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FEMININE RESOURCES OF POWER

Review
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Abstract

Most marital couples from nowadays profess to have modern relationships where the distribution of roles, the gender relations and the method of enhancing functions is egalitarian, however, the overall inequities between partners are still visible. At the other extreme, there is a category of couples who strategically negotiate their distribution of power to each gender in accordance with the resources they hold. Thus, in a constant process of grabbing the other, each partner is building a set of resources enabling the domination of other. The study aims to analyze the resources through which the contemporary women organize and promote power resources to dominate within their marital relationship. The research is performed through the qualitative analysis based on sociological survey and the instrument used is the semi-structured interview, applied to both women and their partners.

THE MARRIED COUPLE – INDIVIDUALISM VERSUS SOLIDARITY

The idea of fairness within the married couple appeared earlier than the assimilation of the behaviors themselves by the marital partners. Even today, there are gaps between declarations of the role distribution and the role behavior. This is due to the traditional society that considers as moral the actions through which the marital partners were scheduled to develop actions in accordance with certain principles external to their couple, often, external to their will (Trifu, Terec, 2013).

This aspect shows that the traditional imperatives, even if their influence diminished considerably, still impact the gender relations, the unfair distribution of tasks and the overall picture of each gender in society. Of course, these forms of cohabitation within the couple cannot be generalized for the entire Romanian marital space because many couples already guide their lives after the modern landmarks of marital cohabitation. We can talk in this regard, not of an entirely fair equity but rather of an asymmetrical equity, where each partner assumes tasks in relation to the time availability or the one dealing with the ability to play certain roles. Nowadays, the marital roles tend to increasingly lose the alleged gender identity; the partners assume tasks regardless of how these were traditionally associated with the gender within the traditional society.

At the opposite of the marital traditionalism and, at the same time, increasingly distant from modernity, a new trend in the marital relationships is to hold the resources of power, as this guarantees a better control of the marital relations and, by extension, a greater possibility to impose one's own values.

Most often in the literature the dominance within the married couple is described in terms of individualistic tendencies and not always from a negative standpoint. (Alexandru, 2012)

In strictly functional terms, the difference in the marital structure between a modern married couple and postmodern (Eşi, 2010) one is great. The orientation towards oneself and the individualistic values substantially alters the function of solidarity; the partners understand to remain united only if their individualistic wishes and values are met through the other. Solidarity no longer remains a function with intrinsic value but a consequence deriving from the very benefit of the relationship, therefore it depends on the degree of individual fulfillment within the married couple. For this reason, the French sociologist Martine Segalen states that today, it is the individual who becomes the basic unit of society and not the family (Segalen, 2011). Therefore, the social norm matters only to frame the other into the moral landmarks of the social ethics,

while the male's or the woman's own morality no longer wishes to be subject to any social or private law control (Dubar, 2001).

The issue of individualism and domination in the married couple is not new. The traditional family environment justifies its functionality only through domination; the explanation is that the domination was culturally "justified" for men alone. All the traditional imperatives strengthened the man's image. Thus, the community members punctually assumed this imperative of the male domination. In modernity, the value fluctuations concerning the gender relations, the varying degree of assimilation of the new values and the new distribution of roles quickly determined the distribution of power to swing in favor of women.

Regarding to post-modernity, the relationships between the partners are no longer built upon the development of a set of common values that are above the individualistic temptations of each partner. The marital partner becomes a form of reflection in the eyes of the other in attempt to conform to it, but turning to oneself (De Singly, 2000). Each partner is trying to exert his influence on each other to feel "promoted by the other in whatever he/she has within at its best" (Roussel, (1989), Dubar (2001, p. 82)). This further accentuates the need for control and domination.

However, in the socio-psychological studies, the individualistic orientation does not always appear as a "relational virus". Although placing the needs of the individual above the common needs of the couple could be considered a risky action that leads to deinstitutionalization and un-affiliation, however, there are researchers (Juravle et al., 2015) who contemplate the individual needs as priorities against the needs of the couple. Their fulfillment may have a revealing effect as the personal satisfactions are a powerful incentive to meet the needs of the other.

