

THE CATHARTIC FUNCTION OF COMMUNICATION

Mihaela Luminița SANDU, PhD Lecturer

Department of Psychology and Social Work

Ovidius University of Constanța

mihaela_naidin@gmail.com

Maria PESCARU, Associate professor PhD

The University of Pitești

mariapescaru@yahoo.com

Abstract: *Often, communication is defined as a particular form of the exchange relationships between two or more persons, two or more groups. It does not mean assessment or solving of problems, but sharing one's own feelings, the effort to know and understand the other and the cooperation in finding a mutually satisfactory solution. Communication is a dynamic act; it's the gateway between two interior worlds. Effective communication also means the public expression of feelings and emotions. Expressing an emotion allows us to acknowledge it and to recognize ourselves in it. This study proposes to identify the style of communication, to emphasize the intensity of the religious feeling of the participants in the study, as well as their opinion regarding the need to discharge their emotions in the challenging periods of life. This research is, therefore, a necessary step, a good argument in order to raise awareness for the need for communication, and a condition for mobilizing resources in view of this approach. The survey was carried out on a sample of 120 persons, using as instruments the S.C. questionnaire (Analysis of the style of communication), the questionnaire for the assessment of religious feeling (C.E.S.R.), the questionnaire of investigation of the need to discharge one's emotions. The action of listening is an element to which the approaches of the communication phenomenon can no longer only grant a place in the area of interaction, as it can moreover provide perspectives on the size of the relationship and of the interaction itself. One of the limits of this research can be found in the reduced number of participants in the study. Researches to this respect might continue by using a representative sample, by which we could be able to determine to what extent the results show a characteristic of our society by comparison with Western ones and to what extent can we speak about cultural and mentality differences in this respect.*

Key words: *communication, emotion, self-disclosure, religious belief.*

1. Introduction

Regardless of schools, fields or opinions that define communication, one can identify a few of the common aspects:

- communication means a process of transmission of information (the information being regarded as a general term referring both to concepts, as well as to signs, symbols, etc.);
- communication requires at least two poles (individual - individual, individual-group, etc.)

Communication has the role of relating systems (the human being) to the environment in which they evolve.

According to M. Zlate - "through communication, the individual becomes humanized, forms his unique personality, because that is what insures the transmission of social experience. In the absence of communication, the individual remains at the stage of the biological development, isolated, unfit for social interaction, deprived of the ability to integrate in the community. Man is a communicating creature and by virtue of this fact man is formed and manifests as a human" (Zlate, 2000:201).

Communication analysis is a very complex proceedings, including both researching its mechanism, as well as investigating the manner in which psychic phenomena of the *transmitter system* give rise to communication and the importance of mental states of the *receiver system* in connection to the manner in which it receives the communication.

2. The cathartic function of communication

The term catharsis (*Καθαρσις*) is derived from the Greek καθαίρειν (*katharein*), which means *to clean*, in its turn derived from „kathares”, which means *pure, clean, unblemished*. The concept is used in contemporary discourse in literary, religious, medical, and learnt traditions context.

"Catharsis" is an aesthetic concept which expresses the purification of the spectators' consciousness of any passion, through the art of tragedy. Formulated for the first time by Aristotle, as a curing action applied in ancient times by means of music, meant to cure cases of ecstasy or orgiastic enthusiasm. Some Platonic and Pythagorean views considered that songs, particularly the "enthusiastic" ones, can cause an exaltation of emotion, which is, necessarily, followed by a discharge of the emotional overload, that is a significant reduction of emotions. Aristotle notes that it is not only the enthusiasts that can liberate themselves from turmoil by means of music, but also those controlled by other emotions such as: fear and pity. And in the ancient mystical practices, the cathartic action of music was a common practice. Mysteries, such as the Dionysian ones, during which "enthusiastic" songs were sang, were considered cathartic.

Plato is the first to apply the term to art. In "Sympozion" and "Phaidros" (Platon, 1998:83) he reveals the value of the Eros, generator of aesthetic experiences by which pain turns into the joy of creation. Plato condemns art based on irrational initiatives of the soul because it excites in man low passions.

Schopenhauer recognizes the cathartic power of art. The reality of ideas, the noumenal essence of reality may be uncovered through intuitive artistic knowledge, which separates the man from the rest of the world. Absolute truth can be achieved through the cathartic function of art.

