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Man and Woman – the Dilemma of Marital Evolution

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Abstract: *Although in the social discourse, men and women are characterized by values that are specific to modernity or postmodernity, however, the analysis of social data often shows that the process of evolution must be located rather at the intersection between tradition and modernity. Thus, the status of men and women is in the process of being reconstructed and this is not a comfortable stage, especially for men. Marital modernity requires, as a matter of priority, a re-evaluation of the role structure and gender relations in the direction of equity, and in this endeavor, the greatest challenge is felt by men, who have to relinquish the old advantages of their traditional status. In this respect, a first hypothesis would be to consider women as having the main role in stimulating this action, and men as being less motivated to give up, by their own accord, the advantages offered by the traditional marital framework.*
From another point of view, we rhetorically ask whether women are ready for this challenge and to what extent the social context becomes supportive in this transition of role and gender relations.
The study aims to make an analysis of gender and marital role relations, in order to identify the challenges of functionality in the contemporary transitional couple.

Keywords: *traditionality, modernity, postmodernity, conjugal role, gender.*

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1. Gender views - between stereotype and reality

People spontaneously categorize the information and events they experience. To simplify the processing of the information they receive from the surrounding environment, people mentally group objects, ideas, and events that have common properties and characteristics.

In the Grand Dictionary of Psychology, Bloch et. al (2006) define stereotypes as "a cognitive schema associated with a criterion, such as physical belonging, gender, religious, political, ethnic, sexual identity and so on, criteria that define our beliefs and guide our judgments about social groups and their members" (Bloch et. al., 2006, p. 1175). Thus, stereotypes are sets of characteristics or traits attributed to the members of a social group; these are shortcuts in thinking about a particular trait of individuals that help us categorize or describe those individuals.

Stereotyping provides a degree of comfort and security in understanding things and a certain adaptation to the self-perceived reality. It can be understood as a "structured mental schema that contributes to perception, to making inferences, to justifying the conduct of the social observer in relation to the evaluated target" (Mitrofan, 2004, p. 40).

In general, the social observer is not concerned with the exhaustive analysis of the information they possess and the structuring of reasoning after a lengthy process of thought, but rather they select and systematize the multitude of information in order to facilitate interaction with other groups; they try to interpret the events they encounter. Stereotypes can therefore arise from these shortcuts in thinking that favor the rapid processing of new information. Stereotypes have two connotations: positive stereotypes, when traits that are positively valued in society can be found in their structure, we speak of, and negative stereotypes, when they encompass traits that are negatively valued in society (Cristea, 2010).

An important characteristic of stereotypes is that they can be acquired at a very young age, most often at a time when the subject has no knowledge or experience of the stereotyped groups or situations. Stereotypes are highly stable over time, persisting even when it is proven otherwise. Changes in stereotypes generally occur in response to a social change of a certain magnitude and are often the simplified expression of an era (Ibid, p.98).

Thus, young people assimilate conjugal views and values that can subsequently generate unequal relationships between men and women, because they are most often socialized in environments that are more

traditional than the generation they belong to. And, while gender inequality was justified by specific patterns in the traditional context, its reproduction in modernity is based solely on social stereotypes. The widespread use of the stereotypical formulations of the image of men and women seems to give sufficient legitimacy and validity to ideas describing the priority of men in the sphere of social and private life.

Stereotyping, which is the phenomenon of applying stereotypes, is determined by many factors. For example: a reduced amount of information about the social target, the emotional affective disposition of the stereotype, the illusion of correlation or the competing relationship between two stimuli or two schemas.

Although the methods of measuring stereotypes are diverse, from a content-based perspective, stereotypes can be measured by: visual identification, presentation of a list of personality traits, percentage estimation of the number of people possessing a trait, and by semantic differentiation (Mitrofan, 2004, p. 42).

In making a general analysis of marital relationships, we observe that the volume of stereotypes specific to this field is generous. There are stereotypes describing the image of men and women, stereotypes describing the types of relationships between them, stereotypes about the specific tasks of the conjugal role, stereotypes about the image that status brings, stereotypes specific to marriage, consensual union, etc. Another category of stereotypes dismantled by specialists concerns the security of personal property in the family or various aspects of inheritance law (Creţu & Florea, 2021).

Before starting to expose gender stereotypes, it would be strategic to briefly analyze gender roles, how they are formed and how they relate to gender stereotypes.

