

Power Distribution Strategies in the Contemporary Couple

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Abstract

Simultaneously with the evolution of society, an evolutionary phenomenon has also occurred within the family structure. From the traditional family, passing through certain transitional stages and undergoing numerous transformations, we have now arrived at the contemporary conjugal couple, within which certain norms, values, traditions, and customs of the past should no longer be present. The contemporary couple, significantly different in many respects from the traditional family, provides the framework and opportunity for extensive research and analysis. A relevant aspect to investigate is the identification of power distribution strategies within the contemporary couple. Closely linked to the identification of dysfunctions generated by power distribution within the couple is the discovery of solutions that can lead to financial, psychological, and emotional balance and well-being for both partners. This paper aims to conduct a comparative analysis of men's and women's opinions regarding dominance within the conjugal couple, as well as to identify their views on the division of domestic roles. This research topic may be useful in improving the quality of couple life, preventing the dissolution of the contemporary family, reducing divorce rates, etc., by raising awareness of the existence and persistence of retrograde mentalities regarding the roles and statuses of partners within a couple.

Keywords: *Distribution of roles; dominance; power distribution; conjugal roles; gender representation.*

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1. The Man and the Woman – Inequity, Equity, Dominance

The family is one of the most widespread types of social groups, and yet the attempt to define it is by no means easy. On the contrary, the great diversity of family types that have succeeded one another throughout history or that coexist in contemporary societies necessitates the identification of common characteristics (Voinea, 2005, p. 8).

In the attempts to define the family, two perspectives are particularly significant: the sociological and the legal. Today's family takes on many names, such as traditional, single-parent, extended, blended, or childless; however, what matters most in a family is the relationship among its members.

The family is the one that offers you affection, support, and helps you whenever you need it, when the world is indifferent (Băran-Pescaru, 2004, pp. 8–9).

In order to observe the evolution of the family, I will begin by defining and explaining it.

The family can be defined as a social group based on marital, consanguineous, and kinship relationships, with the members of the group sharing common feelings, aspirations, and values (Mihăilescu, 2003, p. 157).

In other words, it is the most important human form, encompassing people connected by blood and kinship, and it represents the socio-educational environment where primary socialization is learned. In contemporary society, the family has undergone significant changes, to the extent that the term “family” has become increasingly ambiguous, tending to encompass present-day realities that differ from those of past generations (Apostu, 2018).

With regard to the structure of roles within the family, we distinguish between complete families (consisting of husband, wife, and children) and incomplete families (single-parent families). Single-parent families may result from births outside marriage (families of young single mothers) or from the dissolution of the family (through divorce or the death of a partner) (Mihăilescu, 2003, p. 161).

Family roles can be exercised in a wide variety of forms: one husband may be overly authoritarian, while another may be gentle

and considerate in his relationship with his partner; one father may be deeply involved in the education of his children, while another may not participate at all—either out of indifference or because he considers such concerns unworthy of a man. A wife and mother may manage the household very efficiently, while another may refuse or fail to handle domestic chores; some children may be obedient and well-behaved, while others may be more rebellious.

Despite the wide diversity in the exercise of family roles, there are nonetheless certain margins of variation which, once exceeded, may lead to a decline in family solidarity or even to the breakdown of the family. The variability limits in the exercise of family roles differ depending on the socio-cultural characteristics of the groups (Mihăilescu, 2003, p. 161).

The history of the evolution of the family is nothing more than the history of the development and modification of conjugal roles. These role changes have mostly occurred gradually and insignificantly—except in recent decades, which have compelled both sexes to undergo rapid and somewhat forced adaptation (Ciupercă, 1999, p. 77). Over time, the patriarchal, traditional type of family has predominated, characterized by male authority, with remnants persisting even in the transitional or modern family models. The changes did not occur abruptly; rather, their dynamics were influenced by economic, political, and social factors that became increasingly decisive in women's lives. The transformations within the family were initiated by women and focused on the role and condition of women.

What individuals from a particular culture expect from a man or a woman, from a father or a mother, often overlaps with the stereotypes associated with these expectations. Such stereotypes and clichés are often false statements, but at the level of common consciousness, they circulate as truths and produce behavioral consequences (Iluț, 2005, p. 113). Defined as a social system, the family consists of interpersonal relationships that are regulated and organized through specific social roles and statuses. Failure to fulfill family roles is sanctioned both within the family and by the broader community. Fully functioning as a family requires a long-term process of social learning. If this process is carried out effectively, individuals will adequately perform their domestic roles; otherwise, failures in fulfilling these roles may occur.

