisfied

4 = Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied

5 = Partially satisfied

6 = Very satisfied

7 = Extremely satisfied

# RECONSTRUCTION OF AUTONOMY IN PARTNERSHIP

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26. How satisfied are you with your partnership?	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
27. How satisfied are you with your chosen partner?	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
28. How satisfied are you with the quality of your relationship with your partner?	1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Code \_\_\_\_\_

Contact \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix B

### Release and Permission to Tape Form

Thank you for agreeing to participate in conversations about autonomy and relationship. Your participation in these conversations represents important and meaningful contributions to the body of knowledge available to helping professionals.

I am very grateful for your willingness to share your knowledge and experience with me.

In order to tape our conversations (which is necessary in order to ensure that I capture exactly what you say so that I may precisely document it in my writings) I need your signed consent to do so.

There is also the possibility that, with your permission, I may use the tape in the education of professionals (therapists, educators, supervisors etc.) or professionals-in-training for the purpose of helping them understand and appreciate relationship experience and ideas about personal autonomy. I also will not show any tape that you do not agree to have shown.

\*\*\*\*\*

I, the undersigned, do consent to the video taping of my participation in the conversations with Kristina Brajovic Car, about partnership. I understand that I may request the tape recorder to be turned off or the tape erased at any time during the conversation, or any time there after.

I acknowledge that the purpose of taping has been fully explained to me and that my consent to such taping is given freely and voluntarily. Furthermore, I agree that Kristina Brajovic Car may show the tape for educational purposes as described above.

\_\_\_\_\_

Name Date

\_\_\_\_\_

Witness

### Appendix C

#### Collaborative Approach to Data Analysis

##### Interviews with the Dissatisfied Couples in the Form of Narrative Reports

In order to conduct the transcript analysis in a collaborative fashion, and also to learn on the potential of qualitative research to produce therapeutic effects, during the data processing phase I have included the interviewees from the group of dissatisfied couples in the process of writing the report. I also asked them to intervene by commenting on the preliminary conclusions and interpretations which concerned them.

The following narrative reports aim at familiarizing the reader with the stories of four couples dissatisfied with their relationships, through the researchers' interpretations of the interview content and the dynamics of conversation. The condensed interpretative analysis reports, presented to the couples dissatisfied with their relationships, are italicized, in order to distinguish them from the other narratives and interpretations constructed after the interviews have been conducted. The reports represent a summary of my initial thoughts and hypothesis in the form of a preliminary thematic analysis of each interview. The real names of partners were replaced with made up names which function as the individual couple codes. The codes were used in order to present the reports in a clearer layout and to provide signposts of the presented material for the reader. The entire report consists of fragmentary narratives and four vantage points, i.e. three different points of view in the interpretation of the course and content of the conversations: of each partner individually, which is already two perspectives, then the researcher's observations on the partnership reality and its dynamic, and also a reflective description of the possible influence of the research situation, identified and discussed by the couples and the researchers, after the second interview.

**The narrative report after the interview with Aca and Sanja.** The couple that I present first was not available for further conversation two months after the first interview, as their partnership was discontinued. They were invited for a conversation with the therapists/researcher under the same conditions as the first time around, irrespective of their partnership status. However, they did not make use of this option. This couple is in their mid-twenties and they lived together for four years. They do not have a university degree, but a high-school diploma and a junior college degree, and they work in the service industry. Their wider family is not originally from Belgrade, which is their current place of residence, so the contacts with the family of origin are rare and the connections are weak. What follows are narrative fragments from the interview transcripts, that I have condensed by contracting and collapsing the subjects' answers and the central conversation topics in line with the research questions.

### **Sanja**

sees the difference between their relationship and marriage only in terms of the absence of children. Marriage would, in her opinion, contribute even more to the strength of connection between them. **The autonomy** that she values and recognizes has to do with independence from the family of origin. The two of them make the union in which decisions are made as a product of mutual participation. A dominant behavior pattern springs from his anger, she then sees herself as childish, as someone who needs lessons on boundaries. Partner satisfaction can (and should) be seen in the behavior, she holds. The most important value she stresses is respect for the partner, above all the kind of respect shown and made visible through action. She considers the change occurring in the partners as the relationship develops undesirable and negative (“relationships break because people change”). She considers the two of them as a couple better than the other couples she knows, which in fact she explains by the ability to adapt, the willingness to accept flaws. She does not believe in personal change over time, or in the correction of flaws. This refers mostly to men! The success of the relationship, as she sees it, lies in tolerance. Regarding male-female roles, she does not see men performing household chores (except heavy household work) but she points out their role in rearing children, especially with respect to strictness and physical punishment. However, she shows readiness to assume responsibility for this part of the work too! She considers women to be weaker, more vulnerable... **she hopes to have a male child...** no critical attitude towards the accepted beliefs. She holds that love only becomes stronger if it exists in the first place. In her opinion, there is an unbreakable bond between love and jealousy. Humouring the partner is important for the success of the relationship.

