

# The Image of the Contemporary Woman Between Stereotype and Reality

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## Abstract

*In recent decades, the image of women in society has become a particularly important and captivating topic in the field of social sciences. The representation of women has been - and continues to be - influenced by a multitude of factors, such as traditional family values, literature, mass media, social norms and values, among others. The influences stemming from these factors, and beyond, have generated over time a series of stereotypes and prejudices that have negatively contributed to the construction of women's image in society. This paper aims to provide a comprehensive perspective on the subject by highlighting and analyzing previous research, relevant theories, and key concepts. It explores the transformation of the image of women from submissive to dominant, the evolution of gender relations across the three major stages through which the institution of the family has progressed, as well as the stereotypical representation of women in the family environment, the beauty industry, mass media, and beyond. The purpose of this study is, on the one hand, to observe the level of progress in the image and status of women in today's society and, on the other hand, to analyze the distinction or similarity between actual female behavior and the stereotypical image of women.*

**Keywords:** *Social stereotype; gender image; conjugal couple; family; functionality.*

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## **1. The Image of the Woman - From Submissive to Dominant**

Over the centuries, the issue of the image and status of women in society has undergone such significant transformations that it has become a major focus of interest for researchers. Much has been written about women and their role in society, yet scholars have not always reached a consensus, and many have failed to form a clear, structured opinion due to the complexity of the subject: “the great question that has never been answered, and which I have not been able to answer, despite my thirty years of study, is ‘What does a woman want?’” (Freud, 1994). The second half of the current century has brought more substantial changes to the condition and image of women in society than all previous centuries combined. Thus, it is impossible not to ask questions about the new image of women, their current social status, and the nature of their relationships with the male gender (Briceag, 2015).

The past and present clearly illustrate that the image of women in society has evolved considerably, with the most significant shift being the transition from dominated to dominant (Vlad, 2017). It is well known - and scientific sources confirm this - that the traditional woman was, and often still is, defined in relation to man, not as his equal, but as an inferior being whose role was confined to the family, to childbearing, raising and educating children, managing the household, and submitting to the authority of the man. Male superiority in traditional society stems from the patriarchal form of social organization, which is based on male dominance and the subordination of women to men. In relation to women, patriarchy represents a model of social order that legally allowed their discrimination, depriving them of rights based on unfounded assumptions lacking scientific grounding, as will be further illustrated in the following paragraphs (Coman, 2004).

Society was led and dominated by men, who held the highest positions in the labor market and enacted laws in their own favor, ignoring the needs of women and treating them as beings incapable of making decisions in the public sphere or managing life independently. The perceived inferiority of women in traditional society was also rooted in medical assumptions that were interpreted as indicators of intellectual deficiency: “the fact that women’s genital organs develop internally supported the hypothesis that a woman is merely a failed man, a mistake of nature that did not develop normally; the woman was considered incomplete [...], and because she was physically weaker than the man, this was taken to

demonstrate that she was also intellectually weaker” (Mihai, 2021). One could argue that this perception and classification of women stemmed from a lack of education or the slow societal progress in Romania, as it is deeply immoral and gravely discriminatory to assume that the physical differences between men and women equate to an intellectual disability.

The domination of women by men in patriarchal society can also be viewed through the lens of abuse, the consequences of which included “male control and coercion, manifested through physical, verbal, and/or psychological violence” (Losii & Crășmaru, 2019). The types of abuse endured by women in traditional society included: physical abuse, involving shoving, slapping, punching, and similar acts; emotional abuse, materialized through criticism, insults, degradation, and humiliation; psychological abuse, manifested through possessive behavior, threats of taking away children, constant interrogation, and more; sexual abuse, involving forced sexual intercourse or unwanted gestures; and economic abuse, expressed through the victim’s lack of access to personal finances or control over the household budget (Hogaș, 2010). All of these forms of abuse contributed significantly to shaping the marginalized social status of traditional women. Regardless of how strongly a woman may have wished to surpass her societal condition, within a patriarchal system she could never be the equal of a man - not even through education or personal development. She was regarded as psychologically deficient and believed to require male guidance in life. Her place was considered to be at home, serving the man, not participating in public life or social activities, which were believed to be reserved for men, seen as strong and inherently competent. Women, on the other hand, were deemed emotionally unstable, incapable, and inferior, based purely on men’s assumptions (Mihai, 2021). In other words, due to their alleged intellectual deficiencies and the constraints imposed by traditional patriarchal society, women were dominated by men and unable to rise above their condition simply because they were women - because they were what men presumed them to be: “she is inessential in comparison with the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute: she is the Other” (De Beauvoir, 2022).

Women lived under male domination for a long time, until a certain point in history when their social status began to improve significantly - this turning point being marked by the end of the communist dictatorship. From that moment to the present, the social status of women has undergone a remarkable evolution, eventually

leading to the emergence and portrayal of the dominant woman, the woman in power. Through access to higher education and relative equality with men in the public sphere, women's degree of independence has increased considerably, and their intellectual abilities have enabled them to occupy important positions in the labor market. Today's dominant woman knows her worth and refuses to settle for less. She strives every day to improve her condition, no longer submits to men, and does not accept submission. She respects herself for who she is and wants to be respected by society - as a human being and as a professional - and within the family, as a wife and mother. A dominant woman is not cold or rigid; rather, she works tirelessly to reach her goals through her own efforts. Nonetheless, love and affection remain essential, and she will always need emotional support from those close to her. The powerful woman is not only the embodiment of intelligence and ambition but also of the successful integration of social and familial roles. Without intending to judge or discredit men, it can be argued that today's women are stronger than men, mainly because, within a marriage, women are expected to fulfill far more roles. They are still seen as homemakers - since the family role of women has not changed significantly despite no longer living in a traditional society - and they must also hold jobs to maintain independence. If children are involved, societal norms still place the primary caregiving responsibility on women. Furthermore, some authors argue that the fight for gender equality has led to a new imbalance: "women have become stronger than men; they now hold leadership positions and can work in any field they choose. Meanwhile, men have become weaker and are slowly assuming the traditional role once held by women" (Mihai, 2021).