Gender role refers to the activities in which men and women engage with varying frequency. These are internalized through the process

of socialization by parents, other family members, friends, the mass media, and other agents of socialization. The internalization of gender roles can be observed from the earliest stages of a child's development. As the child grows, they begin to distinguish between the types of clothing considered appropriate for a girl or a boy. Thus, role construction is directly influenced by socializing environments, by the concrete example set by families, and, involuntarily, the influences of the extended group may leave their mark on the mentality of young people regarding the future attitudes that individuals will adopt in their own conjugal relationships (Apostu, 2016, pp. 146–147).

The preparation of individuals for the exercise of conjugal roles is carried out based on social models and norms (Vlad, 2017). Some families fail to adequately socialize these roles, and the learning process may occur only partially or may be in contradiction with role expectations. In such situations, individuals are prone to role failure. In the second half of the twentieth century, institutions providing family support began to promote the socialization of family roles through social work, family counseling, or specialized publications.

The limitation of men's and women's roles and characteristics based on gender is grounded in stereotypes and prejudices.

It should be noted that the gender stereotype consists of a set of beliefs about the psychological characteristics and types of activities typical of men and women. Thus, gender role refers to the definitions of certain behaviors, while the gender stereotype refers to the beliefs and attitudes about masculinity and femininity. These two concepts, gender role and gender stereotype, tend to be associated (Apostu, 2016, p. 147).

Laboratory data do not show significant differences in many personality traits, such as dependency, obedience, or willingness to help others. Marked differences have been confirmed experimentally and through systematic observations regarding stereotyping—specifically, aggression and dominance in men, and a more pronounced tendency toward affiliation (concern for contact with other human beings) in women (Iluț, 2005, p. 114).

Stereotypes about women are the consequence of certain deeply rooted attitudes, values, norms, and prejudices against women. The use of such stereotypes serves to justify and maintain the historical power relations of men over women.

Role expectations create real differences between the behaviors of men and women, primarily through socialization. In other words, most personality and behavioral characteristics attributed through stereotypes are not natural or biopsychological, but are induced through various psychosocial mechanisms (Iluț, 2005, p. 114).

The choice and commitment to a partner is not merely an instinctual matter, but also a moral one. The natural need for an opposite-sex partner, for the purpose of forming a couple, contains within it the symbolic restoration of wholeness through the encounter of the two parts of the human being: the man and the woman.

In the case of a couple, the two partners-beyond their individual identities-will, through a reciprocal process over time, construct a shared identity shaped by life as a couple. Although initially different, over the course of their lives, the individuals who form a couple will gradually adopt a common lifestyle, a shared way of thinking, acting, and behaving, similar preferences, and mutual feelings. Moreover, they may even begin to resemble each other physically.

Beyond the indisputable psycho-biological aspects, I believe there is also an inner agreement of an interpersonal nature, rooted in the couple's cultural, moral, and spiritual-religious values, which creates the shared atmosphere in which both partners live. The assimilation of common values leads to the construction of a unique model: the same life principles, attitudes, mentalities, tastes, and ideals, which become shared and ultimately reflect a new couple identity between the two life partners.

The significant image that highlights the presence of women in society is that of wife, mother, and homemaker. Public consciousness assigns women certain roles that they fulfill in the extra-familial space. Based on fundamental human principles, women's emancipation is an important issue, one that concerns both the present and the future (Fulea-Bordian, 2012, p. 106).

If the man is engaged, by his nature and status, primarily in the sphere of social life-granting the family a somewhat secondary role-for the woman, *"motherhood appears as the crowning of sexuality, as the final and definitive stage of sexual evolution. For the man, the paternal feeling is tied to concerns about the children's future, their education, financial situation, and social integration. For the woman, by contrast, the maternal feeling has an emotional,*

psychological connotation-focused on protection, education, and the formation of the child” (Enăchescu, 2002, pp. 86–87).

Although the woman has taken on roles beyond the home and household, certain responsibilities still fall predominantly on her. Due to her natural inclinations-such as affection, warmth, care, gentleness, etc.-she remains anchored in domestic activities and in raising and educating children. At the opposite pole stands the man, who considers that his financial contribution to the family’s well-being constitutes sufficient involvement.

Differences created through stereotyping also indirectly affect family life, especially regarding power within a conjugal couple, which is directly related to the financial income that the woman contributes to the household budget. Yet, women are: much less involved in the labor market; they hold jobs that are far less well-paid than those of men; for the same type of work, they earn less than men (Iluț, 2005, p. 115).

If conjugal morality clearly subjects the woman to the man, domestic morality and the family economy restore her role-based superiority. As a homemaker, the woman has an overwhelming economic role. [...] And even though property as such-land and the house-was passed down through male succession, the domestic management of the economy fell to the woman (Pantelimon Bistriceanu, 2021, p. 145).

The entirety of domestic responsibilities, including child-rearing and education, elevated the woman to a superior position-firstly due to her innate qualities, and secondly due to the inherited experience passed down from generation to generation within the household sphere.

