



Humor as an ice breaker in marital tension: A family communication perspective

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ABSTRACT

Humor is a communicative tool employed by a person to amuse others. Numerous research have been conducted on how humor is used in deflating tension in romantic relationships, but little to no research has been done on the study in the Ghanaian context. Using relief theory of humor, the researcher studied 20 married couples (10 males and 10 females) within and around the University of Cape Coast: 10 males and 10 females respectively were interviewed using a semi-structured interview guide. Based on the data analyzed, the researcher identified that humor function aids in the expression of a message that will otherwise be difficult to convey. This suggestion affirms that despite the presence of tension in marriage, humor always helps in calming nerves by reducing the tension.

Keywords: humor, marriage, married people, tension

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INTRODUCTION

Communication is a concept derived from a Latin word that means “being in a relation(ship) with, participating in, and bonding together” (Kucharskii & Ruthowska, 2019). Communication is the process of ensuring that meaning is shared, or information can be given out. According to Kucharski and Ruthowska (2019), “communication competence is an ability to use verbal or nonverbal behavior to accomplish the preferred goals in a manner that is appropriate to the context and effective” (p. 13). It is not only about communicating humorous messages but how the message is decoded by a partner is also important.

The word “humor” means different things to different people within a specific context. According to the Oxford dictionary, humor is the quality of being amusing or comic, especially as expressed in literature or speech. Hall (2017) defines humor as the ability an individual has to produce humorous communication or actions, to make jokes, tell funny stories and make others laugh. Also, from the perspective of Warren and McGraw (2015), humor is defined as a psychological response that is characterized by the positive emotion of amusement, to ascertain that something is funny, and has the tendency to be triggered to laughter. Thus, to Warren and McGraw (2015), humor is indicated by at least one of three responses: behavioral (laughing), cognitive (appraising something as “funny”), or emotional (experiencing positive emotion of amusement). Over years, researchers have conducted investigations on importance, functions, styles, and forms of humor and its contributions to positive relational outcomes.

According to Hall (2013), the function of humor in the context of an ongoing romantic relationship can be defined as the intended use of a humorous message or behavior to achieve a communication goal specific to the romantic relationship. Humour has become and continues to be very important to all aspects of our society today—in relationships, at workplaces, in professional groups, among others (Butzer & Kuiper, 2008; Friedman & Friedman, 2019). Humour is necessary due to the stress that comes with the daily activities of individuals and hence humor serves as a teaching tool to reduce stress and make people receptive to serious subjects (Friedman & Friedman, 2019; Guinster, 2008). Humor can be used in deflating tension between married couples. Campbell et al. (2008) argue that, besides humor enhancing positive feelings and bonding in relationships, humor can also serve to deflate tension in a relationship during times of disagreement or conflict. In as much as humor can be used to produce positive results in a relationship, it can also be used in more negative ways that may be detrimental to close relationships (Campbell et al., 2008; Winterheld et al., 2013). Although some researchers have identified a strong association between humor and relationship satisfaction (Weisfeld et al., 2011), for others, the effects of humor in relationship satisfaction is largely elusive, leading Barelds and Barelds-Dijkstra (2010) to claim that “humor plays a limited role in intimate, long-term relationships” (p. 458).

The study intends to find out how married people communicate humorous messages to deflate tension in their marriages. This study seeks to understand if humor as a communicative tool aid married

people to reduce tension in their marriage and if it ensures marital satisfaction.

Statement of the Problem

People see a sense of humor as a very desirable characteristic trait in a potential friend or romantic partner. Generally, strangers who share humorous experiences and laugh together during a first encounter tend to report a greater feeling of closeness and attraction to one another than those who share equally enjoyable but non-humorous experiences (Campbell et al., 2008). Research has often stated that the quality of humor styles and subsequently, their positive role in a couple's relationship may just be an artifact of general positivity in the way partners see themselves in the relationship. Humor styles are mostly adopted and used by married people to bring about stability and satisfaction whenever there is tension in their relationship. It is relevant to study the use of humor among married people in resolving conflict within the Ghanaian context because there is little to no local literature on the study under review. Some works have been done by various researchers on this very subject but in different countries and within a different context. For instance, Campbell et al. (2008), in their research established that, besides using humor in enhancing positive feelings and bonding in relationships, humor can also serve to stabilize a relationship during times of disagreement or conflict. In agreement with Campbell et al. (2008) also posited that humor, by its very nature, seeks to introduce something unique to human interaction that may contribute to a more stable emotional state of being. Even though, there are numerous works done on the use of humor in resolving marital conflict, notwithstanding, little to no local literature can be found on the subject matter. This study will serve as local literature, which will help understand how differently humor can be used positively in this part of the world, and its impact in deflating tension among Ghanaian married people.