Being a powerful woman today is not exactly easy, yet feminists continue to fight for their rights. The dominant woman of today "is not afraid to make bold decisions in both her personal and professional life. A woman confident in her own strength always takes responsibility for who she is, for the path she follows, and for who she wants to become" (Briceag, 2015). As for men, their preferences regarding cohabitation with women have changed over time. Maturity, intelligence, and everything a dominant woman offers today have begun to significantly attract men; many of them no longer seek a submissive partner but rather one with whom they can coexist in relative gender equality, and even if the dominance in the relationship lies with the female partner, they do not appear - or do not wish to appear - bothered by this fact.

The transformation of the image and condition of women over time shows us that “the woman has always endured through time, overcoming the most difficult trials and changes; she has always adapted to the era in which she lived, yet fought to obtain something better.” (Mihai, 2021).

The modern family is quite different, even the opposite, in comparison to the traditional family. Modernity brings a new structure and social order to the institution of the family, laying the foundation for improved lifestyles. Unlike the traditional family, which functioned as a closed unit, the modern family is an open unit oriented toward the outside world due to the industrial society that enabled individuals - regardless of gender - to participate in public life and pursue a profession. Many contemporary scholars have referred to the modern family as the nuclear family, the reason being that the nuclear family, composed of two parents and their children, represented the ideal model that met the requirements of the social context, namely: “mass production, with widely shared values and lifestyles, a bureaucratic and hierarchical power structure, and a clear separation between home life and professional life” (Toffler, 2000). In the modern or nuclear family, a significant decline in patriarchal authority is observed; the emphasis on the individual's freedom to choose their own partner, the need for intimacy, independence, and especially personal development in the case of women, are aspects that mark the distinction between the traditional and modern family.

Gender relations within the modern family are neither symmetrical nor asymmetrical, but rather complementary - spouses complement each other in terms of family roles. In certain domains or levels of authority and power, the husband may achieve greater success than the wife, while in other areas the wife may outperform the husband. Between them exists a form of equality that “can be understood as a complementarity of roles, attitudes, and behaviors between the two sexes, through a balance of the areas and levels in which each exercises power” (Apostu, 2011). Solidarity is the prevailing sentiment in the modern family; both partners are responsible for the happiness and fulfillment of their family. They divide their roles based on the social division of labor: the man assumes the role of provider and protector, while the woman plays an emotional role - caring for the household, the children, and maintaining the emotional climate in the family (Popescu, 2009). Alongside solidarity, feelings of affection between spouses are more clearly defined and valued. The independence to choose one's life partner in modern society has led to the strengthening of intimacy and

the development of a relationship based on love, cooperation, and appreciation - sentiments whose depth forms the foundation upon which marriage is built. In contrast to the traditional family, in the modern family "authority is replaced as a focal value by cooperation. And this is supported by values such as equality, change, and communication" (Ciupercă, 2003).

The power dynamic within the modern family has undergone significant transformation - men no longer hold supreme authority in the household, and women are no longer viewed as inferior, neither in society nor within the family sphere. The emancipation of women was one of the key outcomes of modernism; by entering the labor market, women gradually began to build their own economic independence, no longer relying on their life partners. The horizon within which women could act expanded considerably, and their involvement in public life increased - an evolution made possible by the continuously rising levels of education and access to information. At the same time, women's emancipation led to what has been described as "her separation from the narrow universe of the family" (Apostu, 2011). By socializing, participating in public life, and aspiring to build a career, women stepped out of the family cocoon and focused on professional advancement as a means to sustain their economic autonomy. The modern woman "wishes and presents herself as independent, strong, and self-assured - someone who demands more of herself, whether through a career in which she invests significantly or through her appearance (clothing, makeup, attitude)" (Anghel, 2010). Indeed, women achieved economic independence in the postmodern period, and over time, this has contributed to the emergence of the dominant woman.

Postmodernity - also referred to in scholarly literature as late modernity or the second modernity - is characterized by the evolution and consolidation of several key domains essential to the functioning of the state, with one of the results of this evolution being the partial transformation of the modern family. While there are differences between the modern family and the postmodern family, they are not substantial; rather, the postmodern family can be seen as guiding the values and practices of the modern family to a second stage in the evolutionary trajectory of the family institution.

In postmodernity, there is no longer a single ideal type of family, as there was during the modern period when the nuclear family - composed of two spouses and their children - was considered the normative model. The emergence and recognition of diverse family structures in postmodern society has rendered the notion of a

singular ideal family obsolete. Among the various forms of postmodern families are consensual unions, both heterosexual and homosexual partnerships, trial marriages, and many others.

Postmodern society places the institution of the family one step lower in the hierarchy of fundamental institutions for the survival and reproduction of society. The high level of individual educational attainment influences attitudes toward marriage, the age at which individuals marry, and decisions about having children, with the achievement of a successful career - especially for women - becoming the first stage in personal accomplishment and fulfillment. Individualism is the prevailing sentiment both in society and within the postmodern family. This individualism is reflected in what has been defined as a "pure relationship," which is "a relationship initiated solely for its own sake, for what each person can gain from a sustained association with the other, and which continues only insofar as both partners judge it to deliver enough satisfaction to merit its maintenance" (Giddens, 2000). Thus, in marriage, each partner views the other as a resource for personal fulfillment; the more satisfaction the pure relationship brings, the more each partner will wish to maintain it - this applies mutually. Moreover, the concept of a pure relationship is not limited to romantic partnerships, but also extends to relationships with relatives, children, friends, and other close connections.

The image of women in society has undergone significant transformations over time, prompting the emergence of social stereotypes. The term "stereotype" originates from ancient Greek, combining *stereos* meaning strong or solid, and *typos* meaning impression or image. The writer Walter Lippmann was the one who "introduced the notion of stereotypes in its socio-psychological sense, understood as images in our minds - mental constructs through which we interpret the surrounding reality" (Stavila, 2019). Social stereotypes are ideas that are not necessarily based on actual facts and do not account for the individual characteristics of each person, due to the overgeneralization of stereotypical beliefs to an entire category of people. This overgeneralization is based on the erroneous assumption that what is true of one individual is also true of others who share similar traits - whether in terms of gender, religion, social class, political orientation, ethnicity, and so on. A crucial aspect of stereotype dissemination is that "although they are part of the cognitive mechanisms activated at the individual level, they are also spread across society and transmitted from generation to generation" (Crasnojon, 2012). In essence, the main factors influencing the

development and perpetuation of social stereotypes over time include: the family, school, peer groups, life experiences, mass media, and even religion.