It should be noted that gender stereotyping consists of a set of beliefs about the psychological character and type of activities characteristic of men and women. Thus, gender roles are definitions of behaviors, while gender stereotypes are beliefs and attitudes about masculinity and femininity. These two concepts, gender role and gender stereotype, tend to be associated. When a person associates a pattern of behavior to either a male or a female, they may disregard variations or exceptions and resort to generalizations, inevitably associating that behavior to a particular gender. For example, a man who cooks when he has guests may be considered to be kept "under the covers" by his wife. Gender roles therefore provide the 'raw material' for gender stereotypes (Cristea, 2010).

From another perspective, stereotypes can also be seen through their antithesis. Men consider women incapable of a wide range of skills, while women may consider men shallow in performing tasks. The entire social history of the evolution of status for women shows that not only men, but also women agreed that in their natural condition, women were incapable, while men directed and controlled their external relations. However, a simple analysis of the distribution of specifically traditional roles makes it easy to see that a much greater number of tasks were allocated to women in relation to their husbands. This means that their level of specialization was higher than that of their husbands. And yet, even if men socially recognize all these specifically female roles, they paradigmatically do not recognize women's level of competence. Women have been socially educated by tradition to accept this subservience to men, to perform their tasks without the right to complain about role inequality. And, although it seems to be long gone, the scenario of role inequality is still played out today, for two reasons: the first one is the culture in which they have been socialized and the second is their level of competence. First, men are not socialized in their families of origin to take on roles considered to belong to women. In the families of origin, as a rule, the distribution of roles is still traditional and the socialization of young people follows the same patterns. Second, there is the question of competence. Taking on new tasks often raises the question of the man's competence. The lack of experience in carrying out certain tasks, such as housework, cooking and looking after one's own children, means that the woman has to take part in them for a while or take them on completely.

Another stereotype, which is currently widely legitimized, concerns the distribution of authority in the contemporary couple. Supported by a "glory of the past", a large category of men today still claim the "natural" right to take priority in decisions and manage the family group. For this category, modernity is a challenge against which they have to find arguments.

Reluctance to embrace innovation, which is primarily specific to men, due to the loss of certain status values, tends to slow down this modernization in role behavior once again. In today's social space, it is difficult to argue the superiority of male status based on objective reasoning, which is why the tendency of using arguments based on social stereotypes becomes a strategy. With their supposed social 'legitimacy', generated by the fact that they are widely known and little contested, social stereotypes are often used for argumentation: 'Who should cook in the family? A: The woman!; Who is the best cook? A: The man!". Thus, the

adaptation to marital role equality is atypical - men assume status values, but not the related roles. We often have a modernity of statements, rather than concrete facts that define gender relations (Apostu, 2015).

2. A new premise in conjugality

In a counterintuitive intersection of modernity with the traditional world, discourses about the family and its vitality focus too much on the image of a static family, as we know it in relation to the environments we come from. However, a new trajectory of conjugality shows a strong intergenerational break. The gap between the norms handed down and those played out by young people shows a new vision of conjugality. In this sense, a starting point towards the image of the new family could start from Martine Segalen's idea - "Families are what we make them!" (Segalen, 2010).

As a starting point, it should be noted that current trends in the family are due to changes in the status of women in society, the role the family plays in society, and developments in medical technology (Florea et al., 2020).

So, the present does not always easily allow the reproduction of families with the same functional values, as we have known in the previous generations. Today, a significant proportion of young people are building their marital structures with an increasing degree of independence to the family culture they come from. From this point of view, by assessing the basis of the public discourse on the "decline of the family", we would rather claim a logic of argumentation consistently influenced by a wide range of social stereotypes. In this contemporary dilemma of the idea of legal bonding (by marriage or cohabitation), the basic meaning of the idea of a conjugal couple is somehow lost. A family that is not also a couple can seem incomplete, even by its own legal logic. Counter-intuitively, a functionally unmarried couple is sometimes viewed less favorably than a marriage 'without a couple'.

An analysis of social data increasingly reveals that the contemporary family is being challenged as an institution. In this sense, patrimonial regimes open up a new premise, one towards relational individualism (the tendency to secure the conditions for potential failure from the very beginning of the marriage shows a different logic than the logic of the institutionalized marriage: rather, it shows the need for binding contractual clauses).