Objective of the Study

1. To identify the forms of humor that married people use in deflating tension in their marriages.
2. To establish whether humor can deflate tension between married people in marriage.
3. To explore gender variations in the use of humor to deflate tension between married people.

Significance of the Study

There is a notion that the use of humor in marriage helps reduce tension and more significantly, stabilizes the marriage. The use of humor to reduce conflict among married people, will serve as an extension of knowledge in the area of marital communication in Ghana. At the end of this research, the findings may serve as a guide to stakeholders, especially married people, marriage counselors, psychologists, and/or alternative conflict resolution experts in their line of duty, and how to advise their clients. The study could provide married people with the most effective way to handle conflict using positive humor-infused messages. It could also reveal to couples the effectiveness of humor in reducing conflict, and also it may help in maximizing the use of humor among married people.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Forms of Humor

One of the objectives of humor study is to establish the forms of humor and to identify which form is effective in deflating tension among married people. The Cambridge advanced learner's dictionary defines marriage as a legally accepted relationship between two people who live together. Hall (2013) explored the various functions of the forms of humor and concluded that some forms of humor played an inconsistent and limited role in predicting relational satisfaction. He continued by saying that, to account for better humor value between married people, the researcher should focus on the styles of humor and its functions. Having a sense of humor alone does not influence relationship satisfaction; but rather how the sense of humor is used. Martin et al. (2003) established the existence, distinctiveness, and divergent external outcomes of four humor styles, which include affiliative humor, self-enhancing humor, self-defeating humor, and aggressive humor. These humor styles differ from one another in terms of their strengths and weaknesses. Two forms or styles of humor (affiliative and self-enhancing humor) are considered to be relatively healthy and beneficial to personal well-being and in relationships. The other two forms (aggressive and self-defeating humor) are thought to be relatively unhealthy and potentially detrimental to relationships.

According to Martin et al. (2003), affiliative humor entails saying amusing things, cracking jokes, and participating in spontaneous banter to make others happy, promote relationships, and lessen interpersonal tension in a way that is beneficial to oneself and others. Interpersonal closeness and intimacy in partnerships are enhanced by this type of humor. For instance, amusing someone when he/she feels emotionally down breeds some sort of attraction. Self-enhancing humor, according to Martin et al. (2003), looks at how humor may be utilized to control one's emotions and manage stress by retaining a hilarious and optimistic viewpoint during times of crisis, and by a predisposition to be amused by life's incongruities regularly (e.g., making oneself feel better by seeing the humor in everyday events). Although the two varieties of humor are similar in many respects, Martin et al. (2003) suggest that self-enhancing humor is more intrapsychic in nature, whereas affiliative humor is more favorably utilized. Sarcasm, tease, ridicule, and other forms of aggressive humor were characterized by Martin et al. (2003) as the use of humor to denigrate or manipulate others, such as in sarcasm, tease, and ridicule (Liang, 2014). They go on to describe this form of humor as a technique for her to enhance herself at the expense of others, and it has to do with a desire to convey humor without considering how it can affect others.

Finally, self-defeating humor comprises overtly self-deprecating humor, attempts to ingratiate oneself and amuse others by doing or saying amusing things at one's own expense, and laughing along with others when criticized or disparaged. Individuals that adopt this style of behavior, on the other hand, may appear to be clever or humorous. According to Hall's (2017) meta-analysis, negative humor from a partner that embarrasses, demeans, denigrates, or deflates the self can lead to negative relationship evaluations. Aggressive humor does not contribute to relational satisfaction, it might even lead to divorce. Liang (2014) posits that humor in itself is neither positive nor negative, but it is entirely about how it is used.

Can Humor Break the Ice in Marriage?

Humor is perceived as a good character trait that makes a person more likable by others and makes them fun to be around. It has become necessary to have someone in your life who can cheer you up when you are down. Based on this, our research team wants to establish if there is a link between humor and the reduction of tension in marriages. According to Hall (2017), being perceived as a humorous person can help or hurt a romantic relationship, and the value of humor in a romantic relationship depends on how it is used (Hall, 2017; Liang, 2014). The advantages of humor production may be valuable to the person who produces it, but not so much to the joker's partner or relationship (Hall, 2013).