Gender inequality in Romanian society is deeply rooted in the collective subconscious, dating back to ancient and traditional times. Regardless of the historical period Romania has gone through, traditional images of men and women have continuously evolved into stereotypical representations across each stage of social development. As Stavila (2019) notes, “women are considered dependent, passive, uncompetitive, submissive, inexperienced in business, delicate, intuitive, subjective, empathetic, sensitive, responsive to others’ needs, communicative, and capable of sacrifice. In contrast, stereotypical male characteristics include: independence, ambition, objectivity, intelligence, scientific imagination, courage, aggressiveness, deductive ability, dominance, analytical thinking, self-confidence, physical endurance, intellectual skills, and interest in political affirmation.” The societal contrast is visibly stark: women are perceived as dependent while men are independent, women are submissive while men are dominant, women are passive while men are ambitious, women are intuitive while men possess deductive reasoning, and while women are seen as inexperienced in business, men are deemed intelligent and politically inclined. These distinctions exemplify the persistent social inequality between genders. The intergenerational transmission of such stereotypes has perpetuated this inequality, with the main - if not sole - agents of this phenomenon being the very individuals within society. Without acknowledging the existence of these stereotypes and their detrimental psychological and social impact, society remains trapped in a vicious cycle - a “natural tendency [...] to develop stereotypes and to pass on prejudices” (Crasnojon, 2012).

The image of the contemporary woman is a product of the interplay between modernism, postmodernism, and traditionalism. She is modern and postmodern through her career, independence, strength of character, and ambition to evolve. At the same time, she retains traditional roles within the family as a homemaker, caregiver, mother, and wife, fulfilling roles defined by her familial status - roles that shaped a woman’s social condition during the traditional family model. This combination underscores that “today [...] most working women do not escape the traditional world” (De Beauvoir, 2022). The blame does not lie solely with society or men; a significant share of the responsibility belongs to women themselves, who continue to perform traditional roles - either because they were raised to do so or

because they conform to gender stereotypes promoted by media, family, peers, and other social environments. In literature, theatre, media, the beauty industry, and even the automotive sector, the contemporary female image is saturated with gender stereotypes originating in traditional norms and persisting today. Ultimately, the image of the contemporary woman reflects a complex blend of values, beliefs, habits, and principles accumulated over time.

## **2. Methodology**

The study adopts a quantitative approach, with the sociological questionnaire serving as the research instrument. The sample consists of young individuals aged between 20 and 29, representing the age group that reflects the initial tendencies toward marriage, with 29 being the age associated with the highest nuptiality rate. Additionally, the selection criteria for the sample were based on targeting the young population regardless of gender, residence area, marital status, educational level, etc., and the sampling method used was simple random selection.

The objectives of the study focused on identifying both female and male opinions regarding the image of women in the contemporary social space. The working hypotheses were technical formulations of existing social stereotypes: although women express themselves in a modern manner, their actual role behavior still reflects traditional orientations; and although they criticize social stereotypes about women, their attitudes nonetheless tend to confirm the stereotypical image.

## **3. The Woman - Between Stereotype and Reality**

In the collective social consciousness, the contemporary woman oscillates in her condition between the traditional role within the domestic space of the family and the modern one within the professional, educational, and social spheres. At the same time, existing gender stereotypes in contemporary society raise questions about the actual behavior of both women and men. Therefore, the aim of this analysis is to observe what the image of women looks like in the contemporary context and to what extent feminine stereotypes differ from women's actual behavior.

An analysis of social indicators regarding the perceived appreciation of women compared to men in contemporary society reveals that 60.5% of men believe women are less appreciated in today's society than men, whereas only 49.3% of women share this belief. However, the majority of women - 50.7% - disagree with the idea that they are less appreciated than men, while only 39.5% of

men agree with this view. These findings suggest that, unlike in traditional society, contemporary society no longer places significant obstacles in women's path toward self-realization and development - something acknowledged by women themselves through their disagreement with the notion that their image is devalued today. On the other hand, men seem more aware of the fact that women are less appreciated in comparison to them.

When analyzing perceptions of women's societal appreciation based on respondents' age, significant differences emerge between the 18-22 and 23-29 age groups regarding how women's image is perceived in comparison to that of men.

Respondents aged up to 22 years believe, in a proportion of 64.7%, that the image of women is not less appreciated in society compared to that of men. These younger respondents thus confirm that women do not face significant obstacles in their personal and professional development, due to the level of progress they have achieved in contemporary society. At the same time, their statements indicate the direction in which the image of women is evolving - according to the younger generation, women are increasingly being valued on an equal footing with men. However, when taking into account the responses of those aged between 23 and 29, we observe that 48.3% believe the image of women is less appreciated than that of men in today's society. This suggests that social interactions, greater exposure to traditional elements, and personal experiences among this age group influence their perceptions.

The analysis of how women's image is appreciated in the contemporary space, when correlated with respondents' area of residence, shows that in urban environments, women are perceived as less appreciated than men (53.6%), while in rural areas, they are not perceived as being less appreciated (54.5%). These results highlight that differences in opinion between urban and rural areas are rooted in the ways individuals from these two settings have been socialized. Normative and traditional socialization in rural areas has led both women and men to believe that traditional values represent the best way of life, and consequently, the rural woman is not perceived as undervalued due to her traditional worth. In contrast, in urban environments, the persistence of traditional elements, the presence of gender inequalities in the professional sphere, and lingering feminine stereotypes lead people to believe that - regardless of the contemporary woman's evolution - she is still significantly less appreciated than men.

Society has always promoted gender-based expectations and responsibilities, which has led to inequality in the distribution of duties within the marital relationship.