### **Aca**

claims he has given up on the relationship hierarchy, because it triggered many arguments. He still manages to be dominant every now and then, but in anger. He does not recognize or list clear partner satisfaction criteria: “This is the hand you’ve been dealt, and you need to weather it.”. The relationship in and of itself is a value. He avoids analysis when it comes to the partnership and prefers acting on intuition, without conscious consideration. He sees his partner as his wife and does not see any differences compared to marriage. He only recognizes one personal habit which excludes Sanja, namely watching football with his friends. He shows objections to jealousy between them. He would prefer it if it were not there, i.e. if there were no fights in the name of jealousy. Beside this, he is liable to notice and point out her mistakes and weaknesses and sees himself as in charge of correcting them. He gets angry at her “many” expectations, while seeing himself as the relationship manager.

**They both** behave as if their relationship were multilayered, where one is for the public and is the part of the relationship in which the agreement on respecting equality holds. On the other hand, psychologically speaking, there is another agreement, namely the agreement on his domination in decision-making. They value independence from their parents highly! Both became independent from their parents early on, through work and in leaving their place of birth.

*Jealousy appears as a topic of contention, a challenge in the relationship. Staying in the relationship, persistence and commitment are more important than the quality of the relationship. The success of the relationship in their view lies in tolerating flaws, as well as in effort and acceptance. Adhering to the male/female division of labor is evident in both of them, with no awareness of the origin of this pattern, i.e. the influence of culture. They are content with this division at the moment. Both of them describe themselves using the following attributes: strength, stamina, endurance... Autonomy and independence in the relationship are not recognized needs. In talking about these concepts, fear and resistance appear. Marriage is more important than the person, in their view! They have no secrets with one another, nor do they consider that desirable. They are distrustful of other people, outside their relationship. They view parental influence as an unnatural and undesirable phenomenon, a burden for the relationship. They agree on wanting a male child., Aca without rationalizations, and she with an explanation. Cheating is the greatest challenge for the survival of the relationship, and according to them, it is to be expected first and foremost from men.*

**The narrative report after the interview with Đurđa and Saša.** The second couple that I interviewed is in their mid-thirties. They have been married for over five years and in a relationship for seven. They have a child, a five-year-old girl. He is employed and she is not at the moment. They both have university degrees. The second round of conversations with them was completed and they readily responded to the invitation despite unfavourable weather conditions (the January blizzards). I expected more difficulty with the second interview rounds due to this, as well as due to a lower motivation for participation (after Christmas holidays). In the second round, I presented the report to them, provided further down in the text, after which the discussion started accompanied by their reflections on the formulated interpretations and central topics. What follows is the content of the transcript and the course of the interview that I have condensed, as well as the report on the process and content of the second interview with this couple:

### **Đurđa**

*sees getting married as an adventure, although the birth of the child determined the exact moment (this comes as a later reminiscence). She sees her partner as childish, direct... and herself as his interpreter. The present situation is such that the child comes before the partner. She holds that it is **similarity** that brings them together. She associates marriage with the sacrifice of independence, as well as the sacrifice of a social life. This holds especially true for parenthood. She likes going out and misses it. She sees herself as temperamental, she does not hold back and is quick to respond. She stresses her own independence from parents as a matter of her personal choice. She values personal freedom in the relationship and points out disrespect and humiliation as undesirable. She thinks a man is a mystery even to himself, let alone to the partner. Sex is in her view the critical factor of the success of a relationship. A great dilemma and a challenge for the survival of a*

partnership is the question whether a person should have only one partner for the rest of one's life? In addition, she sees love in her relationship as the glue that keeps them together, despite the fact that she has objections to her partner's personality.