Bergson assigned a hypnotic function to art: "The function of art is to numb the active powers of our personality and to lead us to a state of perfect docility, whether we understand the suggested idea, or we empathize with the feelings it inspires".

Benedetto Croce associates the Aristotelian theory of catharsis with the Kantian thesis of "taking any practical interest out of art"; art raises us from immediate passion to a contemplation of the universal.

Romanian exegetes have written about catharsis: D.M. Pippidi, translator and critic of "Poetics" and Raoul Teodorescu in "Aristotle As An Aesthetic Theoretician". In his "Aesthetics", Tudor Vianu stresses the following, in respect of catharsis: "The man who is preparing for appointments with art must operate in itself that catharsis, that cleansing of the passions which is not only an effect of art, but also a condition for its existence" (Anghelescu, Ionescu, Lăzărescu, 2007:289).

As a result, the cathartic function centered on the need of individuals to release tensions and to express emotions, much more than the need to communicate with others. This tension can be identified with aggressiveness and from this point of view, catharsis was approached from the perspective of reducing this aggressivity.

For the purpose of therapy, catharsis has not only a temporary liberating function, but also the effect of strengthening the Id, of providing emotional maturity.

In somatotherapy, the catharsis function is magnified and even dramatized. Patients arrive faster at having a cathartic experience, after 4-5 sessions, sometimes even during the first exercises. The therapeutic contact between the therapist's hand and the patient's has the role of reminding the latter of the dominant manner by which, in the first days after birth, came into contact with the surrounding world.

Our faulty views and deeds can not be immediately clarified and straighten . They may need time to get to be known and that's why we need next to have beside us, for when we want to confess them, a person with special qualities. Awareness and recognition of errors (to recognize that they do belong to us and that nobody else is to blame for our mistakes), as well as materialization of the thoughts linked to those mistakes (the outer expression of the thoughts) is what to confess them means. Thoughts that we do not express belong to our spirit only, but they can materialize by the sound covering (the word) that they receive during the confession.

Communication analysis is a very complex proceedings, including both researching its mechanism, as well as investigating the manner in which psychic phenomena of the *transmitter system* give rise to communication and the importance of mental states of the *receiver system* in connection to the manner in which it receives the communication.

3. The research methodology

3.1. Research Objectives

This study aims to identify the style of communication and to emphasize the intensity of the religious feeling of the participants in the study, as well as their opinion regarding the need to discharge their emotions in the challenging periods of life.

Specific objectives:

- to identify the communication style of the study participants;
- to assess the intensity of the religious feeling for the the persons involved in research;
- to highlight significant relationships between the religious feeling and the style of communication of the study participants;
- to highlight significant differences between men and women depending on the need for emotional discharge during the challenging periods of life.

3.2. Research Hypotheses

1. It shall be presumed that the persons with stronger religious feelings would rather call on a father confessor than on a psychologists when issues arise in their lives.
2. It shall be presumed that the degree of emotional discharge expressed by participants in the study is influenced by their style of communication.
3. It shall be presumed that the use of an aggressive style of communication leads to a reduction of the religious feeling's intensity.
4. It shall be presumed that the need for emotional discharge during the challenging periods of life is more intense in women than in men.

3.3. Material and methods

The study comprised a number of 120 persons, 60 women and 60 men, aged between 19-52 years of age, both from the urban areas (53,3 %), and from the rural ones (46.7 %).

Regarding the distribution of data for the "studies" variable, 60% of them have graduated from high school, 33,3 % of the subjects have graduated from higher education, and 6,7 % of the subjects have only graduated from primary studies. Regarding the "civil status" variable, half the subjects who participated

in this research are married, 23.3% are not married, 16.7 % are divorced, 6,7 % live in civil partnership and only 3,3 % of the subjects are widows or widowers.

The following instruments have been used for research: The S.C. questionnaire for the analysis of the subjects' communication style, the questionnaire for the assessment of the religious feeling (C.E.S.R.) and the Assesment of the Need for Emotional Discharge questionnaire.

4. Results and debates

As a result of the application of these instruments we have gathered a series of data which, in order to make sense and to be converted into conclusions, needed to be statistically analyzed and processed. For the presentation and interpretation of the data, we have started with each particular hypothesis. For reaching the objectives and validating the original hypotheses, the data has been subjected to primary processing, meant to find the frequencies of apparition of replies to each individual instrument.