**Table 1.**

Do you believe there are differences between the responsibilities and social expectations that a man and a woman have in the conjugal couple?	Gender		
	Female	Male	Total
Not at all		2.5%	0.9%
To a small extent	8.3%	12.5%	9.8%
So and so	18.1%	27.5%	21.4%
To a moderate extent	30.6%	35.0%	32.1%
To a very large extent	43.1%	22.5%	35.7%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

The gender-based appreciation of role assumption within the couple shows that women feel a higher level of responsibility compared to men. Thus, 43.1% of women consider that they are the ones who assume most of the marital responsibilities, while men state this aspect in a proportion of 22.5%.

Analyzing from the perspective of the respondents' marital status, the indicators resulting from the contingency table highlight the fact that the highest level of assumed female responsibility is perceived among the category of married respondents (46.2%). Married respondents significantly feel the differences in roles within conjugal life, which means that they confirm through their conjugal experience the gender inequality in terms of the distribution of family roles.

In order to understand how roles are distributed in conjugal life, and also to see how these influence the image of the contemporary woman, an analysis of conjugal roles is necessary.

The gender-based appreciation of financial responsibility shows a higher level of responsibility for men. At the level of the survey group, women believe in a proportion of 45.8% that these tasks are primarily masculine, although the traditional role of main

income provider is not assumed by men to the same extent (28.2%). Even though the data show that the woman primarily assumes domestic tasks, the man does not wish to take on financial responsibility at the same level. Regarding the desire for equity, men appear to be more open to fairness and equality (59%) than women (43.1%). This data shows us that, by not assuming financial responsibilities and assigning these tasks to men, women have not yet escaped the influence of traditionalism, which promotes the man as the financial leader of the family.

Looking also at the marital status of the respondents, it is observed that, compared to single respondents (43.2%) or those unmarried but in a long-term relationship (32.8%), the category of married individuals significantly attributes the role of financially supporting the family to the man (61.5%). We can say that marital status, together with traditional elements, influences the assignment of this role according to the respondents' gender. The analysis of social indicators shows that, although we live in contemporary times, both the married woman and the married man agree with the traditional element of the man being the financial leader in conjugal life.

The responsibility of being the family leader regarding important decisions is another conjugal role that women and men assign to each other differently.

As observed, women primarily assign this responsibility to men in a proportion of 26.4%, while men assume this role at a much lower rate, 12.8%. Regarding the prioritization of this responsibility by women themselves, the percentage is quite low, 2.8%, which means that although contemporary women speak in their statements about equality and balance between the two sexes or about the overload of female conjugal roles, the evidence provided by social indicators clearly shows the influence of the family of origin and the fact that the elements of the traditional family have not yet disappeared. However, the indicators also show that women wish to assert themselves when it comes to making important decisions, but their assertion is not independent of the man, but rather dependent on him - they primarily want to make important decisions together with their life partner, equally (54.2%). Nevertheless, although the desire for modernity is expressed by women, their actual behavior reveals a traditional outlook.

The responsibility of being the primary leader of the family in terms of making important decisions is significantly attributed to men by the category of married respondents (30.8%). Single respondents

and those unmarried but in long-term relationships attribute this responsibility to men to a lesser extent - 24.3% and 18%, respectively. Therefore, within conjugal relationships, both women and men allocate this role based on the premises of the traditional family, which promotes male superiority in the most important family decisions.

Gender-based opinions regarding the support of the conjugal partner in achieving personal and professional goals show that women assume this role to a greater extent - 18.1% - compared to how much men attribute it to them, 10%.

This feminine perspective stems from the traditional idea that a woman must support her partner in building his professional career, so that he can ensure the family's income. Although the elements of the traditional family have not entirely faded, it is still noticeable at a high level that women (69.4%), and especially men (72.5%), tend toward equalizing this role within the couple. However, even though women advocate for equality and fairness, their behavior reveals something different - namely, that men, in certain situations, prove through their actions to be even more open to equality and fairness than women.

Analyzing the same role from the perspective of marital status categories, it can be observed that married respondents primarily assign the role of supporting the partner in achieving personal and professional goals to the woman (38.5% combined percentage for "Primarily the woman" and "Rather the woman"). The category of married respondents does not even consider that this role could be attributed to the man, which means that within conjugal relationships, both women and men are still strongly influenced by normative socialization and their family of origin. However, a very interesting piece of information is provided by the category of unmarried respondents who are in a long-term relationship. They state in a percentage of 79% that this role should be fulfilled by "Both, equally." While in conjugal relationships things still tend to be traditional, in cohabitation this role is significantly attributed to both partners. Therefore, we can assert that in future married couples, equity and equality will be much greater than in currently married couples.

Regarding the responsibility of resolving family conflicts, it can be noted that women assume this role to a greater extent (18.3%), while men assign this responsibility to women in a percentage of only 5%.

Furthermore, based on the data provided by the contingency table above, it can be observed that women do not consider men to

be primarily responsible for resolving family conflicts (1.4%), but rather that they themselves are primarily responsible for this task. Nevertheless, when considering the tendencies of both genders, men appear more open to equity and gender equality (75%) compared to women (62%). Despite this, the study highlights contradictory tendencies - most men primarily assign household responsibilities to women, yet in statements regarding equity, they appear to be egalitarian.

Referring to the marital status of the respondents, we can note that married respondents primarily assign to women the role of mediator of family conflicts (38.5%), more than single respondents (27.8%) or unmarried respondents in long-term relationships (22.6%). This suggests that, within conjugal relationships, respondents are guided by the normative socialization from their family of origin, whereas in cohabitation and singleness, the elements of normative socialization tend to diminish, although not significantly. Another very important piece of information regarding the association between this role and marital status is that respondents who are unmarried but in long-term relationships responded in a significant proportion (74.2%) that this role should be fulfilled "by both, equally." Thus, in cohabitation, the elements of normative socialization tend to shift and modernize, with partners wishing to handle the resolution of family conflicts together, aiming for mutual understanding and harmony.

The data analysis regarding the responsibility of partners in maintaining family harmony shows that women assume this role to a greater extent (22.2%) than it is attributed to them by men (12.5%).