When humor is truly relational- that is, it is cocreated and enjoyed by both partners, its role in the relationship is greatly enhanced (Hall, 2017; Liang, 2014). The sharing of jokes and laughter between married couples is a display of mutual intimacy and romantic interest (Hall, 2017). Shared humor is a recipe for a good and healthy marriage, though not entirely but it shows that partners can understand each other's humorous messages. The feeling that someone gets your joke means they get you too, even when those jokes are in poor taste (Hall & Sereno, 2010).

Martin et al. (2003) in their development of the humor styles questionnaire hypothesized that sense of humor is a multi-faceted construct that is best viewed as a commonly related trait. Their study showed more interest in how humor use can affect the psychological well-being of people. They developed a 2x2 conceptualization of everyday functions of humor and distinguished four models of humor namely, affiliative, self-enhancing, aggressive, and self-defeating. Affiliative humor, according to Martin et al. (2003), is defined as the use of jokes and friendly amusing banter to strengthen interpersonal ties. The ability to find humor in life's pressures is a hallmark of self-enhancing humor. Sarcasm and put-downs are used to injure or manipulate others in aggressive humor and individuals attempt to amuse others by making excessively negative amusing remarks about themselves is known as self-defeating humor.

For the sake of this study, our focus will be on the two beneficial humor types (affiliative and self-enhancing). Extraversion, cheerfulness, self-esteem, intimacy, relationship satisfaction, and generally positive moods and emotions are likely to be associated with affiliative humor according to Martin et al. (2003). A typically amusing outlook on life, a predisposition to be constantly amused by life's incongruities, and the ability to maintain a humorous perspective even amid stress or adversity are all characteristics of self-enhancing humor. In contrast to affiliative humor, this humor is more intrapsychic than interpersonal in nature, and so is unlikely to be highly related to extraversion. Campbell et al. (2008) claimed that affiliative humor may be particularly beneficial for relationship satisfaction and that aggressive humor in a partner appears to be particularly linked with relationship discontent, in keeping with Martin et al. (2003)'s hypothesis. They also claimed that self-defeating and self-enhancing behaviors have little to no correlation with relationship quality metrics.

In their study *'Bad humor, bad marriage: Humor styles in divorced and married couples'*, Saroglou et al. (2010) claimed that while humor makes a partner appealing, women in particular regard humorous men to be less clever and trustworthy than their non-humorous counterparts. Constructive (self-enhancing and/or affiliative) was connected to higher marital happiness and no divorce status, especially among men,

according to the researchers. Self-deprecating humor, especially among women, predicted marital pleasure but also divorce. Men's usage of antisocial humor (aggressive) has been connected to divorce and poor relationship quality. In their research, positive opinions of one's spouse's humor were found to be linked to marital problems. Also, married people seem to credit their marriages' successes to their shared sense of humor among other things. Hall (2013) with a different viewpoint on how humor can be used positively in marriage did not only focus on the forms of humor like Saroglou et al. (2010) did, he explored the functions of humor as well. Humor has five positive communicative functions. According to Hall (2013), humor can be used to communicate happiness, share affection, cope with stress, let go of tension, and apologize. According to him, one of the most well-known uses of humor in romantic relationships is to transmit positivity, enjoyment, and levity of one's partner. In romantic relationships, having fun, being witty, and being amenable to joking around were also important roles of humor. The expression of affection, which can be done through the use of pet names, affectionate dialogue, and other adorable actions, is the second function of humor. He claims that when humor is utilized to show affection, it is more likely to help a relationship flourish. The third and fourth communicative functions of humor are concerned with the role of humor in stress management and dispute resolution, respectively. According to his research, one of the oldest roles of humor is to relieve stress and tension and having a sense of humor is linked to increased immunity to infection. Also, his study drawing inspiration from Butzer and Kuiper (2008) sample report shows that one-third of romantic couples use humor to manage interpersonal conflict. When it comes to dispute resolution, couples that used more affiliative and less aggressive humor seem to be happier in their marriage. Finally, the apology function of humor is employed to convey an apology or an admitting of fault. according to Hall (2013), humor can be used to defend oneself or admit mistakes before others do. Humor's ability to express difficult-to-say messages is one of its most useful functions.

Gender Variations in the Use of Humor

The Oxford language dictionary defines gender as one of two sexes (male or female), especially when social and cultural distinctions are regarded rather than biological differences. As a relationship partner, both men and women appreciate someone with a "good sense of humor" (Bressler et al., 2005). According to Saroglou et al. (2010), humor is a significant component of a partner's beauty, and its presence boosts romantic relationship desirability. They go on to say that a partner's positive humor style indicates a trustworthy self and respect for interpersonal relationships.