The woman’s exit from the shell of the family implies a competition with men-a competition that men are not so certain they will win, despite the prejudices and stereotypes that burden a woman’s career (for example, if she has children, she will neglect her work; at menopause, she will become temperamental, etc.) (Ciupercă, 1999, p. 77).

It has been proven that women have achieved high performance in many fields of activity, despite the fact that these fields had traditionally been dominated by men. Certain vocational sectors embraced by women have aligned naturally with their inherent aptitudes, making the sense of competitive threat felt by men

unjustified. In leaving the “shell” of the family, women did not seek competition, but rather the fulfillment of their vocations.

The masculine cultural model currently passed on to men and reinforced by society presupposes strength, even harshness, and the concealment of emotions and affectivity as signs of a blameworthy weakness (Pasti, 2003, p. 88).

Boys are raised within inherited behavioral patterns and are taught from the earliest years of childhood that a man must be strong, must not show his sensitive side because it makes him vulnerable, and that he bears the full responsibility for the material support of the family, as well as the transformed expectation of protecting, even physically-through muscular strength-those who are part of his family. For such reasons, young boys are often told that “*men never cry*”, and are assigned a model that does not suit all of them and is, at the same time, harmful for their future roles as husbands and fathers, as their masculinity is conditioned by the absence of emotional sensitivity.

Roles designated as feminine have been considered inferior to those designated as masculine, and particularly as roles lacking authority. These causes, among many others, represent the starting points of feminist movements, which aim to reevaluate the relations between the sexes and to change the vision of what it means to be a woman (Ciupercă, 2000, p. 21).

Women have known and intuitively understood that their innate aptitudes qualify them for certain professions, for the arts, or for education in general. Motivated by the desire for knowledge and education, but also for the acquisition of rights-such as the right to vote, to have their opinions count, to gain social and cultural visibility, recognition, and to break free from certain molds-women initiated the feminist movement.

Feminism militates against the reproduction of systematic inequalities between men and women and has a major interest in the study of language, precisely because language plays a key role in the structure of all social practices and institutions, in reflecting, creating, and propagating norms, differences, and, implicitly, gender-based discrimination (Dragomir, 2002, p. 127).

Gender represents a fundamental division in all societies. Being born female or male fundamentally affects the way we behave, as well as

the way we are treated. And this is where language comes into play (Dragomir, 2002, p. 127).

Being a woman or a man implies that the language we use-or that is used when speaking to or about us-is essentially different, being deeply infused with gender ideology. Language reflects gender divisions in human society and, at the same time, perpetuates them.

Step by step, feminism, as a social, political, and cultural movement, has achieved its aims, evolving through all of its so-called waves. Naturally, along the way, many women no longer identified with the ideology of the movement, seeing it as having drifted toward an unnatural extreme. The emancipation of women has been an extremely beneficial process for their condition and for the evolution of human society, as long as women's expectations did not exceed the boundaries of common sense and the natural condition of humanity.

Above all, they obtained the right to think through any issue, to formulate and to choose the solutions they considered appropriate (Ștefănescu, 1997, as cited in Ciupercă, 2000, p. 21).

"In general, power implies relationships of inequality. From this perspective, in the traditional family, such relationships were extremely unequal and unidirectional, due to the fact that the woman was subordinate" (Ciupercă, 2000, p. 63), while the man, regarded as the head of the family, could abuse his position. It is true that women's social power has significantly increased in contemporary society compared to the traditional one, but we cannot equate this power with that of men.

The issue is relative, because although there is a tendency to influence the other in assuming a certain role, it cannot be determined whether the social power of the contemporary woman is greater than that of the man, or vice versa (Ciupercă, 2000, p. 63).

Although, following the liberalization of post-revolutionary Romanian society, one might have assumed that Western liberal models regarding the relationships between women and men would influence Romanian society in shaping these relations, we are far from witnessing the construction of a partnership-based model in the family and society-one built on respect and the recognition of each individual's value, in which gender differences are not viewed or transformed into deficiencies that hinder the affirmation and free

development of every person, regardless of their sex (Pasti, 2003, p. 89).

Romanian society has yet to develop worthy and contemporary cultural models to follow. A first step toward progress would be the outlining and dissemination of a cultural model adapted to Romanian society, aimed at redefining the relationships between women and men.

2. Methodology

This study employed the sociological survey method, with the aim of capturing individuals' opinions regarding the distribution of power within conjugal relationships. The research instrument used was the semi-structured interview, which included questions related to the participants' behaviors, opinions, experiences, values, and principles. The objectives of the study focused on analyzing gender-based opinions concerning dominance in the conjugal couple and identifying perspectives regarding the division of domestic roles.

The research sample consisted of 10 young individuals aged between 20 and 29, who are below the peak age of marriage, and who reside in Bucharest and Ilfov County.