EQUALITY AND DOMINATION IN THE CONTEMPORARY COUPLE

In the 90s, the sociologist Anthony Giddens described the marital relationship in terms of a pure relationship. The idea of fairness, functional balance was perfectly tuned with the pure relationship which started from the premise that a marital relationship is satisfactory by itself and not by the individualistic needs that each partner claims (Giddens, 1992).

However, the influences of the home family, of the social media have distorted the image of pure relationship. The women wanted fairness and fought for it, men were losing the old status image and reacted with wariness to the feminine actions and the unwritten gender polemic has developed a rather competitive environment between the two genders, each to sustain or promote his or her domination.

In his studies, the French sociologist Louis Roussel defines this trend through the concept of "captive capture". The trend of each partner goes towards fusion, but as this is felt as a vulnerability, which is why the risk of fusion encompasses the risk of possession and frustration because "if I capture my partner, I prevent him or her to capture me." (Dubar, 2001). The partners act no more on behalf of a principle external to them (mechanical solidarity) but in an autonomous context where the individual as agent acts in accordance with his or her own definition of wellbeing.

At its origin, the desire to captivate derives from the need of women to be equal to men. Thus, the desire to be equal gradually leads to an aggressive manner to promote their rights and needs, making the very behavior of women to become masculine.

Talcott Parsons made a distinction between „, the normative socialization of men for «instrumental» roles and of women for «expressive» roles” (Parsons, Vlăsceanu, 2007). Or, in time, the expressive has become a resource of power that allowed women to build the road to justice or even to domination. The competitiveness between the genders is manifested in any approach attempt. Men and women try to display to the other their qualities and hide their defects so as not to become vulnerable. By doing so, they resemble and „are at the same time different and complementary” (Dolto, 2008). In this context, the attraction towards complementary becomes to other a resource and its method of use indicates the difference between a relationship built on solidarity landmarks or one that appreciates the „capture” of the other as focal value. For example, the dominant expressive character that generally characterizes a woman provides her with greater potential to render a situation in a manipulative manner. Thus, experts consider that women may lie more easily than men to get a more favorable position in relation to their partner. Women manage to achieve their goals by resorting to falsehood, and the men as they do not pay attention to details, trust them and become manipulated very easily: „women lie relatively easy to a man when they are face to face, because he it is not equipped with the required sensitivity to detect the inadequacies between their verbal signals and the non-verbal signs” (Tudose, 2005).

The persuasion ability of women is very high and even if they say untrue things, they lead men to believe that what they say is the pure truth. Even if within the couple, women ask their partners for love and sincerity, we cannot say that they do not offer the same in turn. The ladies turn to lie only when it is about things that men do not understand or do not matter to them anyway. There are typical cases like hiding the price of a dress or lipstick from the spouse or partner. Men do not understand or will not understand why women spend so much money on clothes or makeup but for a woman, the feedback

obtained from these actions means self-esteem, power or even domination.

This does not mean that men are completely detached from the sentiment of authority but on the contrary: „the decision-making authority, the heads of the family are still the men, even if the daily expenses of the family are decided upon by women” (Băluță, 2006). Of course, we talk about a symbolic authority, one that can become a resource for women alone. The classical traditional socializing is still producing its effects, most adults are being educated in families where the parents were themselves traditionally socialized. In the traditional context, the resource ownership was a resource of male power. Men used to manage all the family's resources and thereby managed to condition the whole family structure in the distribution of roles, functioning system and even influencing the marriage decisions. Or, the use of this status in the modern context grants to the man only a symbolic authority by which he is educated in the spirit of a masculine responsibility concerning the welfare of the family. However, the women's management of the family budget is the expression of a shift of resources and decision power in the contemporary couple. The man is provided with the duty to ensure resources while the woman is given the decision to decide the distribution of the budget by priority categories. In this sensitive „duel” „every word is an attempt to influence the other” (Mucchelli, 2002). Partners try to steer the other's thinking in the direction they prefer. Moreover, men have a higher level of vulnerability when it comes to a quarrel in the couple. They are the ones who give in the easiest because they have become dependent on their partners: men are sexually and emotionally addicted to women in everything related to the daily family life ”(Vlăsceanu, 2007).