### Saša

is of the opinion that in order to analyze and understand a relationship at present, one has to come to understand its beginnings. In his view, every relationship is founded on a unique experience. That is where the value and the strength of a relationship lie. He is open in communication, expresses himself directly and is uninhibited and active. The values he considers important for the survival and quality of a relationship are similarity and trust. "Man errs in making choices", he claims, and should not run from his mistakes (The "Always" script according to the transactional-analytic interpretation). Partnership is a value! He associates marriage and family with the words: instinct, naturalness, simplicity, adaptation, spontaneous change... He mistrusts the strength of will of an individual. "How much can one do?" He sees work and home as his routine and is content with that. He sees commitment to family as both a value and a duty. Describes the marital situation and relations as a **natural state**. Marriage is a state, about which there is no exhilaration. The father is the figure of authority in his view, reserved and strict. The interests of the child come first. That is the motive of loyalty. In a conflict, his only goal is to reduce the discomfort by withdrawing or to alleviate a negative emotion with humour. He has no need for freedom with respect to his parents. He sees, in his own words, "extreme events" as a danger to the survival of the relationship, and these are adultery and separation. The child, as well as motherhood, he sees as hindrances to sexual imaginativeness. Describes himself as cantankerous.

They both see the child in their relationship as the focus of attention at the moment. They underline similarity as the main quality of their relationship. Human fallibility, especially in a relationship, is considered an inevitability. Tolerance may follow from this, but pessimism as well. The topic of **independence** leaves them without associations and connotations. They even consider this term to be too complicated for a discussion or a reflection. They spontaneously offer the description of an episode, or rather a stage, in the bringing up of their child when they decided to use physical punishment of the child for misbehaving. Common beliefs that they discovered at the time lie behind this. He has the initiative in decision-making, but they see the final decision as joint. They explain the dynamic of their relationship as "natural", they are not prone to the re-examination of positions and roles. They agree that humour keeps them from being bored and it is important for humor to be present. It is Saša's charge to have the initiative in this as well. The content of their answers has little enthusiasm, few expectations and wishes... there is no clear vision of the future. They both underline the importance of sexual and erotic attraction, as well as openness, patience and willingness to compromise. On the topic of independence, they do not go beyond the phrase "One should respect oneself.", with no further explanations. They do not hold tactfulness in high esteem in their relationship, nor do they recognize it in themselves. They are temperamental and open in communication.

**The observed influence after the second interview: Researcher report.** Two and a half months after the first interview, I am meeting with Đurđa and Saša in the same environment and company – two researchers and the two of them as a couple. The conversation lasts 45 minutes. The occasion for the conversation is the verification of the observations and the conclusions. The researcher and co-researcher act similar to reflective teams. We begin the conversation by asking if there was anything from the previous encounter that left an impression, ideas or topics that they continued to talk about. We get almost no reply to this question from them. They say that they have many things on their mind and that they see no direct influence of the interview on a change in their relationship. In fact, they have not seen any change in themselves in the two and a half months. Although they are registered as dissatisfied, now, as in the first conversation, there is no insight coming from them or a direct conversation about the circumstances and behavior that create the dissatisfaction. Đurđa makes a general remark that, in her opinion, there are not so many couples who think about their marriage in that way, as a phenomenon, or talk about it. She says this without a value judgement.

Afterwards, Danijela, the research assistant who was the observer in the initial conversation, puts forward her view of their relationship, created after they introduced themselves the first time around. She paraphrases some of their claims that left an impression on her, most of all the spontaneity, naturalness and letting go of the harness in life as well as in the relationships. Her interpretation has a positive subtext, she non-verbally communicates acceptance, support and interest through gesturing and mimicry (her voice is a bit tense, her words stuck in her throat, which can be understood to mean that she is controlling (choosing) the words that she is using, which reduces the spontaneity, but not to a great extent).

The first correction of the content of the interview report has to do with Đurđa's objection to my interpretation of her comments on Saša's directness. We correct together the conclusion that she sees him as childish (she reads this to mean infantile) with the new phrase being that she sees him as interesting! She says that with the remark that she wanted to emphasize his spontaneity and directness as an interesting specificity of their communication. Also, she corrects my conclusion that Saša is less independent of the family of origin than her. What she wanted to stress was that Saša had completed the process of psychological separation before her and that it is no longer a topical subject for him, unlike for her.

Saša is surprised by the fact that the report is in his opinion confusing and lacking in structure. He expected short expert definitions and predictions. He soon realizes that the report is a paraphrased summary in a narrative form of what they offered as answers and that there are very few interventions (interpretations) of the researchers themselves. This confuses him a little, but he is beginning to understand the position of the researcher as a systematic observer, someone who writes down experiences without changing them. He requests that the report be read to him once more to be able to understand one sentence, the only one that does not contain his exact words: "In order to analyze and understand a relationship at present, one has to come to understand its beginnings." After he remembered his thought that was behind this sentence, he had no further comments.