According to Satici and Deniz (2020), marriage appears to be a transition state towards creating one's own family in an individual's experience and aim of meeting the emotional needs of individuals. For an important interpersonal relationship like marriage, it should be a source of happiness but for others, it is a worrying situation. Satici and Deniz (2020) attribute this disparity in marital satisfaction to the different upbringing of people with different values and expectations and hence partners must endeavor to meet each other halfway.

According to two research conducted by Bressler et al. (2005), men are not drawn to amusing women, the phrase "good sense of humor" is employed differently by men and women. Men appreciate their partners' responsiveness to their humor more than women, according to the study, whereas women valued humor production and receptivity

equally. They also proposed in another study with participants that women liked men who produced humor in all forms of interactions, whereas men chose women who were open to their humor, especially in romantic relationships. This shows that in marriage, men use humor to create shared laughter and intimacy, hence they expect their partners to understand the humorous messages and be able to decode them. Women on the other hand expect their husbands to create humorous situations as well as being able to understand their humorous messages.

This, according to Bressler et al. (2005), is a recipe for marital satisfaction. In a study of newly married couples, Campbell et al. (2008) revealed that when husbands use more humor during problem-solving, the couple is more likely to be separated or divorced later, especially when the couple is dealing with a lot of major stressful events. They hypothesized that husbands' use of humor during times of tension may be a mechanism for them to temporarily redirect challenges and escape discomfort without genuinely engaging and resolving the issues, which could contribute to increased marital instability in the long run.

Hall (2019) investigates whether sex influences the importance of humor in romantic relationships and whether sex influences relationship pleasure. According to his findings, women rate men's humor production higher than women's humor production. He contends that women should prefer humor in long-term partnerships over long-term relationships if the generation of humor during courtship is a tool for assessing the odds of long-term collaboration and compatibility.

He says that humor is a sexually chosen attribute that is a true indication of intelligence and creativity by males and evaluated by females, however, Hall (2019) found no link between humor creation and intelligence, or creativity as mentioned by others. In contrast to Hall (2019), Saroglou et al. (2010) argued that while humor is an important component of a partners' beauty, women perceive humorous men to be less intelligent than non-humorous men. Women's use of humor is strongly linked to their partner's happiness than men's use of humor (Hall, 2013).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The research is based on relief theory, this explains the process by which the use of humor affect marriage in the presence of tension and also explains how humor sustains the liveliness, cohesion, and happiness of a marriage.

According to Meyer (2000), humor arises from the relaxation felt when a person's tensions are engendered and dissipated. The release of nervous energy leads to the relief theory. In a nutshell, relief theory of humor is an umbrella term encompassing studies looking at the enjoyable effects of humor creation and appreciation as a means of reducing personal stress or social tension

The physiological or physic-physiological nature of the alleviation is idea is obvious. The theory reached its zenith when Freud (1960/1905) proposed his hypothesis on how laughter can release tension and psychic energy, the theory attained its pinnacle. This energy builds in the human body over time, but it is no longer useful, thus it must be released. This release is uninhibited and manifests as laughter. This is a prevalent belief among individuals who feel that laughing is good for one's health. Like Spencer (1860) proposed earlier, humor is vested from the idea of energy been conserved, bottled up, and

then released like so much steam venting to avoid an explosion. This theory, first developed by Spencer (1860), was made famous by Freud (1960/1905). Many people may fear or find it difficult or uncomfortable to discuss certain subjects, for example, rape, impotence, homosexuality, violence, racism, and incest. Humor gives these people a socially acceptable way to relieve their tension about these sensitive areas Mulder and Nijholt (2002).

This "psychic energy" in our bodies, according to Freud (1960/1905), is designed to help us repress feeling in these taboo areas. We chuckle when this energy is released, not only because of the energy release but also because these prohibited thoughts are being entertained. When humor replaces negative feelings like pain or despair, we experience a pleasurable sensation, according to a more traditional version of the relief theory.

To alleviate a potentially uncomfortable situation, communicators take advantage of this source of humor by telling jokes, generally at the start of their speech. People often experience dissonance after deciding or sensing the approach of conflicting and undesired things (Friedman & Friedman, 2019). Because people desire and find it pleasing to reduce dissonance, speakers who do so can create humor Meyer (2000). Simple and even awkward laughter during conversations has been found to relieve tension and facilitate further interaction between the parties. The theory does not explain why we find humor funny and can be seen as a theory of laughter.