After statistical processing of replies to the communication style questionnaire it has emerged that 46.7 % participants in the study adopted an assertive style, 23.3 % adopted a non-assertive style, 13,3 % adopted an aggressive style, and 16.7 % adopt a manipulative style.

In the case of most of the participants, the communication style used in the relationship with the other is the assertive one. Such a person knows how to listen and is willing to understand, knows how to be himself of herself (without simulations and "role plays") and to be self-reliant. In addition, such persons have the capacity to affirm themselves, to honestly, directly and clearly express their own views and rights without aggressiveness and without damage to the others; the capacity to follow one's own interests without the infringement of the others'.

There is however a considerable number of participants who adopt a non-assertive style of communication. These persons have a tendency to hide and to flee more than to face somebody. They manifest excessive of civility and conciliation, a tendency to defer making decisions and often an inability of making them, along with the handing onto others of their rights to decide. In these manifestations lies an unhealthy fear of being judged, as well as intense grievance felt in the case of a possible failure - in order to avoid them the individual prefers to let the others make his decisions for him. This does not preclude a sense of resentment, smoldering anger, and rancor.

Trying to identify the level of intensity for the need of emotional discharge on a scale of 1-5, the results obtained showed that 34.5% of the participants feel a very intense need for emotional discharge during challenging period of life, another 31.5 % felt this need intensely, 24.2 % of them have moderately felt the

need for emotional discharge, 6,7 % felt a weak need and just 3.1 % of the subjects have not felt this need.

The results obtained show that, as far as the intensity of the need for emotional discharge during tough times of life is concerned, over half of the participants have experienced this need intensely and very intensely, which reveals that these participants are free and open to the emotional experiences, they let go of their defence mechanisms and they accept their own emotions and feelings.

The comparative analysis of data related to the need for emotional discharge depending on place of residence reveals that in rural areas confidence in their father confessor is higher than in urban areas, and that in urban areas, the participants have greater confidence in their psychologist/ psychotherapist compared to the subjects residing in rural areas. The percentage of those who trust both the confessor and the psychologist is greater in rural areas than in urban areas, and confession to friends is more accepted by the participants in the urban areas than those in the rural areas.

All in all, 76.7% of the participants admit to expressing their feelings, and 33,3 % to not expressing them. These persons, instead of asking people around them for the things they want and being happy when receiving them, choose to remain frustrated, to feel unloved and neglected, because they have internalized a rule according to which "it is not good to ask and to oblige yourself". Of course, each of these examples is about unconscious choices, which happen almost daily in real life." The result is an accumulation of intrapsychical tensions which causes a state of acute pain, a collapsed image of oneself and sometimes outbursts which are unexpected and unjustified in the given context.

When referring to the forms by which participants discharge their emotions, 46.7 % of the subjects have identified gestures or words, 26.7 % stated that they were using crying, 10% used as the form of emotional discharge outbursts of anger or of joy, and 16.7 % of the subjects have failed to respond or haven't been able to identify one of the forms of manifestation of emotions. These results reveal that most of the subjects do appeal to emotional discharge, less than one form or another, most of them by making use of gestures or words.

As regards the extent of emotional discharge, 50% of the subjects shows a moderate degree of discharge, 26.7 % an increased intensity of emotional discharge, 16.7 % have a very intense degree of discharge, and 2,7 % did not seem to be able to express themselves, showing a low degree of emotional discharge.

Adding up the results related to "very much" and "much" confidence, we see that the majority of participants have confidence, and are willing to confess to a spiritual advisor. In fact, in the past, the role of the Church was to help people overcome certain difficulties that arose in their lives, and to regain balance in order to carry on. Confession is needed to all those who they want to

earn eternal life, regardless of whether or not they are suffering from mental distress.

Referring to the confidence that participants have in confessing to their psychologists, 30% of subjects said they are very confident, 23.3 % subjects have a lot of confidence, 20% have moderate confidence, 16.7 % of them have little confidence and only 10% subjects have declared that they have very little confidence in the psychologist.

These results reveal that public perception of psychologists has changed from the previous years and that more and more people have gained confidence in the profession. However, people address the psychologist as a last resort and then only for serious problems. For the seemingly superficial ones, Romanians prefer to confess to friends, family and priests rather than to a psychologist.