3. Power and Domination in the Contemporary Couple

A comparative analysis of task division between men and women within conjugal relationships reveals that both women and men, at least at a declarative level, support an equitable distribution of responsibilities. Moving beyond the constraints of a traditional model-in which the man was responsible for all tasks outside the home and for providing income, while the woman handled everything related to the domestic space and childcare-the responses collected indicate that responsibilities are now distributed according to each partner's availability and skills. Tasks assigned to men often require physical strength (considered specific to men); however, there is a boundary between the roles a man sees as his own and those he assigns to the woman. Arguments based on physical strength do not always support gender balance in role distribution, and at times, such statements reveal the subtle perpetuation of traditional behaviors and attitudes by men.

Within a conjugal relationship, each partner has certain expectations of the other. Based on the data collected regarding expectations related to household tasks, it appears that women expect men to handle tasks such as changing a lightbulb, mowing the

lawn, maintaining the car, or making various repairs around the house. This does not necessarily indicate a lack of competence among women regarding these tasks, but rather a desire to motivate the man and to feel protected. In conjugal behavior and the assumption of domestic roles, men need, more than women, a form of encouragement to take initiative. This external stimulus is required even for traditionally masculine roles. Men's role-related behavior at home is often minimal, with socialization in their families of origin reflecting a hierarchy that they replicate in their own conjugal lives. The struggle for gender equality initiated by women has had repercussions on men's behavior—men have come to realize that women can perform many of their traditional tasks and, as a result, have grown more complacent. Consequently, most responsibilities still fall on women, which explains why their responses often indicate the delegation of less pleasant tasks to men—tasks that are easier for them to carry out.

The male perspective is somewhat different, with men often stating that they have minimal or even no expectations from their partner. While the absence of expectations may seem like a dream to some women, it can also represent a male strategy aimed at eliciting reciprocity and lowering their partners' level of expectations.

When analyzing individuals' willingness to take on some of their partner's responsibilities in order to support their professional trajectory, a discrepancy in responses becomes apparent. Among women, the answers were relatively consistent: they stated they would be willing to take over some of their partner's tasks, provided that he did not entirely neglect household duties or negatively affect their own professional development. Among men, however, opinions were more divided.

One masculine perspective closely resembles the feminine one, expressing agreement with taking over the partner's tasks "*as long as this does not interfere with my professional responsibilities.*" This suggests a balance between partners, as a professional career is currently a source of satisfaction and self-esteem for both genders, in addition to material well-being.

Another male perspective stands out for its openness to fully assuming the partner's responsibilities, enabling her to focus entirely on her professional career. This reflects the presence of men who understand the importance of a woman's career and autonomy, willingly supporting their partner without clinging to traditional or culturally defined roles, and acknowledging women's individual development needs. This perspective indicates a shift in male

mentality, especially considering that most men tend to be highly competitive, career-oriented, and view domestic tasks as less significant. These results, however, offer a new image of the contemporary man-one who is not afraid of engaging in so-called “women’s work” and who provides full support to his partner.

In complete contrast to these perspectives, the following response was received: *“A man can do what a woman does, but a woman cannot do everything a man does.”* This point of view highlights a perceived difference between the sexes and can be classified as a traditionalist mindset, where the man is seen as all-knowing and capable of anything, while the woman does what she can. In contemporary society, traditionalism can no longer be supported by logical arguments, but only through social stereotypes. When referring to men’s physical strength, the idea emerges that men rely on this argument to justify gender-specific roles for men and women.

For a long time throughout history, women’s professional careers were virtually nonexistent. The emancipation of women and their transition from exclusively fulfilling domestic duties to building a professional career-while still maintaining household responsibilities-has had consequences for couple dynamics. This shift, initiated by women, has required men to take on certain responsibilities that their partners could no longer fulfill due to objective constraints, such as lack of time. The price of women’s careers is role overload, as men are often unprepared to assume these roles, influenced by the examples set in their families of origin. Primary socialization directed women toward assuming domestic roles-both traditionally feminine and masculine-which contributes to role inequity in conjugal relationships, even though women should, in theory, be the first to avoid this imbalance.

Women emphasize the importance of their careers in terms of independence, confident that *“if the relationship no longer works for any reason, the financial aspect is no longer a constraint that would force them to remain in an unhealthy or unconstructive situation.”* The responses analyzed indicate that a professional career is highly important for women, as it is a resource that grants them autonomy and reduces inequities. Dependence on a man tends to reinforce traditional behaviors, whereas a personal income that ensures basic autonomy and individual functionality is a support mechanism that enables women to overcome traditional barriers and classic imperatives.