METHODS

A research design, according to Groenewald (2004) and Holloway (2005), is a theory of knowledge, which serves to decide how a social phenomenon will be studied. This study used a qualitative research approach. A qualitative approach is a research methodology that uses no statistical or quantitative methods to depict and explain a person's experiences, interactions, or social situations (Davidson et al., 2002; Seale, 1999). The researcher used the qualitative descriptive research design to seek empirical evidence to support the study through the use of an interview guide (Abdolghader et al., 2018).

Target Population and Sample Size

The target population consisted of married persons in and around University of Cape Coast (UCC) some of whom were lecturers and others were students. In all, 20 married persons were interviewed during the exercise with a gender balance of 10 males and 10 females. The purposive sampling method used restricts participation to only individuals who have in-depth knowledge of the study and therefore limits the participants who can be engaged in the work. The researchere visited the participants in person, introduce himself to them. This offers the researcher the context the privilege of observing the non-verbal cues of the participants. This will be done under strict adherence to COVID-19 protocols. Thee presented an official document that explains the intended purpose of the study to each participant after which further explanations will be offered if the need be.

Research Instrument

The data was gathered from the participants using a semi-structured interview. According to Turner (2010), one of the most popular areas of research in qualitative research design is the interview guide. A semi-structured interview guide gives n in-depth information on the experiences and perspectives of participants on a certain topic.

The data was gathered through recording. The recorded was transcribed and thematized to arrive at the research findings. The participants were informed, assured anonymity, minimal risk and many others.

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Forms of Humor

This part of the work focuses on the forms of humor, one of the three objectives expounded before. In the data collected through interviews, certain forms of humor like the affiliated were more dominant than the others. The result of the findings indicates that different forms of humor help deflate tension in marriages. In an interview with one of the participants from within UCC, she agrees to using various forms of humor to reduce tension in her marriage. She says:

I make use of pet names in addressing my husband any time he is not happy with me. I do not make it a habit by normalizing the name, so he feels the uniqueness of it anytime I use it. Aside from the pet name, I also employ the use of smiles and touch. What I do not is denigrate him, whether seriously or jovially, because words have power. This also helps in strengthening the bond between us (female participant one, 31 July 2021).

From the above interview, it is obvious that married people adopt various forms of humor in their marriage for different reasons. The participants are not oblivious of the other forms of humor like self-defeating, self-enhancing, and aggressive humor, but she chooses to use affiliative humor because of its benefits to marital satisfaction. Affiliative humor, according to Martin et al. (2003) entails saying amusing things, cracking jokes, pet names, and participating in spontaneous witty banter to amuse people, facilitate relationships, and relieve interpersonal tension in a way that affirming of both one and others. In an interview with another participant from within the university community, he affirms using affiliated humor more often because it ensures marital satisfaction. He and his wife try to shun any humor that will displease the other. In his own words he says:

My wife loves to smile a lot, and that creates a positive atmosphere at home. What we do not is denigrate each other in the name of being humorous. We both have our limits (male participant one, 31 July 2021).

The participant is fully aware of what negative forms of humor can do in his marriage; hence he tries to avoid it. According to Hall's (2017) meta-analysis, a partner's negative humor embarrasses, demeans, denigrates, and deflates the self, which can lead to unfavorable relationships evaluations. Aggressive humor does not contribute to relational satisfaction; it might even lead to divorce. In line with this assertion, another participant we interviewed disclosed that she employs the use of humor very often because she does not live with her husband due to working conditions. Hence, any little time they get to share, she uses humor to ensure that there is little to no tension at home. She resorts to apologizing to her partner just to ensure that the happy mood goes on uninterrupted. She says:

I am the type who always wants to make people laugh and happy, and I like to be at peace with the people that matter to

me. I most often apologize to my husband to ensure that there is peace. He also does the same when he realizes that he has not done well. After that, we make fun of the situation and let everything die down (female participant two, 31 July 2021).

In an interview with the different participants who also held the view of the participants above she explained that:

My husband is the type that is always serious, and he never apologizes. But what I do is apologize in a nice and funny way to calm him down to reduce the tension at home and ensure that peace prevails I sometimes prepare his favorite food just to apologize also what he does when he knows what he has said is to take the family out so that the changing environment can help me to let go of the conflict (female participant three, 31 July 2021).