They both think that the segment of the report that contains their combined narratives describes them best and that it is the most "accurate".



At the end of the conversation, Saša points out that he thinks their relationship lacks in “collaboration”, and that it is something he thinks he can and should initiate. He says he does not support Đurđa in her projects as much as she would want to and that he would like to change that in the future. Hence, to be more active in giving support and collaborating with his partner, instead of withdrawing or criticizing.

**Research assistant report.** The conversation begins with my question: “Is what happens in a relationship something spontaneous, unpredictable? Are things exactly as they should be (as you would like them to be)? I was left with the impression from the previous conversation that you do not recognize the need to change anything; have you perhaps had an idea, a sort of inspiration, in the meantime, to somehow introduce certain changes?”

They both agree that the analytic spirit and planned change (or improvement) are not typical of them.

When they hear from the report that the words **naturally and spontaneously** are the words they use most frequently to describe themselves, they say, “Yes, that’s us. Isn’t everybody like that? It surprises me that this is in fact an observation of yours in the first place!”.

Đurđa becomes contemplative when we mention pessimism and this is how she interprets it: “It could also mean that we are realistic, we don’t have unrealistic wishes.” In answer to my question whether he has ever considered if there was something in their relationship that bothered him or made him dissatisfied, so that he should actively work on changing that or having a plan about future actions, Saša says:

“Many people, us too, aren’t aware of their prejudices.”

After a short pause, Đurđa says, “Of course one should work on improving, and not abandon oneself to lethargy.”

They both agree that Saša is the one who organizes joint fun, for example ice-skating and the like.

They both agree that the first conversation left no impression on them and that it did not inspire them to perhaps think about their relationship and their personal satisfaction with it. They think other couples function the same way as well – without prior consideration, analysis and planning when it comes to partnership.

At the beginning of the conversation, when we announce that we will present our observations and check our conclusions with them, Saša says that he does not want to listen and that he is not particularly interested in the feedback. Later in the conversation, he puts forward an idea of his that we assessed him as a person and that we observed some traits and characteristics that he is not aware of. He saw us as expert assessors who might tell him something unpleasant about him.

Later on he says himself that he is his own greatest critic, and that he has difficulties accepting praise, but also criticism. He adds that there is little room for support in his behaviour towards Đurđa: “It is difficult for me to show my support to her, and I should probably show more...” He says that he is very critical of himself and others. Đurđa also says that being critical is a good trait because it creates room for change: “Criticism is corrective.” They both agree that one should be strict with oneself: “Criticism is intellectually good because of insights. Intellectual exchange is our key similarity.”

**The narrative report after the interview with Marija and Branko.** The third couple from the dissatisfied couples group that I have interviewed is in their late thirties. They have a one-year-old son (the previous pregnancy ended with a miscarriage). They have lived together for three years already, but they are not married. They are both employed, the difference being that she is on her maternity leave at the time of the conversation. She has a university degree and he finished high school and works in construction. Two months after the first interview, they were interviewed the second time and they readily responded to the invitation. What follows is a condensed report with interpretations by the researcher, created after the first interview, as well as two additional reports (by the researcher and the research assistant ) written after the second interview. The structure of the report and the method of analysis are the same as for the previous two couples:

### **Marija**

*emphasizes the existence of differences between the two of them, as well as the importance of personal freedom in the relationship, i.e. of individuality. She frames her story as a flight from the patriarchal model, with a resistance to the traditional view of marriage. Although they are not married, she calls their relationship, i.e. partnership, marriage a few times in the conversation. The greatest values in her opinion are agreement and respect. Shows opposition to relationships based on interest. She considers important to keep oneself from the changes a relationship brings. Sees abuse as the greatest challenge to the survival of a relationship. Expounds her views on the psychological differences between men and women.. She considers women to be independent and resourceful, especially in bringing up children. Insists on excluding the wider family from the rearing of children. She thinks that for a marriage to be successful a good division of labor between partners is crucial, without any third party involvement. She shows resistance to a union with parents, with idealizations of her family of origin. She values her partner's experience and supports him in making his own decisions. Slightly critical of Branko, both during the interview, by directly objecting to his infrequent contributions to the conversation, and in the content, in an indirect fashion. In her criticism, Branko is a little selfish, naive, and has a temper. When it comes to **autonomy**, she explicates this concept by emphasizing on the fact that neither her nor her partner have changed as personalities in their relationship! Holds that her expectations about marriage are met. The success of the relationship lies in understanding and tolerating differences. She sees every couple as a story in its own right, and thinks that relationships cannot be compared or experiences exchanged.*