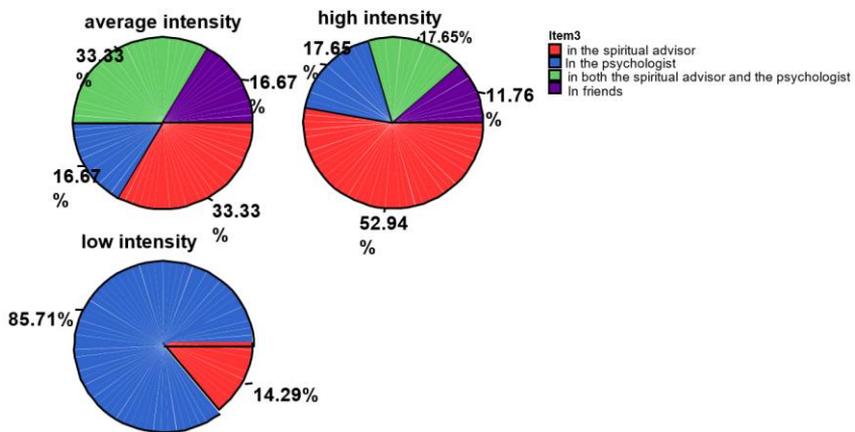


Figure 1-3. The results obtained from the application of the questionnaire for the assessment of religious feeling. The comparative distribution for the faith given to people before to whom confessions are made according to the intensity of the religious feeling.

For the validation of the following hypothesis: "It shall be presumed that the person with a more intense religious feeling calls rather on a spiritual advisor than on a psychologist when issues arise in their lives", the data obtained through the application of the questionnaire for the assessment of religious feeling have shown that the participants in the study who have a high intensity religious feeling have confidence rather in a spiritual advisor than in a psychologist or in friends for confessing their problems to (Figure 1-3).

It should be noted that the majority of participants with a low intensity religious feeling confess to a psychologist (85,71 %) and only 14.29 % are turning to a spiritual advisor on the occurrence of problems in their lives.

In conclusion, our hypothesis has been validated. Even though last century's psychology has established some scientific rules to confessions and the

psychologist/psychotherapist masters the art of listening, of understanding the other and of helping the other overcome his or her fears, inhibitions and to open their soul, by using clear techniques and rules, the participants in the study would rather call on a spiritual advisor than on a psychologist.

In view to the validation of the second hypothesis: "It shall be presumed that the degree of emotional discharge expressed by participants in the study is influenced by the style of communication", the data have been subjected to a correlation analysis.

Table 1. The non-parametric correlation between style of communication and the degree of emotional discharge

			style	Item13
Spearman's Rho	style	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.460**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.003
		N	120	120
	Item13	Correlation Coefficient	.460**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.003	.
		N	120	120

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Taking into account the fact that most of the participants in the study adopted a moderate degree of emotional discharge, and that the style of communication for the majority of participants is assertive, there is a significant correlation, at a level of significance of 0,01 ($\bar{r} = 0.460$, $p < 0.01$), between the communication style and the intensity of the emotional discharge. Thus, the participants who know how to listen and are willing to understand, who know how to be themselves (without simulations and role plays) and how to rely only on themselves, those who adopt the best attitude because it makes it possible to achieve their intended purpose without causing resentment of others and even often gaining their sympathy, these individuals have a moderate degree of emotional discharge, which means that the force, the strength and the depth of the emotional discharge are moderate. This discharge is also depending on the emotional value of the problem that needs to be solved, of its significance, as well as on the emotional ability of the participants to the study. Therefore, the second hypothesis of the study has also been validated, respectively the one stating that the degree of emotional discharge is influenced by the style of communication.

For the validation of the third hypothesis" It shall be presumed that the approach of an aggressive style of communication leads to a decrease in the intensity of the religious feeling", the data obtained has been subjected to a correlation analysis with a view to identifying significant relationships between the aggressive style of communication and the religious feeling (see Table 2).