To corroborate the interviews above, Hall (2013) established that sharing enjoyment, expressing affection, coping with stress, letting go of disagreement, and apologizing are all functions of humor that have been supported by prior research and are essential in romantic relationships. Humor he believes can be used to manage interpersonal conflict. Couples who use more affiliative and less aggressive humor are happier in their relationships, according to Hall (2013), who agrees with Martin et al. (2003). Generally, the participants we interviewed mostly made use of affiliative humor, which in research is regarded as a positive function of humor. In an interview with another participant, she says that:

I make use of humor when there is tension at home, but what I have realized is that humor does not work immediately in the heat of the moment. It takes a while for both of us to calm down and that is when the use of humor becomes effective. Because when tempers are high, the tendency to misunderstand one's humorous message is high and that takes the effectiveness out of humor (female participant four, 31 July 2021).

It is very important that married people must be able to understand and react favorably to each other's humor because it helps to strengthen their bond of intimacy. Humor can be used positively or negatively depending on the individual using it. When and how humor should be used is very important. The same participant further said:

I feel offended anytime I have serious concerns and my husband counters with a form of humorous message. I get the feeling that he does not want to talk about the problem, or he just does not want to take me seriously, which adds up to the already existing tension (female participant four, 31 July 2021).

The responses gathered from the various interviews suggest that frequent use of affiliative humor by most married people helps to reduce tension in their marriage. Some married people make use of humor without knowing its implications because they just want to create laughter and this is why Liang (2014) posits that humor in itself is neither negative nor positive but the how it is used in this corroborates with our findings, which that positive humor forms are necessary for every marriage.

Can Humor Break the Ice in Marriage?

This section attempts to find answers to research objective two. To achieve this, the data from the interview were discussed and analyzed to establish whether humor can deflate tension between married couples in marriage. The results obtained from the study support the research objective. It was predicted that humor can deflate tension between married couples thereby fostering a positive environment for them to thrive. Results of the findings from the interviews showed that the presence of humor among couples serves as a life wire of marriage.

In an interview with a married man whose marriage is nearing a decade, he agrees that humor is an essential element in reducing tension in marriages. In his own words, the man stated that:

Because of the presence of enormous humor in our marriage life. Anytime there is tension, no matter the magnitude of the issue, my wife or I can only prolong it when one of us fails to look at the other in the face. But once there is eye contact and I smile or she smiles depending on who has affected the other, no matter how angry we might be that will be the end of the anger (male participant two, 31 July 2021).

From the interview, one thing is certain that humor is effective in deflating tension between married couples. The respondent expressed that the presence of humor in his relationship promotes cohesion and peaceful relationship due to its ability in killing tension. The respondent also clearly articulated the various means by which one can express humor and this is through a smile, touching, name-calling, patting, dancing, etc. The above research supports Hall's (2013) claim that humor may be in five constructive ways; share enjoyment, show affection, cope with stress, let go of conflict and apologize. He went on to say that humor's role in coping with stress and managing conflict is related to its positive communicative function. That is to say that one-third of romantic couples use humor to manage interpersonal conflict.

In another interview with a married woman from UCC, she indicated that she has come to realize the important role humor had been playing in sustain her marriage in moments of tension. She notes:

My husband and I respect each other's humor. And more often than not, I employ it when I feel that I am wrong in a situation, and he does the same too. Interestingly, there has been no time when both of us think we were right about an issue. Whenever there is an issue, one will always determine that he/she is wrong. And so would adopt humor to express an apology. Whenever this is done is truly respected and welcome (female participant five, 31 July 2021).

Similar to the earlier interview the above interview also affirms that humor can deflate tension between married couples in marriage. The respondent also reiterated how an apology can be rendered humorously. This verifies Hall's (2013) claim that the function of humor in apologizing is to communicate an apology or an acknowledgment of wrongdoing. He went further to say that this type of humor can be used to defend or to admit errors before others do. This humor function aids in the expression of a message that would otherwise be difficult to convey. These suggestions affirm that despite the presence of tension in marriage humor always helps in calming nerves by reducing the tension that occurs. According to one of the interviewees:

My husband mostly whenever he realized that I am angry or moody. He knows what to do to bring me back to my normal self. I am a little bit temperamental and often I react to issues. When this happens, I mostly express my state of mood in silence. Once my husband realizes this, he does just one simple thing, which will cause me to be myself and this is through touching certain parts of my body (female participant six, 31 July 2021).

This, as confirmed by Hall (2017) by saying, the sharing of jokes and laughter between married couples is a display of mutual intimacy and romantic interest. Shared humor is a recipe for a good marriage, though not entirely but it shows that partners can understand each other's humorous messages.