Furthermore, as social indicators show, women do not even consider the idea that men could bear this responsibility. However, the analysis of indicators from the male perspective also shows a greater expectation for women to assume responsibility for family harmony (12.5%) than the willingness of men to assume it themselves (2.5%). These data highlight the fact that women view themselves as primarily responsible for maintaining family harmony, but the traditional idea of the woman as ruler of the household and the domestic environment is being reconditioned in the contemporary space. She is no longer seen only as the one who performs domestic tasks, but also as the one who maintains balance. The influence that women have in ensuring the emotional harmony, balance, and stability of the family is also recognized by men.

If we look at the data in relation to the respondents' marital status, we can see that married individuals primarily assign women the role of maintaining the emotional climate in the family (53.9%, a

combined percentage from “Primarily the woman” and “Rather the woman”). The other marital status categories assign this task to women to a lesser extent: 37.8% and 25.8% (combined percentages from “Primarily the woman” and “Rather the woman”).

Analyzing the top three roles that women are primarily expected to fulfill in a conjugal relationship, we can observe that the most important three female roles are: the role of friend and partner who offers emotional support and encouragement (30%), the role of mother responsible for raising and educating the children (27%), followed by the role of a woman focused on development and advancement in her professional career (20%).

According to the study’s data, women bear responsibilities tied to traditionalism and affective normative socialization, but also exhibit modern tendencies due to their need to pursue a professional career and to attain a higher social status than the one granted by the institution of the family. At the same time, the role ranked fourth - namely that of the housewife (9.6%) - should not be overlooked, as it further reinforces the image of the woman within conjugal life and gender stereotypes.

Referring to the analysis of these feminine roles based on gender-based opinions, we find that both women and men assigned the same top three roles, in terms of importance, that a woman should primarily fulfill in a conjugal relationship: the role of friend and support to the partner, the role of mother, and the role of a woman who develops and progresses professionally.

Nevertheless, differences in gender-based opinions emerge regarding the role of the woman in resolving and diffusing family conflicts. A percentage of 26% of women stated that this role is assigned to them, whereas only 10% of men said the same. Similarly significant is the response rate concerning the role of housewife: 25% of women believe this role should be theirs, yet men assign this role to women at an even higher rate (31%). When it comes to the responsibility of providing the family with safety and physical protection, men tend to assign this role to women more often than women are willing to assume it - 8% of women versus 15% of men.

From the analysis of these indicators, we can state that, although women take on a greater number of roles in the conjugal relationship than men, this assumption tends to occur also because men are starting to assign them roles that were traditionally and customarily their own responsibilities. Thus, the overburdening of women with responsibilities in the conjugal context is not solely a result of their own desire to fulfill these roles or of influences from their

family of origin, but also of men's desire for women to take on more conjugal roles, regardless of the normative socialization they received in their upbringing.

Although the contemporary woman is more traditional in behavior than she claims to be, this aspect does not fully extend to the traditional practice of female submission to men. The contingency table above shows that both men (43.6%) - and especially women (58.6%) - express a combined degree of disagreement with the idea of submission.

**Table 2.**

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The married woman should submit to her husband	Gender		
	Female	Male	Total
Strongly disagree	35.7%	30.8%	33.9%
Somewhat disagree	22.9%	12.8%	19.3%
Neither agree nor disagree	15.7%	25.6%	19.3%
Agree	15.7%	23.1%	18.3%
Strongly agree	10.0%	7.7%	9.2%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

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The evolution of women's status following the era of the traditional family has led to significant shifts in societal perceptions of gender roles, with submission no longer being an element that governs conjugal relationships in many contemporary families. However, we can observe that although social perceptions regarding submission have changed considerably, the influences of the traditional family still persist in today's society. When summing up the agreement with the idea that women should submit to men, it becomes apparent that 25.7% of women declare that they must submit to their husbands, and 30.8% of men agree that women should be submissive within marriage. Therefore, although women state in their declarations that equity and gender equality should prevail in conjugal relationships, some of them still behave in traditional ways. By extension, women's submission also reinforces men's traditional perception that women ought to submit to them.

At the same time, we observe a negative correlation between the variables: the woman's concern for her professional success and

her submission to her husband. The correlation is statistically significant, with a Pearson Correlation of -0.307 and a significance value (Sig.) of 0.001.

**Table 3.**

<b>Correlations</b>			
		The married woman should take care of her professional success	The married woman should submit to her husband
The married woman should take care of her professional success	Pearson Correlation	1	-.307**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.001
	N	110	108
The married woman should submit to her husband	Pearson Correlation	-.307**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	
	N	108	109

The explanation for this correlation lies in the fact that, in the process of defining herself as an individual, pursuing a career gives a woman a sense of autonomy and independence, which distances her significantly from dependence on her husband - a dependence that, in turn, fosters submission.

The analysis of these social indicators shows that a woman who strongly focuses on her professional development is less inclined toward submission to her husband and traditional imperatives.

The analysis of the image of the woman living in cohabitation reveals that, depending on gender, she is viewed predominantly positively - both by women (58.6%), and even more so by men (66.7%).

From the aspects that respondents associated with the image of a woman living in cohabitation, an image of an individualistic woman emerges.

Analyzing the data regarding feminine stereotypes in contemporary society, we can observe that opinions differ by gender.

**Table 4.**

Blonde women are less intelligent	Gender		Total
	Female	Male	
Strongly disagree	82.6%	57.5%	73.4%
Somewhat disagree	8.7%	20.0%	12.8%
Neither agree nor disagree	5.8%	15.0%	9.2%
Somewhat agree	1.4%	2.5%	1.8%
Strongly agree	1.4%	5.0%	2.8%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Women predominantly fall into the “Strongly disagree” category, with a percentage of 82.6%, while men disagree with the stereotype at a rate of only 57.5%.

Thus, women reject the stereotype and the reasoning behind it at a significantly higher level compared to men.

On the other hand, when it comes to men, they reinforce the blonde woman stereotype at a rate of 5% in the “Strongly agree” category, even though they are aware that this image is a stereotypical one - an image that leans more toward the idea of the woman’s relative capability compared to the man.

The correlation below shows that the stereotype of the blonde woman is no longer significant when considering the personal interests a person may have.