Starting from the following statement: *“from the moment women wanted and obtained the right to hold the same positions as men-leadership or demanding roles-they should not try to shift their responsibilities onto men,”* we can observe a complete lack of willingness on the part of the man to take over certain responsibilities traditionally associated with women. Behind such a statement lie stereotypes acquired through flawed socialization within the man’s family of origin. The stereotypical aspect here is the idea that women with careers still take on domestic roles, whereas men do not. Thus, the notion of equity is more strongly supported by women, who adopt these behaviors, and less by men, who reduce their domestic involvement in favor of their careers.

The refusal to support one’s partner in building a professional career can be interpreted as an obstruction to her emancipation and as an expression of the man’s desire to dominate the relationship. In some cases, a woman might accept such behavior and attempt to fulfill all duties herself, at the cost of neglecting her physical, mental, and emotional health. However, if she reaches a breaking point and experiences constant stress, she may decide to continue her life without her partner. Therefore, women’s behavior in contemporary conjugal relationships reveals a newfound freedom to make decisions, largely determined by their financial autonomy.

Contemporary society is characterized by both partners contributing to the couple’s income. For this reason, it becomes relevant to analyze who is responsible for managing that income. When income is managed by only one partner, it may be a sign of domination, through control over how money is spent. Given that income comes from both sides, each partner should have the freedom to use part of the money for personal needs and shared goals, after essential expenses (such as bills or loans) have been covered.

Respondents-both male and female-stated that women are more organized and better suited to managing the couple’s finances. Nevertheless, the preferred method of income management is the creation of a joint budget, from which utility bills and shared expenses are paid, while the remaining money is used for personal expenses. Moreover, if the couple’s income allows, they may set aside a “reserve budget” for potential investments or unexpected emergencies. The effective and consensual financial organization, as described by respondents, appears to be the ideal model within a conjugal relationship.

The study also revealed opinions that describe the phenomenon as follows: *"I teasingly told her she might be spending more than she earns. But sometimes the smile wasn't wide enough, and she took it as a reproach."* From a traditionalist perspective, the man once held the role of financial sufficiency, yet nowadays he no longer assumes this responsibility, leaving the task of ensuring the family's material well-being to the woman. In contrast, women reproach men precisely for this economic imbalance, represented by a smaller financial contribution and higher spending. Such statements from respondents highlight a reverse inequity: although the criticism comes from the man, it is perceived by the woman as a form of inequality. At the same time, as the response illustrates, the man is not necessarily affected by being labeled as the spender in the relationship, but rather in his *status*, since he is expected to be recognized for his ability to provide for the household. A discrepancy exists between men's declared behavior and their internalized social mentalities. They do not self-evaluate their financial contribution, but are disturbed by women's criticism-especially when accompanied by arguments that highlight this imbalance-indicating that some men remain deeply anchored in rigid traditional norms.

Financial matters are an important topic in relation to couple dynamics. Money offers stability, security, quality of life, and various opportunities. However, there are situations where one partner-usually the higher earner-dominates the other by using money as a tool for control. Most often, men are those who exert dominance in this way, while women lack the courage or the means to leave abusive relationships due to financial dependency on their partner. This dependency can be traced back to the model inherited from their parents-the traditional family model in which only one partner (typically the man) generated income, while the other (typically the woman) managed the home and children. This inherited model causes some partners to perceive this mode of functioning within the couple as normal.

The use of money as a tool of control in the contemporary couple reflects men's insecurity and their resistance to accepting women's equal status. Although tracking income is important, a balanced and lasting relationship requires that financial decisions be made jointly, with the consent and agreement of both partners.

Starting from the following statement: *"Realistically though, I did go a bit too far by reproaching my partner for the fact that I earn more and receive significant support from my parents,"* we can observe how this woman's greater purchasing power gives her the

perceived “right” to criticize her partner for the income gap. Although money is often the source of arguments and frustrations, *“in a conjugal relationship built on healthy and mature principles, there should be no hierarchy between partners, no power, and no control.”* With few exceptions, the responses to the question regarding power and control in the conjugal couple through income indicate the absence of such behaviors in respondents’ relationships. Progress in partner equality is particularly evident in how income is managed, by overcoming past prejudices that justified financial control.

Effective communication is essential for good organization within a conjugal relationship. In my view, communication is the solution to many problems, misunderstandings, and even frustrations. The first step to effective communication is listening. Especially in today’s society-which is crowded, fast-paced, and exhausting-the most difficult thing is to find the time and attention to truly listen to what your partner is trying to communicate.

In traditional society, what was considered “effective communication” often involved aggression toward women, under the assumption that the message had been understood-whether through verbal abuse or the imposition of opinions and tasks. My goal is to analyze how effective communication is viewed today, and the responses collected through the research instrument indicate a strong consensus, with only one exception. There is a clear desire for communication, regarding both problems and positive aspects: *“Effective communication in a couple involves discussing both the good and beautiful things that one or both partners enjoy, and the less pleasant aspects.”* Generally, women are more inclined toward extensive communication, feeling the need to anticipate or resolve issues, but this time, men expressed the same view.