Gender Variations in the Use of Humor

In this section, we tried to provide relevant answers to research objective three. Objective three talks about the issue of gender variation is a term as an expression to describe gender identity or behavior drawing on the outcome variable. The subject of gender in humor, like other variables, has no longer been adequately portrayed or explored with appropriate categories of humorous behavior of females in high comedy, mass media comedy, and everyday banter.

Women's isolation from the hilarious world was reinforced in reference to authors like Satici and Deniz (2020). Although humor has since been associated with muscularity rather than femininity, our study in humor used in deflating tension in marriages has provided relevant data disbanding such notion. One of our respondents at UCC:

I could say that my husband never uses humor when there is tension. He is not the kind of person who uses humor in any circumstances (female participant seven, 31 July 2021).

Similarly, another respondent also shared a common opinion as to our first respondent. She said:

Is amazing but my husband does not use humor in any of our marriage conflicts. She does not even say sorry when he errs, not to think of him even trying to use humor (female participant eight, 31 July 2021).

These statements reveal a different notion about humor and muscularity as Satici and Deniz (2020) claimed that the issue of disparity in culture is the main factor piloting tension in marriages. He attributes this disparity in marital satisfaction to the different upbringing of people with different values and expectations and hence partners must endeavor to meet each other halfway. This was kindly expressed in one of our respondents:

You see, in our marriage, we are from two different cultures. I'm from the Akan side and he is from the Volta and Krobo sides. So, we are both a few worlds apart. So, when it comes to child upbringing there is always tension. My partner grew up in this place, which it's more of a rural setting. It's not so much of an urban setting. And is not a village too, but. I was brought up in the city. So, there are a lot of things he did not see growing up, but he may have seen them later when he grew up and moved out of his hometown. So, most of the time when we are talking, and there is something we have to talk about our daughter's upbringings and he goes like, no, it's not supposed to

be done that way or is not done like that. I will tease like, 'Eeii Agzikpo people di33 this is how you do things?' (female participant nine, 31 July 2021).

This is further investigated as other respondents were of the same view concerning the issues of different cultural backgrounds as beliefs. Speaking to a married man in the Cape Coast environment he said:

My wife is a person who likes to keep track of our everyday activities. She wants us to report our daily activities to each other. On the daily basis, she tells me where she goes from time to time. She tells me when she leaves her office to another place when she moves from that place to somewhere new or even back to her office. But I do not mostly do that, and this creates tension. Not that I cannot do it but I was not brought up that way, so I'm not used to it. So, in the cause of the tension, I use humor like cracking jokes and teasing her for being angry over nothing. Eventually, we will start laughing and she teases back too (male participant three, 31 July 2021).

Another respondent believe that cultural differences lead to conflict in marriage, she whether said that every individual was raised differently, and this can create tension, but we must adjust to each other, she said:

We do not have any issues in our marriage. What I have learned is that we came from a different home, and we have to adjust to each other. Is important that you do not have to lie as always tell the truth. Like I did this and that. Lying and trying to hide certain things is not good, just bring everything out and you must be faithful to each other. It makes everyone happy when my partner uses humor (female participant ten, 31 July 2021).

It can be seen that the use of humor is not only a tool for deflating tension, but it creates an interpersonal bond among married people. According to Saroglou et al. (2010), humor is a key aspect of a partner's attractiveness, and its preservation makes a romantic relationship more desirable. They go on to state that a partner's positive humor styles show a trustworthy personality and an appreciation of interpersonal interactions. They go on to say that a partner's positive humor styles reveal a trustworthy personality and a "care for interpersonal relationships". In a conversation with another married man, he stated:

My wife is not a much humorous person. When there is tension in our marriage and I do not attempt to resolve it, she will prolong that tension for a longer time. So, I will wait in the night, pamper and cuddles her and tell her some jokes, which make her happy and we resolve our issues, and that chapter of tension is closed (male participant four, 31 July 2021).

Not only does this affirm the definition of humor stipulated by Saroglou et al. (2010). Also, Satici and Deniz (2020) are of the view that marriage appears to be a transition state towards creating one's own family in an individual's experience and aim of meeting the emotional needs of the individual. Another respondent also affirms this:

I like cracking jokes, I do so when there is tension between myself and my partner. When I crack jokes it makes her happy

and I'm also happy then we can talk about our problems (male participant five, 31 July 2021).

To expatiate more on the issue of gender variation as a medium to humor initiation among married people. Hall (2019) examines whether sex influences the links between partner humor production and relationship pleasure, as well as the role of humor in a romantic relationship.