### **Branko**

*lacks initiative in the relationship, chooses giving in as his position in the relationship. He marks as important in a relationship the following: respect, a joint struggle for survival, making joint efforts to secure and improve the quality of life. Sees no problems with the relationship at present, nor does he remember any past difficulties. Not being able to be around his child enough due to work is a stressful situation for him. He is committed to making money, securing the survival and*

*financial safety. He acknowledges lesser “tensions” in the relationship since they have been alone in the union, without the family members from his side. Regarding his friends, Marija’s influence does not reach that far. Even though things were different before. They make a distinction between “my friends” and “your friends”. No awareness of the conditions and indicators of happiness and satisfaction in the relationship. Happiness is when you have no objections. The child is a motivator for the survival of the union. Children are the glue that keeps the relationship together. He hopes to have more (male) children. He is ambivalent towards marriage. The values are loyalty and persistence. For a relationship to succeed, trust and giving in are essential in his opinion. Absent-minded during conversation, and physically absent from the family, due to work.*

***They both** think respect is necessary for the success of the relationship. An unfavourable financial situation is what they consider as a challenge for the survival of and the satisfaction with the relationship. Their beliefs are that circumstances impose dissatisfaction. Although there is a degree of joint decision-making and negotiation, which is seen as important, there is also a high incidence of separate decision-making. He accepts (with some difficulty) her decision to live independently of their parents. Friends are a demarcation line between the two of them. When they think about the beginning of their relationship, they see it as if circumstances have brought them together. **They stress noticeable differences between them**, especially with respect to temper and communication style. They agree that Branko has a temper and strong reactions.. They are of the opinion that partner similarity is an illusion, an impossible connection. **They have no common expectations, nor do they plan far ahead in the future** regarding the further development of the relationship.*

**The observed influence after the second interview: Researcher report.** Two months after the first interview with Marija and Branko as a couple, we have the second meeting and conversation. It is not difficult to reach them, or to set up another interview. On the contrary, they both came, far more relaxed than the first time around, as if now we knew each other well and there was no need for further discomfort. Branko’s participation is more pronounced than before. In answer to the question of what they thought of the first conversation and if there have been any further exchanges about some of the topics we touched upon, they say they have not talked about it, but that some things have changed. More specifically, Branko is spending less time at work now (he is a construction worker, and the conversation is taking place during winter) so he is spending more time with her and the child. They are both happy with this and she has realized that was the reason why she had so many objections and problems with him. As she puts it, it would bother her when he decided, even with so little free time on his hands, to spend time with his friends.

I suggest sharing with them the observations and comments that were formulated immediately after the first interview with them. They accept this suggestion with some interest. First, I have presented my summary of Marija’s story. Marija for the most part confirms everything she said before, which was turned into a narrative on the subject of her key attitudes to marriage, male-female relations and personal freedom. She has two interventions. One has to do with the fact that

she does not idealize her family (this for her is too strong a word). She corrects me saying that when she mentioned her family as a model, she actually wanted to emphasize only one aspect of how her family functioned that is ideal to her (or rather good, satisfactory), namely allowing every family member to be autonomous and showing respect. She responds to the bit to do with her critical attitude by commenting that she is now much more relaxed, satisfied and less critical since Branko has had a “360 degree turn around”, as she perceives it. By this she means that he is less tired, absent-minded, grumpy, etc. She works now too, so she is less bothered by his absence. She accepts this as her weakness and mistake, although she sticks with the claim that she minds Branko’s quick temper in expressing objections. She gives as an example the situation when she bought clothes for herself without consulting with him at a time when they were not financially stable, to which he reacted by intense anger and testiness. While listening to this, Branko does not intervene except that he agrees he has changed lately, that he is more available for his family and more rested. Concerning this episode, he reacts more defensively than apologetically. Marija is the one to take responsibility for her lack of thinking and impulsiveness in this situation, but she expects more tactfulness from Branko. She says she has been thinking much about her critical attitude after the conversation with us, and that she has decided to make it less.

Branko listens to the narrative that sums up the claims he made in the previous conversation and does not interrupt or intervene. What he confirms is the remark that Marija meddles far less with his choice of friends, as he is also less absent. This makes him more satisfied. He still sees the division of friends into “mine and yours” in their case. In answer to my question whether the respect that they both emphasize is an indicator of love and what they understand it to be, Marija talks more and says that respect for her is tolerance, love... Reacting to my conclusion that they do not believe in similarity as the requirement for success, she says that by that she meant “identity, a full identity in everything...”, which she does not believe in, but rather in a kind of general similarity.