Table 2. Parametric correlation between an aggressive style of communication and the religious feeling correlation chart

		aggressive	feeling
aggressive	Pearson Correlation	1	.798(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	120	120
feeling	Pearson Correlation	-.798(**)	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	120	120

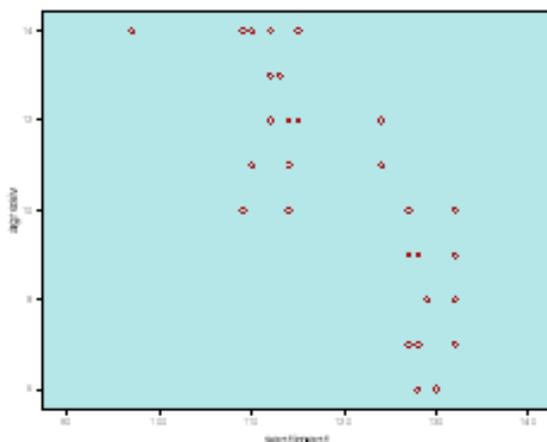


Figure 4. The for the aggressive communication style and the religious feeling

According to the results submitted, it should be noted that there are significant, negative relationships, at a level less than 0.01, between the aggressive style of communication and the religious feeling ($r = -0.798$, $p < 0.01$). A high intensity feeling religious leads to a decrease in the aggressive style of communication, the participants no longer have a tendency of always being at the forefront, of having the final word, of imposing their own point of view at any cost, even at the cost of injuring and angering other persons. They become more tolerant, they come to understand other people and have a capacity of honest, direct and clear expression of their views and rights without aggressiveness and without damage to the others. To conclude, we can say that the third hypothesis has also been confirmed.

For the validation of the fourth hypothesis "It shall be presumed that the need for emotional discharge in the challenging periods of life is more intense in women than in men", the data collected has been the subject of comparative nonparametric analysis, with a view to the identification of significant differences between men and women as regards the need for emotional discharge in the challenging periods of life.

To statistically confirm the results obtained by the qualitative analysis of the data we have appealed to the quantitative study thereof, by applying the chi-square test (χ^2), also referred to as chi-square of adjustment (see Table 3).

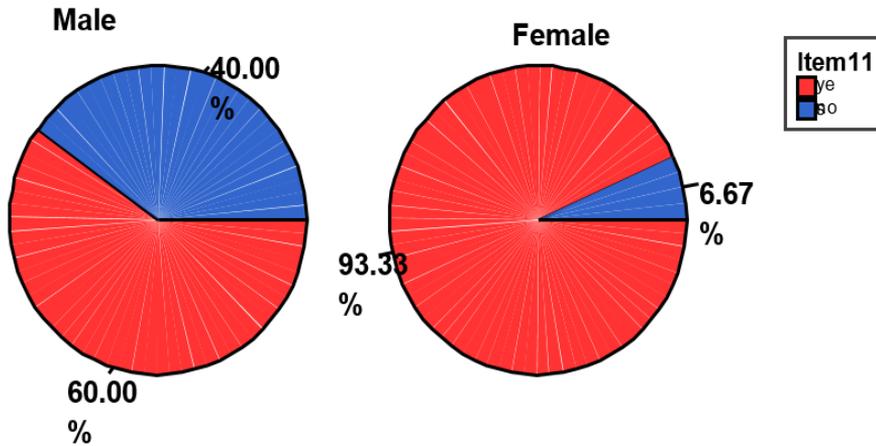


Figure 5-6. Comparative distribution of the need for emotional discharge depending on biological gender

Table 3. Comparative study, chi-square (χ^2) of the need for emotional discharge and biological gender

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	Exactly Sig. (2-sided)	Exactly Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	4,658 (B)	1	.031		
Continuity Correction(a)	2.981	1	.084		
Likelihood Ratio	5.058	1	.025		
Fisher's Exact Test				.080	.040
Linear-by-Linear Association	4.503	1	.034		
N of Valid Cases	120				

a Computed only for a 2x2 table

b 2 cells (50.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 3.50.

As may be seen in table 3, the significance level is less than 0.05 which means that there is a significant difference between men and women as regards the need for emotional discharge, women feeling this need more intensely than the men.

5. Conclusions

As a result of the methodological procedure we can say that the objectives of this research have been achieved, and that the hypotheses originally laid down have been confirmed. It is true, persons who adopt an assertive communication style feel the need of a more intense emotional discharge during the difficult moments of their lives, and women feel this need more intensely than men. These features are useful for the awareness of the need for communication and, in particular, are a condition of resource mobilization in order to approach it.

Most of the times the cathartic discharge takes the form of tears, sighs, outbursts of anger, rebellion, use of harsh words or gestures (of course, with due limitations, meaning not to cause harm to oneself or to those around). In our study, the participants make use of words or gestures for emotional discharge.