After a thorough analysis and discussion of the data, the following are key findings obtained from the study. These are, as follows: Firstly, it was revealed that humor plays a vital role in resolving conflict among married people. According to Martin et al. (2003), they revealed four forms of humor namely, Affiliative humor, self-defeating humor, self-enhancing humor, and aggressive humor. During our interview, we discovered that Affiliative humor is frequently used among married people to deflate tension in their marriage. We identified that most marriage conflicts were a result of sex tension, financial crises, and child upbringing. The above mentioned becomes friction in many marital conflicts. Individual ideologies turn to create misunderstanding among married people. Affiliative humor such as telling or cracking jokes, the use of pet names, engaging in funny things, etc in many occurrences set in to break the barrier of tension and also to normalize their marriage crises. Secondly, the findings showed that humor can deflate tension between married people. The study revealed that married people contribute effectively to resolving tension. They do so mostly through the use of Affiliative humor such as pet names, cracking of jokes, saying funny things, and engaging. Being viewed as a humorous person according to Hall (2017), may or may not enhance one's romantic relationship. This means to make a marriage or relationship work depends on the individual. In the findings, we found that to make a relationship work base on humor must be a deliberate attempt by both entities. This is because if the man is in the mood to use humor to deflate any tension and the lady is not ready, it becomes difficult to get rid of the issue. Given this, Hall (2013) underlined that the importance of humor in a romantic relationship is dependent on how it is used. The advantages of humor production may be beneficial to the one who produces it, but not so much to the joker's spouse or relationship. Focusing on the literature review, it was postulated that humor can indeed break the ice or tension in a marriage. Although some scholars disagree with this, it can be demonstrated that humor may keep things intriguing, fresh, and energetic in long-term partnerships. It can also assist couples in resolving problems, disagreements, and little irritations that can accumulate over time and sever even the strongest of relationships. According to the study, humor must be reciprocated, and sharing the pleasure of humor fosters intimacy and connection between couples. When married people laugh or make each other laugh, it strengthens their relationship. This tie functions as a powerful barrier in a relationship against stress, arguments, disappointments, and rough patches. Finally, the findings explored gender variations and how they use humor in solving conflict. Men were seen as the dominant people when it comes to the use of humor in relationships as compared to women.

As a relationship partner, both men and women appreciate someone with a "good sense of humor" (Bressler et al., 2005). Men and women both use humor and laughter to attract one another and express affection, but they do so in different ways. During the interview, we noticed the males use humor to deflate tension as compared to the females. For example, though men use humor in relationships more

compared to women, the content of this humor is negative in the form of hurting or demeaning the other. Similarly, they stated that husbands' use of humor during times of stress could be a tactic for them to momentarily redirect tension and reduce problems without completely engaging and resolving the issue, which could lead to long-term instability.

The constructive use of humor appears to be just as important as the presence of feelings such as love, trust, and affection, as well as sound communication, to properly preserve a marriage. This shows that in marriage, men use humor to create shared laughter and intimacy, hence they expect their partners to understand the humorous messages and be able to decode them.

CONCLUSION

The study based its findings on Campbell et al. (2008) who identified four types of humor: affiliative humor, self-defeating humor, self-enhancing humor, and aggressive humor. It has been established that among the types of humor, affiliative humor is the most commonly used by married people. This is because the elements such as saying funny things, telling jokes, use of pet names, etc. expressed when using affiliative humor are benefits to marital satisfaction. From the above, it can be concluded that when positive humor is adopted and use effectively in marriage during tense situations it will help calm the tension.

Also, the study reveals that humor is an essential element in sustaining marriages. Since it can reduce tension and helps create conducive room for married people to discuss their issues regardless of their serious nature.

Recommendations

Firstly, couples must be counseled on the important functions of positive humor in resolving conflict in their marriages. It should be a prerequisite during premarital counseling that couples will be educated on the positive and negative effects of humor and how positive humor helps in creating marital satisfaction and stability. Couples must be made to understand that shared laughter is a recipe for a long-lasting relationship. One of the participants we interviewed who doubled as a counselor said that we have enlightened her on the benefits of humor and how it can be used as a positive tool to create a happy and stable home. She was grateful and promised to enlighten her clients on the important use of humor in marriages.

Secondly, individuals must endeavor to make use of positive humor in their relationships. People need to understand the benefits of positive humor; shunning negative forms of humor, which tend to create disaffection. Laughter shared even with a stranger tends to illicit good lasting memories, then imagine sharing laughter with your loved one. Humor is and will continue to be a very important communicative tool that needs to be appreciated by all.

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