**Table 5.**

Correlations	
It is perfectly normal for each partner to have personal interests that are independent of	Blonde women are less intelligent

the relationship			
It is perfectly normal for each partner to have personal interests that are independent of the relationship	Pearson Correlation	1	-.428**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	107	104
Blonde women are less intelligent	Pearson Correlation	-.428**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	104	109

The correlation is negative and statistically significant, with a Pearson Correlation of -0.428 and a significance value (Sig.) of 0.000. The interpretation of this correlation is that the more personal interest takes precedence, the less important the perceived traits of the blonde woman become. Therefore, as long as personal interests drive an individual to pursue their goals, the societal imperfections attributed to the blonde woman become less relevant to them. The stereotype that women are worse drivers than men is still commonly encountered in contemporary society.

**Table 6.**

How do you think people in contemporary society perceive women drivers?	Gender		
	Female	Male	Total
Positive	29.2%	25.0%	27.7%
Neutral	8.7%	20.0%	12.8%
Negative	5.8%	15.0%	9.2%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Both women (52.8%) and men (52.5%) confirm the negative perception that female drivers face. Similar to the stereotype of the blonde woman, the stereotype of the female driver is not based on

any evidence proving that women are less skilled than men at driving. This once again demonstrates that both the stereotype of the blonde woman and that of the female driver are perpetuated in the social mindset on discriminatory grounds. However, if we analyze the stereotype of the female driver through the lens of gender-based opinions, we can observe that there are differences between the female and male perspectives.

**Table 7.**

Women drive worse than men	Gender		
	Female	Male	Total
Strongly disagree	65.3%	27.5%	51.8%
Somewhat disagree	16.7%	27.5%	20.5%
Neither agree nor disagree	9.7%	17.5%	12.5%
Somewhat agree	8.3%	20.0%	12.5%
Strongly agree		7.5%	2.7%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Compared to men, women show a higher level of disagreement with this stereotype (65.3%), whereas only 27.5% of men state that they disagree with it. Not only do men report a lower percentage of disagreement, but 7.5% of them also fall into the “Strongly agree” category regarding the stereotype that women are worse drivers than men. From these indicators, we can deduce that men tend to reinforce this gender stereotype, while women significantly disapprove of it. The stereotype of the woman “at the stove” is one of the gender stereotypes promoted since the era of the traditional family, and as can be seen in the table below, it is still present in contemporary times.

**Table 8.**

How do you think contemporary society perceives the traditional role of women in the kitchen?	Gender		
	Female	Male	Total
Positive	43.5%	46.2%	44.4%

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Neutral	42.0%	43.6%	42.6%
Negative	14.5%	10.3%	13.0%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

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Both women (43.5%) and men (46.2%) state that the image of the woman in the kitchen is positively perceived in contemporary society, which means that the gender stereotype is confirmed and that the image of the woman “at the stove” does not diverge from reality.

Although women identify themselves as modern, they nevertheless confirm - just as previous data has shown - the gender stereotype by primarily assuming responsibilities related to the domestic sphere of the family.

The positive image expressed by both men and women regarding the stereotypical notion of the woman in the kitchen also demonstrates that, even though they claim that today’s woman should be modern in terms of career, education, financial independence, and so on, the expressed appreciation of the stereotype reveals that traditional masculine and feminine perceptions have not disappeared in contemporary times.

This only serves to further perpetuate the image of the woman in relationships as the one who belongs in the kitchen. However, if we analyze respondents’ opinions based on their gender and their agreement or disagreement with the stereotype of the woman in the kitchen, we can observe clear differences in perception.

Women predominantly state that they disagree (97%) with the stereotype suggesting that a woman’s place is in the kitchen, whereas men predominantly disagree at a lower rate of 77.5%.

Looking at the level of agreement among men and women regarding this stereotype, we can see that women register no agreement with the idea.

Men, on the other hand, agree with the stereotype at a rate of 12.5%.

From this data, we can infer that the ones who tend to reinforce the stereotype of the woman in the kitchen are men - but also women, through their actual behavior, as shown by previous data.

The relationship between the variables “*A woman’s place is in the kitchen*” and “*The woman is the housekeeper in her own home*” shows a positive and statistically significant correlation (Pearson Correlation = 0.696, Sig. = 0.000).

**Table 9.**

<b>Correlations</b>			
		The woman's place is in the kitchen	The woman is the housekeeper in her own home
The woman's place is in the kitchen	Pearson Correlation	1	.696**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	112	110
The woman is the housekeeper in her own home	Pearson Correlation	.696**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	110	110

The explanation for the correlation is that the more respondents agree with the stereotype that a woman's place is in the kitchen, the more they also agree with the stereotype that the woman is the housekeeper in her own home. From this explanation, we can deduce that assuming the role of cook also leads to assuming the role of housekeeper - the woman who tends to cook for her family also tends to take on responsibilities related to the domestic sphere of the household. As previous data has also shown, the positive image of the woman in the kitchen is not supported solely by male opinions, which indicates that, in fact, a significant factor in maintaining the traditional image and status of women is that some women themselves are unwilling to detach from these roles that they continue to assume. Thus, the level of traditionalism is upheld not only by men's expectations that women take on these responsibilities, but also by 43.5% of women who believe that the image of the woman in the kitchen is a positive one in today's society. Nevertheless, the assumption of these roles has led to the perpetuation of traditional stereotypes in contemporary society.

The analysis of social indicators regarding the stereotype of the materialistic woman shows that women fall into the "Strongly disagree" category at twice the rate of men - 43.1% compared to 20%.

**Table 10.**

Women nowadays are materialistic	Gender		Total
	Female	Male	
Strongly disagree	43.1%	20.0%	34.8%
Somewhat disagree	18.1%	15.0%	17.0%
Neither agree nor disagree	31.9%	27.5%	30.5%
Somewhat agree	5.6%	27.5%	13.4%
Strongly agree	1.4%	10.0%	4.5%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Thus, the female perspective significantly refutes the materialism of the contemporary woman, while men are more likely to associate women with materialism, as shown by a higher percentage in the “Somewhat agree” category (27.5%), compared to “Strongly disagree” (20%) or “Somewhat disagree” (15%). The analysis of these social indicators shows that those who tend to reinforce the stereotype and are more inclined to believe that women in today’s society are materialistic are men. Women, on the other hand, report very low percentages in the “Somewhat agree” (5.6%) and “Strongly agree” (1.4%) categories, indicating that they are less inclined to view contemporary women as materialistic.