Departing from the pattern of most responses, the study highlighted certain male opinions that emphasize gendered communication differences: *“For communication to be effective, the partner shouldn’t bug the other with every stupid thing that crosses their mind. Women talk a lot and, indirectly, burden the man with their problems or moods; the man just wants to be alone with his thoughts without someone buzzing in his ear like a broken record.”* This illustrates men’s low willingness to listen to women’s perspectives. The lack of time, patience, and openness on the part of men to truly listen to their partners reflects gender and attitudinal inequality within the relationship. It is a clear example of the gap between attitude and expectations-a form of devaluation of the feminine image based on stereotypical beliefs such as *“women babble and say silly things.”*

In terms of communication, there are situations where one partner refrains from expressing their opinion out of fear of repercussions. When the partner tends to respond aggressively, react negatively, or even completely ignore one's point of view, one may avoid bringing up certain opinions and become hesitant or intimidated about discussing more sensitive topics. Each partner has the right to express their opinion equally, but this remains difficult to achieve—even in the contemporary period, where conjugal relationships appear to have evolved compared to the past.

Regarding decision-making in the couple, responses show a significant overlap between genders, with both women and men stating that, within their relationship, both partners contribute equally to decision-making. Naturally, in an ideal relationship, this would be the appropriate behavior—one that includes effective communication, based on respecting the partner's opinion, and where differing views are debated with arguments until a mutually accepted decision is reached. However, based on the answers of some respondents, it can be concluded that although both partners claim to agree on joint decision-making, there are still situations where one partner compromises—yielding to the inflexibility of the other just to maintain peace and avoid conflict that could destabilize the relationship. Most often, it is the woman who makes this compromise, which reveals that some men still retain traces of traditional family beliefs, where the man—due to his status as the sole breadwinner—was entitled to make unilateral decisions. This tendency to protect traditional values leads some men to remain inflexible, using this stance as a last means of maintaining dominance. Modernity no longer guarantees their status—now they must earn it. The image of the man is that of someone who manages to meet feminine needs so that his partner feels comfortable, protected, empowered, and autonomous. Yet, the act of yielding shows that sometimes conjugal relationships, from the perspective of gender roles and attitudes, take the form of compromise more than that of communication and functional interaction.

Analyzing some of the responses given by women (for example: *"I think I'm one of the lucky women who takes part in almost all, if not all, of the important decisions in the couple"*), it can be concluded that the woman is not in a position of equality with the man in this decision-making process, but rather that the respondent emphasized the phenomenon of women's subordination in Romanian families, considering herself a fortunate exception.

At a declarative level, all male respondents support the equal participation of partners in decision-making, but at the same time, some men believe that *“the final decision should preferably be made by the man because he has a more rational and analytical mindset.”* Accepting this statement also means acknowledging that certain traits specific to women—such as sensitivity, intuition, and the capacity for self-sacrifice—can contribute to decision-making in situations where these qualities are relevant. This leads to the essential role of communication between partners, as well as the self-confidence of each individual. If someone is confident in themselves, they will argue their opinion and may influence the final decision. On the other hand, some men admit that they cannot make decisions without consulting their partner, even for minor matters: *“... I actually need confirmation from my wife. Not necessarily because she’s more rational than I am, but it gives me a bit more confidence.”* This response reveals a somewhat duplicitous behavior. The man does not acknowledge that he cannot decide on his own and that his partner’s feedback is the key resource that enables him to do so—instead, he claims he simply wants another opinion. It is clear he would remain indecisive without her input. His traditional self-image and cultural construction compel him to maintain the mentality of the leader, refusing to accept the idea that, in fact, the woman’s opinion validates his ability to make the decision. He does not accept the principle of equity, and especially not the possibility that the woman may be superior when it comes to evaluating situations and forming judgments. Self-confidence plays a vital role in decision-making, and a self-assured partner actively participates in all decisions made together with their significant other.

In order to impose their own opinion or choice, one of the partners may resort to certain means of persuasion. Most women believe that such behavior has no place in a healthy relationship, suggesting that a discussion based on arguments would benefit both dialogue partners. When the male partner resorts to persuasive methods to obtain unconditional acceptance from the woman, this is perceived by women as manipulative behavior. Moreover, if, after exhausting logical arguments, the partner resorts to blackmail or threats, the discussion crosses the line of reasoned conversation and becomes an act of subjugation. A tendency toward acceptance and submission can be observed among women, who often, once a decision has been made by the partner or in favor of his option, accept and respect that decision even if they did not fully agree with it: *“I tend to respect my partner’s decision regardless of whether it benefits or disadvantages me.”*