In my observation, regarding the topic of marriage, I did not find any indications of long-term common plans, expectations, ways of improving the relationship and the like. They both stick with the claim that they prefer being “realistic” and without great expectations, rather than to “fantasize”. They even see this as one of their good traits. I provide for them a couple of examples of what it would be like to be “realistic” and to “fantasize” at the same time about achievable and attainable goals, which then become a joint project, such as buying a car and the like. They understood this and took account of it as potentially useful.

**Research assistant report.** They are both on time, like the first time around. Marija is kind and shows interest and involvement for the duration of the interview. Branko looks tired, unmotivated and says himself that he drifts off at times. This happened in the first interview as well, with the difference that Marija did not criticize him this time. She retains the tendency to speak on both her and his behalf. Thus an impression forms of a disbalance in their relationship, i.e. of Marija’s initiative and domination, even if only in the sphere of expressing opinions, views and feelings.

Despite this impression of mine, Branko says that precisely this kind of partnership meets all of his expectations.

His activity, initiative and the area of highest involvement is work and material security. He invests himself there, so he has given over to Marija, consciously or unconsciously, the other areas of family life. They explain this kind of relationship by the present circumstances they prioritize, namely taking care of their child and earning money.

I get the impression that they do not experience their partnership as something topping their list of priorities. Their tolerance and acceptance are the reasons for the satisfaction, but also the fact that the expectations they have about the relationship are low. They do not require the partnership to be a place of exchange to a greater extent.

I see this in the fact that although Marija's attitudes and views dominate both in the first and in the second interview, Branko shows no dissatisfaction, agitation, or open complaints.

Marija mentions that the previous conversation with us inspired her to re-examine her attitude towards his friends and to accept some of Branko's behaviors that were unacceptable to her before. Such an attitude of hers is not a result of their joint re-examination; rather, our questions motivated her to re-examine the possibility that she may be criticizing him too much.

**The narrative report after the interview with Ivana and Vladimir.** The fourth couple is in their early thirties. They are both unemployed at present. He has an internship as a medical doctor. She too has a university degree. They have been in a relationship for three years and living together for one. They are not married and have no children at the moment. This is the only couple with whom communicating and motivating for the conversation proceeded with some difficulty. Regardless, it was not difficult to get them to come for the second round of interviews, they even entered the conversation more directly and dynamically. What follows is an interpretive report that I have condensed based on what I have learned from the first conversation with the couple. Condensation of the content is done in line with the same principle of analysis as in the cases of the first three couples. The same holds for the reports after the second round of interviews:

### ***Ivana***

*Is less verbally active, non-verbally very present and engaged (listens to, is compassionate and expresses her emotions...). She perceives marriage as a practical union, with orientation towards children. She has no expectations from the partnership. She recognizes the desire for children as a motive for marriage. She sees love as more important than marriage ("it's nice without marriage as well"). **Autonomy** is not important to her; she has no associations related to the idea. On the contrary, she objects to Vladimir's autonomy drive. She appreciates more determination, clarity and simplicity in behavior and communication, in difference to Vladimir. Has trust in her partner, looks for reliance in him and obtains it, as she asserts. She tolerates his inclination towards conflict dialogues. She places her impression of being in love into the past but*

does not see it now. She wants to discuss the future and tries to steer the conversation into such a direction. She ends up having no partner in conversation on such matters. The success of a union is guaranteed by the acceptance of partner with all his characteristics. She sees the challenge to the existence of the relationship in the possible time dissonance of partners' needs (talks in principle). The partnership values she speaks of are understanding, reliance and support through unconditional acceptance.

### **Vladimir**

Emphasizes the fact that their professional lives have no connection whatsoever. The household is a meeting point. More conversation for him means more insight, dissatisfaction and quarrelling. Since the beginning of their union they are less pals, less spontaneous with each other, there is more boredom. The everyday life means acceptance of differences through conflicts. **He avoids conversation about marriage.** The issue is the trigger for mythical beliefs, models of marriage that belong to older generations... According to him, marriage calls for courage, seriousness and romantics. He is ambivalent towards the issue, due to the presence of fear from entering into the relation of dominance and subjugation. Marriage for him means loyalty, permanence, monogamy, possessiveness, a bond, as well as a fulfilment of all expectations. For him, marriage is a specific relationship between a man and a woman that does not include children. Also, for him, one of the greatest values is to be bonded with someone, without being able to explain why. He identifies himself more with his buddies (men) than with his partner. Does not believe that someone can understand him completely, joint with fear of rejection. For him, fight and conflict are more valuable than conversation. He avoids being direct and open, and is prone to nagging. Expresses resignation and revolt, and shows interest through anger. He does not see either her or their joint contribution to togetherness. At the same time, he is harsh towards himself.