Philippe Aries said, more than three decades ago, that what was once unacceptable, becomes ordinary, usual, desirable today (Ariés et al., 1991).

3. Men and women - between tradition and modernity

The old imperatives of the sense of duty towards norms are increasingly coming into conflict with the new logics of relational individualism. The evolution of social mentalities cannot be understood as a unitary stage, as one which generally marks the same level of assimilation of new conjugal values. The evolution from one stage to another is gradual and differentiated, depending on the personal capacity to adapt, the strength of the imperatives of the community of origin, etc.

Thus, while the heritage of the past provides more comfort for men, women rely much more on modern conjugal values. At this stage of transition, both men and women mix traditional and modern values, each finding their rationale either in the validated behaviors of their families of origin, or proactively, in new sets of values that have other valences of gender equity and the conjugal role.

According to G. Allport (1981), thinking in terms of the relationship between personality and role, the role dimension can be viewed from four perspectives: the socially prescribed role, as the totality of attributes of a given category, the perceived role, as an individual's own perception of the social acceptance of the role, the assumed role, as the sum of actions taken by the individual based on their own perception of the socially recognized role, and the role actually played, as the outward manifestation of the role.

Differences in marital role, either due to the non-acceptance of certain valences, that would not fit the masculine or feminine status, or of role overload, particularly in women, are often sources of marital conflict. In such situations, personal demands and expectations do not match those of the partner, a situation which can in many cases create stress within the family and sometimes even its dissolution.

It is also counterintuitive that role distribution problems are complained of more frequently by men than women, because the only status position threatened is that of the man. As a rule, by traditionally socializing the man, his conversion to new role sets, that would lead to a role balance in the marital space, is a challenge that is difficult to accept and assimilate. Moreover, the analysis of social data also highlights a counterintuitive aspect. The analysis of the 2018 Gender Barometer highlights a conjugal attitude with an obvious traditional influence in the Romanian space. If we compare the statistical data of the Gender Barometer of 2000 with those of the last Barometer (2018), we can see that, if in 2000, the share of those who considered the man the leader of the family was 83%, 18 years later the indicator registered a total percentage of 78% (Grünberg, 2018). Rather, the

current moment captures an atypical situation - a modernity in statements and a traditionality in concrete fact.

However, the responses to these questionnaire items in the young population shows much lower rates of the traditional influence. In the case of our own sample, the analysis of social indicators shows that about 40% of respondents express social opinions marked by traditional influences. From this point of view, young marital relationships capture this moment of a double transition. Mostly, the transition encompasses the moment of assimilating the modern conjugal condition, and the biggest challenge derives from the duality of challenges faced by men and women regarding gender relations and the issue of role equity. At the same time, in terms of role dimensions, the analysis of the indicators highlights a counterintuitive situation - 54.2% of women take on more domestic tasks than men assign to them. Thus, women's desire to build equitable marital relationships is thwarted by their very choice of what they take on as a role. Some of the role inequalities are rooted in women's own self-assumed behavior. At the same time, the statistical analysis for this category shows that the claim for a duty of obedience by women to their husbands is statistically three times higher for men than the value provided by the indicators for female responses. In this sense, a high level of female role tasks may also be due to a low level of male role tasks. Thus, assumed tasks are not always the result of a traditional view on role distribution, but rather an effect of not assuming the other (Apostu, 2022).

Conclusions

The dilemma of gender interaction and of role adaptation would appear primarily as a problem of men's adaptation, as they lose the generous amount of advantages that traditionality offered. Clearly, the beginning of this social evolution from inequality to gender and marital role equality should start with women, as they are the main beneficiaries of these marital contexts of role distribution differences. However, the analysis of social indicators still shows that these new modern values are not taken on. At the same time, many men are more comfortable in applying the functional logic of their families of origin, relying on the fact that tradition offers better protection for the image of old status values.

Often, it is said in public discourse that we are modern, but national indicators show obvious views, mark at best, mark the transition to modernity.

The contemporary marital environment can therefore be characterized by an atypical modernity - masculine or feminine status images have remained relatively rigid, they are more resistant to change, but their validation differs. In the past, status was protected and validated by traditional imperatives, whereas today it must be confirmed by personal competence. For this reason, returning to tradition is easier than embracing modernity. This justifies the fact that more than half of women take on traditional roles more than their life partners require of them, while many men find it difficult to confirm their role tasks in such a way as to be validated by their own partners.

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