Women also tend to yield more easily to the partner's insistence and firmness, out of a desire and need to preserve peace and harmony in the relationship, but also because they often consider the man to be more capable of making decisions. This view of the partner stems from the fact that, throughout history, women were deprived of many rights, and men made important decisions alone, from the position of head of the family. Women appreciate this ability in men to make good, practical, and objective decisions, considering it part of masculine charm: *"Honestly, I wouldn't want him to follow me blindly in everything I do or want to do. I want to see that he has an opinion, that he supports it, and that we reach a common ground. I'm aware that in some cases I might not have the best opinion, I might not make the best decision, so it's helpful to hear another perspective that might help me."* Although the interview guide was applied to young participants, the form of interaction and power dynamics clearly reflects a traditional model. Society still operates based on traditional values, and both men and women-even young individuals-submit to them. Women maintain traditional submissiveness toward men, while men resort to authority as the only remaining tool to assert their traditional image of status.

If, in a scenario of trying to persuade a partner, verbal or even physical aggression were used, the situation would become intolerable for any woman: *"In my opinion, no dispute should involve any form of aggression. Personally, I would not tolerate any kind of abuse or aggression, whether physical or emotional."* Aggression is so harmful to women that nearly all of them stated they would end a relationship with an aggressive partner. *"If it ever happened that, during a dispute, my partner became aggressive, I would certainly end the discussion at that point and, likewise, the relationship itself."* *"Aggressive behavior during conflicts makes me feel anxious, panicked, and stressed. I get the urge to leave my partner as quickly as possible."*

From the perspective of male respondents, their partners' aggression is mostly verbal-manifested through a raised tone or even shouting. Tension in the conjugal couple that escalates to verbal or physical aggression is most often caused by the absence of dialogue-namely, one partner's refusal to collaborate, marked by inflexibility (even stubbornness) and complete disregard for the other's opinion. Although the male respondents claim to be open to dialogue and to show cohesion and empathy toward their partner, behind this attitude lie traditional elements that they have internalized either from their family of origin or from societal models of conjugal relationships. It is

evident that men attempt to impose their point of view, following the traditional model-mentioned earlier-of the head of the household, while women end up raising their voice out of the frustration accumulated over generations of women who were denied the right to speak, and who voiced their thoughts with hesitation and fear in front of men.

For most respondents, both men and women, a partner's aggressiveness is associated with similar episodes from childhood, experienced in their family of origin: *"A violent reaction is a trigger for me, and I also react (extremely) violently. It reminds me of some problems from childhood, and sometimes I find it impossible to manage them."* From the analysis of responses regarding aggression in communication between partners in conjugal relationships, we can conclude that men tend to imitate a traditional model characterized by the domination of the female partner-one learned from their families of origin. Likewise, women perpetuate behavior acquired within their own families, rooted in frustration and the inability to be heard, as well as in the desire for their opinions to matter.

The analysis of situations in which one partner imposes something on the other highlights the categorical refusal of all respondents to accept any imposition that contradicts their personal principles. A very small group, composed of both men and women, stands out for their firm refusal of imposition while still expressing willingness to analyze the situation in order to better understand what is happening, how it got to that point, and to seek solutions.

The power dynamic regarding authority within the couple tends to tilt in favor of the male partner. In order to determine the degree to which male authority might be considered useful in the conjugal environment, I analyzed the responses received on this topic through the interview guide, from the perspectives of both partners. While women see neither the need nor the purpose for male authority in a couple, male respondents express the perceived usefulness of such authority: *"...he should be more authoritarian if the woman gets out of hand," "Someone has to keep the woman grounded."* These responses clearly indicate inequality, a lack of trust in women, a tendency toward domination, and a lack of flexibility in understanding power relations-making it evident that even among young people, traditional views persist. An exceptional male response stands out, stating that *"male authority can only serve as a tool for subjugating the woman and will bring discomfort and tension into the relationship,"* thus reinforcing the persistence of traditional views among youth and

highlighting a male recognition of such behavior in contemporary conjugal relationships.

Authority can also manifest through one partner imposing themselves in the role of leader. When analyzing the need for a leader in the conjugal relationship, we find unanimous agreement among female respondents that the conjugal environment is not the appropriate context for such a role: *“The existence of a leader in a conjugal couple implies domination or the intention to control,”* *“There is no need for a relationship of subordination from either partner.”*

Men’s opinions are divided into two categories: opinions against the existence of a leader in the couple (*“I don’t think there is a leader in a couple. Each has their own role and qualities.”*) and opinions in favor of a leader, specifically the man in the leadership role (*“The man is naturally the leader in the couple because he has the ability to better analyze and manage situations and critical moments.”*). Although this type of response may express care and protection toward the partner, behind it lies the traditional belief that only the man is capable of leading the family, being endowed with superior abilities compared to the woman.