Another form by which women manage to manipulate men is the quality of the interaction, building a beneficial relationship between body language and the tone of voice. A woman knows that when she wants to obtain a benefit, she must behave warmly, gently, and „men feel compelled to give an affirmative answer.” Also, women utilize classical verbal formulas such as „you can or you could” that compel a man to never refuse a woman (Tudose, 2005). This is because, as they have a capacity to secrete more testosterone, men tend to see life situations and actions as personal challenges. Therefore, words such as „can you ...?” can be quite easily understood as „are you able to...?”.

This culturally built mechanism by a sense of duty, usefulness, and competence can hide enough feminine strategies to manage the actions of men to the desired direction.

FEMININE RESOURCES OF POWER

The analysis of the data obtained through the application of research tools show that the main resource used by women to dominate and manage favorably the power relations with men is beauty.

Beauty tends to become an increasingly important concern for women, the care for aesthetics, and therefore for the image going as far as surgical risks. The analysis of the female responses indicates, at a glance, opinions oscillating between physical beauty and the enhancement of the inner beauty. The close analysis of the responses reveals that, regardless of their views on the desire or need for inner beauty, no one respondent prioritizes it against the physical beauty. Finally, the physical beauty becomes an inner resource that gives a feeling of safety, trust, a good self-esteem and, at the same time, the feedback of the attractive woman.

From the perspective of the research objectives, women think that the female beauty is an element which gives them an advantage over their partners. Women make use of their appearance to acquire some benefits from men. The analysis of data shows that in the strategy of conquering, the two images of the (inner and physical) do not necessarily correlate. Beauty produces attraction; the attraction produces self-confidence, self-control and power. It later produces or marital relations or not, but following the reciprocal validation of partners in the couple, there is a wish for the beauty to be extended to psychosocial and relational items as the inner beauty is worth the second place on the scale of importance. And if beauty grants a general advantage based on which women dominate men, there is another group who know how to transform „faults” into resources of power: „I can get something just by being a girl, I do not have so much force, I am very fragile and everyone wants to help me.” Therefore, another resource of feminine power derives from the way in which a woman with „symbolic flaws” can stimulate the actions of a man in the desired direction. In this context, it is about motivating men to demonstrate their skills in support of the „fragile” women.

It is sufficient that the woman expresses through her attitude that she needs to be helped by the partner. To be a woman is an asset in the relationships with men, precisely because women are considered the weaker gender who needs help from men where appropriate. If the "challenge" of man in a context of situations requiring a solution related to his psychological needs to be praised, to confirm the ability to do a thing for women, the management of the conditions for fulfillment of needs tends to become a resource for control and power management.

The data identified in the study highlights that the need for domination of women in the married couple originates precisely in the man's trend to impose the

traditional order regarding the unfair distribution of marital role, gender relations etc. Often the excuse of actions meant to ensure the gender role and fairness, women are building a set of strategies meant to ensure the control of their matrimonial relations. This allows women to build a functional advantage system where the career ascension, the fairness of the spousal role ensure a balance. The women's claim to impose balanced tasks and roles can be understood because of overcrowding of the role of the woman who also desires to build a career. The overcrowding of tasks maintains the traditional role order and this involves obedience resulting in male domination. In this context, the role balance becomes a priority for women as it constitutes itself as another form that is stimulated by the female domination.

Another way in which women believed to have an advantage over men is the very structure of the feminine communication. They have the capability to build multiple messages, they can include in conversations several levels of discussion and have greater responsiveness to manage them: „verbose makes women dominate in many respects, either because the man does not have the time to say nothing, or because he does not understand where it begins and where it ends and, as he tries to build an argument, he ends up being dizzy. So, men prefer to remain silent!”. In accordance to the particularities of gender, men manage difficultly messages that come with abundance and are loaded with ideas (Tudose, 2005). Therefore, in accordance with the feminine answers, one form of manipulation can also be the „dizziness” of the speech.