**They both** view coordination of business and working hours as a big challenge for their relationship. They do not negotiate; there is no clear division of tasks. Ivana is adapting to Vladimir's pace of life and character. They are both without initiatives, visions, desires, as well as without clear expectations and open requests. The exchange is limited to the exchange of objections. The values for both are honesty, openness, but at the same time they do not attribute it or see it within each other. They express no praises, do not see the good sides of their relationship (or at least do not speak about them). Ivana does it partially.

**The observed influence after the second interview: Researcher report.** After hearing from me the condensed form of the interview content, Ivana thinks that the summary paints a faithful picture of her, that it is "objective". She does not agree that she is not verbally present. She believes that most of the time she talks sufficiently. Agrees that love is more important than marriage. Autonomy is not very important to her. Vladimir cuts in and says that it is important to him! Reacting to our claim that Ivana trusts her partner, Vladimir cuts in and objects: "Why don't you tell them what you really think?" Ivana holds her ground claiming that she is saying what she really means. The two of them start an argument over

who meant what. Vladimir does not believe that for her he is her mainstay, as she puts it, and demands a clarification from her. She explains that she believes what he tells her. As the conversation unfolds, she ceases to agree with the idea that Vladimir is always her mainstay. She agrees that she does not mind the arguments and clashes of opinion, but she does mind the fights. Thinks that there are still emotions between the two of them but that they are buried under the quotidian matters. Vladimir, reacting to unconditional acceptance as a value that Ivana considers a characteristic of a quality partnership, comments that in his opinion this is in line with the “slave owner mentality”. He adds that I have misunderstood that Ivana accepts him regardless of his flaws. She nonetheless confirms this. Ivana does not want to add anything new to her claims from the first conversation. Says that she is unfocused and feeling weird. She has wondered a lot about what we think of them after the first conversation...

Danijela, the research assistant, explains that the focus of these meetings is not on our evaluation or interpretation; rather, the only thing that matters is for us to hear what they say about themselves and to remove, in collaboration with them, our personal views which could distort their story. “This is a summary of the transcript, and not an assessment of you two as a couple.”

Vladimir says that he would like it if there were more meeting points between the two of them and confirms that more closeness in their case means more fighting and more disappointment. He would like it if their attitudes were more similar. He thinks that differences, as well as the emotional tension between them, are becoming greater over time, more pronounced, and that they are not diminishing. He admits that when he is nervous or dissatisfied, he becomes cynical. They accept Danijela’s interpretation that passion is holding them together despite all problems. He does not agree that they are bored in the relationship, it is more likely that the biggest cause of problems are rigid, incompatible attitudes. He says it is “pathetic” that their relationship boils down to accepting and tolerating differences. Ivana gets angry over the word “pathetic” and demands a clarification. Vladimir says he is bothered by conflicts. He does not agree that he avoids talking about marriage; on the contrary, he thinks that attitudes toward it speak volumes about the person having them. “Years go by and this becomes an increasingly serious topic... I break off a relationship, find a new girlfriend, spend three months with her, and there you go, I get married.”

The two of them have not discussed marriage yet, he claims. He is not sure if their relationship is “meant” to turn into a marriage, or into a stable, permanent union. “I don’t picture having kids, but her attitude about children and talking about it makes it clear to her too.” All the talk about domestic living, settling down... is of no interest to him, no need to stress that. They start an argument over the fact that their apartment is cluttered with her things. Ivana feels hurt by his comments. He feels that everything to do with their living together is a burden to him, and that he takes care of everything in the house, her things included. He partially corrects the story of the “highschool sweetheart” kind of love as an ideal and no longer insists on it as a value in itself. Moreover, he does not understand how such people stay together without once asking themselves if someone else is better for them, or without being attracted to someone else in their lives and the like. Ivana does not believe that such a love, from the days of highschool, is even possible. Vladimir associates romance with marriage,