When analyzing the stereotype of the materialistic woman through the lens of age groups, it is noteworthy that respondents aged up to 22 fall into the “Strongly disagree” category at nearly double the rate (43.1%) compared to respondents aged 23–29 (23.4%).

**Table 11.**

Women nowadays are materialistic	Age		Total
	18 – 22 years old	23 – 29 years old	
Strongly disagree	43.1%	23.4%	34.8%
Somewhat disagree	13.8%	21.3%	17.0%
Neither agree nor disagree	30.8%	29.8%	30.4%
Somewhat agree	9.2%	19.1%	13.4%

Strongly agree	3.1%	6.4%	4.5%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

At the same time, it can be observed that there are differences in agreement with the stereotype. Respondents aged between 23–29 report being “Somewhat agree” with the stereotype of the materialistic woman at a rate of 19.1%, while respondents aged up to 22 register a “Somewhat agree” rate nearly 10 percentage points lower (9.2%) than that of the 23–29 age group. From these data, we can conclude that young people aged 23–29 are more likely to label contemporary women as materialistic and to reinforce the gender stereotype compared to young people under the age of 22.

As for the stereotype of the demanding woman, we can observe that opinions between the two sexes are divided.

**Table 12.**

Women nowadays are demanding	Gender		Total
	Female	Male	
Strongly disagree	47.2%	25.0%	39.3%
Somewhat disagree	12.5%	10.0%	11.6%
Neither agree nor disagree	22.2%	12.5%	18.8%
Somewhat agree	8.3%	35.0%	17.9%
Strongly agree	9.7%	17.5%	12.5%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Women express a significant combined rate of disagreement (59.7%) with the statement that women in today’s society are demanding, whereas the combined rate of disagreement among men is 52.5%. On the other hand, men report a high combined rate of agreement (35%) compared to women (18%). The analysis of these data highlights that men perceive today’s women as demanding because, as shown in previous findings, they do not take on as many responsibilities in the conjugal relationship as women would like them to. Modern women who expect men to contribute more to household and family duties are, from the male perspective, seen as demanding - and even uncomfortable to deal with. Women, however, view the image of the demanding woman through the lens of the functional

reality of family life and the unequal sharing of conjugal roles. This shows that women are perceived as demanding and oppressive not because they choose to be so, but because they need more support from their male partners.

The correlation below indicates a strong and statistically significant relationship between the variable “*Women nowadays are materialistic*” and the variable “*Women nowadays are demanding*” (Pearson Correlation = 0.832, Sig. = 0.000).

**Table 13.**

<b>Correlations</b>			
		Women nowadays are materialistic	Women nowadays are demanding
Women nowadays are materialistic	Pearson Correlation	1	.832**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	112	112
Women nowadays are demanding	Pearson Correlation	.832**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	112	112

This correlation suggests that the idea of the demanding woman is closely linked to the idea of the materialistic woman - materialism and demands are perceived by respondents as going hand in hand in the case of contemporary women.

However, referring back to previous data on the demanding woman, and in association with this correlation, we can observe that the image of the demanding woman - and the sense of undesirability declared by men, with a combined agreement rate of 52.5% - is reinforced by material considerations.

Specifically, men are less willing (28.2%) to take on responsibilities in the relationship than women expect of them (45.8%).

Women's demands for men to assist with household responsibilities are accompanied by expectations that men also provide financial security for the family. Thus, from the male perspective, the demanding and materialistic woman becomes uncomfortable and oppressive, due to his own lack of commitment to both financial and domestic responsibilities.

The analysis of feminine stereotypes also includes the association between youth and beauty - an association that fuels the emergence of gender stereotypes in mass media.

**Table 14.**

Women are only beautiful while they are young	Gender		
	Female	Male	Total
Strongly disagree	80.6%	48.7%	69.4%
Somewhat disagree	11.1%	23.1%	15.3%
Neither agree nor disagree	5.6%	20.5%	10.8%
Somewhat agree	2.8%	5.1%	3.6%
Strongly agree		2.6%	0.9%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

We observe that women strongly fall into the “Strongly disagree” category (80.6%) regarding the statement “*Women are only beautiful while they are young*”, whereas men register this level of disagreement at only 48.7%.

In terms of agreement with the statement, it is noteworthy that men tend to associate youth with beauty, with 2.8% reporting “Strongly agree,” while women do not even consider being in total agreement with such a statement.

The analysis of these social indicators shows that women significantly challenge the notion that a woman is only beautiful while she is young. As for men, they show a tendency - though not very high - to perceive beauty primarily in relation to a woman's age.

Furthermore, the correlation between the variables “*Your age in completed years*” and “*Women are only beautiful while they are young*” indicates a positive and statistically significant relationship. The level of statistical significance is shown by a Pearson Correlation of 0.325 and a Sig. value of 0.000.

**Table 15.**

<b>Correlations</b>			
		Your age in completed years	Women are only beautiful while they are young
Your age in completed years:	Pearson Correlation	1	.325**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	112	111
Women are only beautiful while they are young	Pearson Correlation	.325**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	111	111

The interpretation of this correlation is that as age increases, so does the level of agreement among respondents regarding the connection between youth and female beauty. Thus, the stereotype of the woman with the ideal body or ideal age, as promoted by mass media, becomes more significant as respondents grow older. At the same time, the correlation also indicates that with increasing age, there is a stronger tendency to devalue adult and elderly women.

The traditional stereotype that a woman must first and foremost be a mother is diminishing in contemporary society - at least in terms of women's perspectives.