Speaking generally, the surveyed women said they get what they want from men, the condition being to know in what form to place the information provided to men: one must provide arguments: *and if we change this old furniture....* and you provide them with some benefits: *we could buy a larger TV*". Thus, the domination and manipulation of man can be performed starting from his needs, guiding his behavior to meet the feminine wishes and needs. The man's personal decision and action is simulated as the woman manages the entire process: „the man has the authority and woman has the strategy”.

The victimization strategies help women to gain certain advantages in the couple relationship. Although this involves taking some risks regarding to the management of situations that can be difficult to manage, the analysis of the data from the qualitative research indicates that women also use the emotional blackmail: threaten to leave, the state of anger, crying etc. These are strategies that build the domination of women. Noteworthy is the fact that the threat of leaving the prevalent strategy among the surveyed women who were married. The immediate impact generated by the potentiality of marital dissolution produces a type of immediate

reaction in line with the woman's wishes hidden under this type of strategy.

The risks arising from these manifestations of feminine power weaken the socializing function. Gradually such accusations lose their emotional intensity generated the first time they are uttered, they lower the levels of trust and interaction between the two partners and they sabotage the marital relations irretrievably. However, the information obtained in the study show a female optics centered on the immediate effect, the conformism and obedience. It relies on the fact that holding the power provides women the possibility of building their own functional system of which they together with their partner to subsequently feed their gender and role balance as well as their marital stability.

The analysis of the male responses shows that, in the mentality of men, the idea of role equality is a more conceptually accepted reality role, rather than in their actual behavior. Or, it is on this premise that women justified their domination needs in the married couple. They say that changing the gender relations and the marital role do not come from a male volunteer action but they can manage the relationship in their favor.

Men admit that a „beautiful, nice, neat, who looks appropriately” woman holds a certain power of influence, which confirms the feminine strategies in this regard. Moreover, for men, beauty becomes a „business card” that enhances their status image but also becomes a manipulation resource in the conditions under which they feel addicted to it.

Most surveyed men admitted that their partner is always attentive to their needs. They believe that women have the advantage of a very good intuition of the needs of each family member and this may be a manifestation of female domination in a couple, because they can very well guess their reactions and therefore women can build a speech favorable to them. They believe that their partners do not do this deliberately or to get something in return, on the contrary, they believe that the women in their lives surprise them with the things they love involuntarily. An important aspect that emerges from this psychosocial mechanism of power management in the contemporary couple is that men understand these power management strategies as usual feminine manifestation elements. Therefore, since they are understood as natural attitudes, they are not perceived as strategies, to which men rather have acceptance obedience feelings and not action.

The analysis of the interviews showed that men like their partner to always be happy, therefore when she becomes insistent on something, they give up most times. They believe the weeping of women as consequence of unhappiness, make men proceed to sets of additional actions to rebalance the emotional status of women. Most men said they are very sensitive to their partner's crying and they give in

their favor, because they do not want to make them suffer.

CONCLUSION

The fight for supremacy within the couple of today is an increasingly common fact. The power relations begin to be built early in the marital relationship and are in a constant duel. Today, the “captivation” trend of the other guarantee not only the supremacy but also the chance to build their own system of marital role or typology concerning the attitude regarding gender etc.

The study shows that men realize the methods by which women show their influence within the couple, even if they find mitigating circumstances to them and their acceptance derives of the received benefits from this process.

From another perspective, the traditional influences which are still visible in contemporary couple call to partners for “negotiation”, which further stimulates the tendency of domination.

Considering the perspective of beauty standards, they seem at first to be masculine ideals to which women tend to join. The woman is beautiful by the standards required by the masculine world, thus becoming “appropriate”, which might seem a form of “modern” tradition through which the woman responds positively to male demands. This may indicate that women's orientation is still towards the claims of men but in a fundamentally different orientation – the beauty standard becomes a power resource and this fundamentally changes the balance of power in favor of women.

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