Ivana wants it in a relationship too, but is not getting it from him, as she claims... they start an argument over this. When there is no love, in Vladimir's opinion, a relationship turns into a domination and subordination game due to frustration, because the partners are bound by something – children, mortgages, repaying bank loans... An argument starts again... Ivana asks if he is describing himself, he avoids answering. If the relationship is not good, one should not get married, as this will harm the children, says Vladimir. He does not see himself as possessive, but rather occasionally jealous. Says that Ivana would like it if he were jealous more often. Ivana adds that not being jealous is not healthy in the first place and that it is a sign that something is wrong. She also claims that she knows Vladimir is not indifferent, but that he is not ready to tell her he is jealous. Vladimir is not inspired by fatherhood, it is a passive role in his view, he imagines being with his children only when they grow up and up until then, it is the wife's job to bring them up. He would like to have children, but does not have the patience, he is more interested in other things, "you gotta work hard, you just cannot afford spending time with children." He thinks that his parents got married for marriage itself rather than love and that perhaps that is why he turned out "an idiot". He heard a lot of ugly stories from his father. His father wonders what his child and life in general would have been like had he married a different woman. Ivana claims that her parents had a bad marriage too, which ended in a divorce but that she is not bothered by this much. He is displeased with his profession (he is a medical doctor), although he is committed to it and is a graduate student. Corrects fear of rejection that we offered as a hypothesis into abandoning the illusion that it is possible to find someone who is one's match in all areas of interest.... after which a long narrative ensues on his dissatisfaction with the situation in the health system, at the Faculty... he becomes aggressive and testy over the topic of fear of rejection. Says that he cannot chitchat and that he finds conflict easier to handle. Forgets at times that the partnership is in focus, easily slips into the story of himself in general. Is of the opinion that he overestimates the effort he puts in, the time... he expects a lot, cuts himself a lot of slack... thinks that he could be ready for psychotherapy too. Has had experience with gestalt psychotherapy. He felt at the time that the therapist did not hear him because the therapist talked more than he did as a client. Says that he was going through tough times when he first sought help, but that he did not need on top of everything else the guilt that he felt with the therapist. "I had a catharsis before the session, but after him all I felt was guilt. You feel bad already and someone keeps rubbing in the guilt on top of that."

Vladimir does not agree that Ivana is ready to adapt to him, he thinks it is the case that they have two separate, different life rhythms.

**Research assistant report.** During the conversation they are both motivated to answer my questions and are interested in our observations from the first conversation. On the other hand, one is left with the impression that they are at opposing sides from the beginning. They openly express dissatisfaction with their relationship. The cause in their view is the fact that they are very different and that over time this has had an increasingly negative effect on the atmosphere in the relationship. Their comments to one another are mostly cynical and hostile, and they consciously avoid addressing each other directly, which I assume serves to avoid the escalation of the conflict, so they use addressing me as a means of making sure



the other party would hear them. They both agree that the exchange boils down to the exchange of objections. As the sole positive moment they see the initiative to refresh their relationship. Neither mentions breaking off the relationship which is riddled with conflicts and is difficult for both; instead, they think along the lines of refreshing it. They both wish for understanding and acceptance, but they seem to be giving up on that in this relationship.

Ivana says, "... but, Vladimir doesn't want to open up..."

Vladimir: "... I feel insecure and tied down."

They both express the opinion that a harmonious relationship between them is almost impossible. They agree that they have a conflict relationship and that in essence they are not conflict personalities, in the sense that their relationships with other people are satisfactory.

Marriage is for Vladimir an important subject, but not in the context of his relationship with Ivana. It is as if he feels uncomfortable over this and he avoids talking about it in front of her, he looks away and through the window. He often addresses Ivana as "this young lady". In the beginning, she is tolerant and patient but she becomes "bitter and sarcastic". They agree that this is a usual dynamic of their relationship and that such a turn in the conversation is a result of the fact they feel relaxed enough to be who they are in the interview situation.

At the end of the conversation they say that they feel embarrassed in expressing their dissatisfaction with their relationship since they are still in front of strangers. They have no regrets because I openly expressed acceptance and respect for both of them, as well as an acknowledgment of their choices. They see our interest in them, the understanding and the acceptance as a support and a source of optimism about the survival of their partnership.

They both leave with the idea that it is possible to transform their relationship and that neither of them must suffer in it. They both suspect that they stay together because both of them have a problem being happy with themselves, independent of each other. They mention deficits in the good models of partnership, i.e. the bad relationships of their parents and the frustrations they have not left behind.

I am getting the impression that they have opened up new questions, but also options, and that they left visibly relieved and freshly optimistic. The conversation for them had the effect of giving vent to their feelings. The cathartic dimension is manifested in seeing possible perspectives that they did not think about before, namely, to transform their relationship to the pleasure of both, to affirm a collaborative and friendly dimension of the relationship and to re-examine the expectations they have about the partner. They think this can lead to tolerance and acceptance on the one hand, and a greater exchange on the other.