**Table 16.**

The woman is, first and foremost, a mother	Gender		
	Female	Male	Total
Strongly disagree	39.4%	23.1%	33.6%
Somewhat disagree	12.7%	20.5%	15.5%
Neither agree nor disagree	19.7%	25.6%	21.8%

Somewhat agree	14.1%	23.1%	17.3%
Strongly agree	14.1%	7.7%	11.8%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

The percentage of respondents in “Strongly disagree” with this stereotype is highest among women: 39.4% of women believe that a woman is not, first and foremost, a mother. However, an important observation is that although the majority of women express disagreement, 14.1% of them still assume the role of being primarily a mother - almost double the percentage of men who assign women this stereotypical role (7.7%). Although the stereotype that a woman’s primary role is that of a mother has diminished in contemporary society, the influences of the traditional family still persist. As previous data also indicated, women continue to assume this role, which suggests that the stereotypical image is not far removed from reality.

Referring also to the marital status of respondents, we can observe that married individuals reinforce the stereotype of the woman as primarily a mother, with a significant 38.5% responding “Strongly agree.”

**Table 17.**

The woman is, first and foremost, a mother	Marital status			Total
	Single	Married	Unmarried, but in a long-term relationship	
Strongly disagree	37.8%	7.7%	36.7%	33.6%
Somewhat disagree	13.5%	15.4%	16.7%	15.5%
Neither agree nor disagree	24.3%	15.4%	21.7%	21.8%
Somewhat agree	21.6%	23.1%	13.3%	17.3%
Strongly agree	2.7%	38.5%	11.7%	11.8%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

From the perspective of other marital status categories, single individuals agree with the stereotype of the woman as a mother at a rate of 2.7%, while respondents who are unmarried but in a long-term relationship report a “Strongly agree” rate of 11.7%. Compared to other marital status categories, married respondents tend to agree more with the stereotype of the woman as a mother than they disagree (7.7%). Through the analysis of these social indicators, we can see that although we live in contemporary times, the traditional views held by men and women in conjugal relationships contribute to the ongoing perpetuation of traditional feminine stereotypes in today’s society.

The analysis of gender stereotypes also shows that the woman who acts as a housekeeper in her own home is positively perceived in contemporary society.

**Table 18.**

How do you think people in contemporary society perceive a woman who takes on the role of housekeeper in her own home?	Gender		
	Female	Male	Total
Positive	45.7%	55.0%	49.1%
Neutral	40.0%	32.5%	37.3%
Negative	14.3%	12.5%	13.6%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Both men (55%) and women (45.7%) report a positive perception of women who place great importance on cleanliness and other domestic responsibilities within the household. However, through their positive evaluations, both men and women implicitly affirm that the stereotype of the woman as a housekeeper in her own home remains a reality in today’s society.

This is further supported by previous data showing that women’s level of assumption of these responsibilities, as well as the degree to which men predominantly assign them to women, is significant.

Although respondents believe that the woman acting as a housekeeper in her own home is positively perceived in today’s society, their opinions on whether they agree or disagree with this feminine stereotype vary.

**Table 19.**

The woman is the housekeeper in her own home	Gender		Total
	Female	Male	
Strongly disagree	70.4%	38.5%	59.1%
Somewhat disagree	18.3%	23.1%	20.0%
Neither agree nor disagree	8.5%	12.8%	10.0%
Somewhat agree	2.8%	20.5%	9.1%
Strongly agree		5.1%	1.8%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Women strongly reject the stereotype that the woman is the housekeeper in her own home, with 70.4% falling into the “Strongly disagree” category, while only 38.5% of men disagree with this stereotype. Regarding agreement with the stereotype, men register a significant 20.5% in the “Somewhat agree” category, while only 2.8% of women fall into this category. From the analysis of these social indicators, we can observe that women strongly contest the stereotype of the woman as a housekeeper in her own home, while men tend to reinforce it. However, even though women reject the stereotype, their behavior - through the actual assumption of domestic responsibilities - continues to reinforce the stereotypical image.

#### 4. Conclusions

The contemporary woman oscillates between modern behavior in the social and professional spheres and traditional behavior within the family environment. The modernity of today’s woman is reflected in the importance she places on education, professional career, and personal development. However, when she returns to the family setting, she adopts a traditional role. The traditionalism of today’s woman is evident in the responsibilities she assumes - tasks that in no way differ from the roles held by women in traditional times. Therefore, the hypothesis that *“Although women present themselves as modern, they behave traditionally”* is confirmed. Nonetheless, her assumption of conjugal roles reaches a different level in contemporary society. Pressures from men, as well as men’s lack of involvement in family duties, have led to a much more unequal distribution of roles than in the past. Today, both

domestic and financial responsibilities fall more heavily on women than on men. The woman's need and desire to grow professionally and socially, combined with her continued assumption of household duties, has led to a situation where the man has become more passive in conjugal life - precisely because his level of engagement in family responsibilities has decreased.

The assumption of traditional roles by women in today's society demonstrates that gender stereotypes rooted in the domestic sphere of the family are indeed real. This is shown not only by women's continued acceptance of traditional responsibilities, but also by the fact that the stereotypes of the woman at the stove, the mother, and the housekeeper are positively perceived in today's society by both men and women. Thus, the hypothesis that "*Although women criticize gender stereotypes, they confirm the stereotypical image through their behavior*" is validated - but only when associated with the family environment.

Other feminine stereotypes that mock the intellect of the blonde woman, question women's driving skills, or refer to women as demanding or materialistic are typically reinforced by men and discouraged by women. The image of the contemporary woman is still saturated with gender stereotypes in today's society, but women's actual behavior is nuanced depending on the context in which these stereotypes are activated.

Women challenge the stereotypical image in public discourse, but partly confirm it through role-related attitudes and the assumption of certain responsibilities - these being influenced by the traditional status image (e.g., the woman behind the wheel). Modernity no longer offers men the protection of automatic status superiority, and thus, when modernity invites gender equity, stereotypes often remain the only refuge that men can appeal to in order to justify a perceived status advantage in the couple.

In conclusion, the image of the contemporary woman reflects the classic representation of a woman with a dual career. While she remains traditional within the family environment, she is modern in the professional and social spheres. The gender stereotypes attributed to her are confirmed through their association with domestic responsibilities. However, although her stereotypical image is validated within the family context, the same cannot be said about those stereotypes that were created to question women's intelligence, to criticize their character, or to promote discrimination based on age, beauty, or physical appearance.

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