In very many cases, education received yet from early ages, social requirements, the desire to protect or fear not to lose those close to us, determine people to hide or not to allow themselves to express a series of resentments or sufferings. Thus, instead of protesting when an injustice is done to them, they choose to be silent and to console themselves with the idea that "it is not nice to have fights". Instead of mourning the loss of a dead loved one, they choose to behave "with dignity", "not to put on a show" and to suffer in silence. Instead of asking people around them for the things they want and being happy when receiving them, they choose to remain frustrated, to feel unloved and neglected, because they have internalized a rule according to which "it is not good to ask and to oblige yourself". Of course, each of these examples are about unconscious choices, which happen almost daily in real life." The result is an accumulation of intrapsychical tensions which causes a state of acute pain, a collapsed image of oneself and sometimes outbursts which are unexpected and unjustified in the given context. Catharsis means free and open expression of emotions, removing defences, accepting one's own emotions and feelings, and of one's own Id. The one who exposes oneself loses the burden, gets liberated of some pieces of information which, by the significance allocated to them, are felt to be "oppressing".

A friend or adviser to whom open your heart, confessing your failures and errors, with which you can pray and share burdens, constitutes an essential factor of progress. Especially in the case we aren't able to shake our erroneous way of thinking or our detrimental actions.

Psychological resistance also means not accepting a new stimulus, even when it is a favourable, positive one. Any new, disturbing stimulus in a system (the appearance of the psychologist, for instance) will cause a normal "conflict", at an intra- and inter-personal level, as well as at an organizational one. A positive resolution of this "conflict" may lead to a greater adaptation, increasing the system flexibility. Most people have a tendency to enter into the dramatic

triangle (composed of the psychological roles of the Savior, the Persecutor and the Victim). For example, in their contacts with the psychologist, the individuals adopt the position of a victim (asking for help) for later to appear as a persecutor (refusing to assume any responsibility for doing something related to the existing problem). The psychologist is seen as a Savior who solves problems without any involvement on the part of the individual.

The relationship between the psychologist and those in the environment in which the individual activates involves the specialist's availability to actively listen, which ensures that there is, between the person in need and the psychologist, a sensitive, emotional and intellectual connection.

Truth obliges people to confess to their spiritual adviser all their sins, without intentionally omitting any of them, or else it would be a matter of disrespect to the Sacrament and would turn forgiveness useless. This is one aspect to which special attention should be paid. Hiding a single sin lets the confessed ones go unforgiven too. It is not true, of course, in the case where lack of confession is due to forgetting or lack of knowledge. For this reason, a good preparation for confession means to closely examine the self, which leads to better knowledge of oneself. It is necessary to know oneself both for confession, as well as for the cleansing of one's soul.

One of the limits of this research can be found in the reduced number of participants in the study. Research in this respect could continue by using a representative sample. It would be interesting to note if the results will be repeated. We could thus be able to determine to what extent the results show a characteristic of our society by comparison with Western ones and to what extent can we speak about cultural and mentality differences in this respect.

Models of confession and self-disclosure based on religious confession and therapy will differ in particular because of personality traits of the subjects, which make them more versatile and replicable in different social media. Further research should take into account the personality of each subject in the sample in order to see what type of personality is directed towards confession and which towards therapy.

The action of listening is an element to which the approaches of the communication phenomenon can no longer only grant a place in the area of interaction, as it can moreover provide perspectives on the size of the relationship and of the interaction itself.

References:

1. ANGHELESCU, M., Ionescu, C., Lăzărescu, Gh. (2007). *Dicționar de termeni literari*, Bucharest, Garamond.
2. CHELCEA, S. (2001). *Psihologie socială*. Note de curs. Bucharest, University of Bucharest.

3. CHIRU, I. (2003). *Comunicarea interpersonală*, Bucharest, Tritonic.
4. DOLTO, F., (2005). *Imaginea inconștientă a corpului*, Bucharest, Trei.
5. NEVEANU, P.P. (1978). *Dicționar de psihologie*, Bucharest, Albatros.
6. PLATON (1998). *Dialoguri*, Bucharest, IRI.
7. STEPHAN, C., Stephan, W. (1985). *Two Social Psychology*, Homewood, The Dorsey Press.
8. ZAMFIR, C.; Vlăsceanu, L. (1993). *Dicționar de sociologie*, Bucharest, Babel.
9. ZLATE, M. (2000). *Fundamentele psihologiei*, Bucharest, Pro Humanitas.