Power in the conjugal couple can be associated with the role of “head of the family.” I approached this phenomenon from the perspective of the woman as head of the family, in order to understand the opinions of young people in contemporary society. Many responses—from both women and men—at least at the declarative level, lead to the conclusion that this idea is not unacceptable. The reasons vary. While most women believe that although they could successfully fulfill this role, they do not wish to do so and would accept it only out of strict necessity. One notable exception comes from a female respondent who considers this role entirely normal for a woman, as she was raised by a single mother and saw in her the model of a woman who was the “head of the family,” a model later continued by her older sister in her own conjugal relationship.

From the male perspective, the ease with which some say they would accept a woman as the leader in a conjugal relationship actually masks their own complacency, immaturity, and refusal to take on that responsibility. Among the respondents, one man stands out by firmly rejecting this role for a woman, viewing her merely as *“a helper, an extension of the man.”* This reflects traditional beliefs in their purest form, revealing the superior and dominant position of the man in contrast to a supposedly inferior being referred to as *“the weaker sex.”*

4. Manipulation in the Couple – A Psychosocial Approach

Family psychology is a field that deals with the theoretical and applied study of the psychological mechanisms involved in the formation, maintenance, and dissolution of the family, as well as the processes and phenomena that occur within a family. This branch of psychology defines the couple as “a bipolar, biopsychosocial structure based on mutual interdeterminism (partners satisfy, stimulate, develop, and fulfill themselves as biological, emotional, and social individuals, through one another)” (Mitrofan, 1989, p. 14). Through marriage, the family is established, which psychology defines as “a form of human community composed of two or more individuals, united by marital and/or parental ties, fulfilling, to varying degrees, the biological and/or psychosocial dimensions” (Mitrofan & Ciupercă, 1997, p. 16).

In its development, the marital couple faces certain obstacles; the partners may become concerned with the security of the relationship in the future, with fidelity and ownership, with attraction and rejection (Cojocaru, 2021, p. 154).

There may also be many other causes of conflict, primarily related to the desire for self-fulfillment, unity, and stability.

Marital conflict represents a temporary, momentary, or prolonged disruption of family functionality, characterized by negative emotional tension and by a breakdown in communication between spouses (Spînu, 2020, p. 315).

Conflict can manifest through various actions: verbal aggression (disagreements, heated discussions, raised voices, shouting, threats, insults), it may escalate into physical aggression, or it may take the form of long-term psychological, emotional, or economic abuse.

Emotional manipulation involves an action primarily aimed at influencing psychological processes and phenomena through tactics designed to control the partner’s behavior or thinking by exploiting emotions.

A series of psychological phenomena in the cognitive, emotional, and relational sphere can be instrumentalized by the manipulator, sometimes with spectacular results in determining and controlling human behavior, especially when this method is combined with informational manipulation (Cojocaru, 2021, p. 154).

Psychological violence is identified by psychiatrists and psychologists as the most frequent but also the least observable and admitted, making it difficult to establish a direct connection between the causes of symptoms and their consequences (Mitrofan & Ciupercă, 1998, p. 373).

In a couple's relationship, emotional manipulation can manifest through various methods, such as: making the partner feel guilty or ashamed in order to get what the manipulator wants; criticizing or insulting the partner to make them feel inferior or insecure; attempting to control the partner's activities and relationships, as well as limiting access to resources such as money, the car, or the phone; using silence or ignoring as a way to make the other person feel uncertain or unimportant; using threats or even violence to make the partner comply with the manipulator's wishes.

Despite the fact that a couple is founded on feelings of love, manipulation can still arise within the relationship, transforming it from an egalitarian dynamic into one of dominance and submission. The manipulator does not openly express their desire to dominate, nor do they explicitly articulate their demands and grievances, but instead resorts to alternative strategies. If they were to ask directly for what they wanted, they might face a rationally justified refusal.

What the blackmailer desires is not a logical resolution of their demand, but rather a path that involves fear and guilt. They will subject the other person to pressure, seize every opportunity to make them feel guilty, and will place the burden of their own unhappiness on the other's shoulders (Cojocar, 2021, p. 155).

Manipulation is a weapon that should have no place in a couple's relationship. While in a professional setting one might find some potentially positive attributes of this form of interaction, it cannot be beneficial in an emotional relationship, as a bond between two people should not rely on tests or inappropriate words, but on honesty, trust, and love.

The woman often resorts to manipulation in a subtle and difficult-to-detect manner for her partner. By contrast, the man manipulates more harshly, and the woman becomes a helpless victim, unable to escape her partner's dominance.

The woman, in particular, is raised in a spirit of endurance, tolerance, and valorization of her husband, even when he becomes unbearable. Dogma, custom, and prescribed norms in some

environments assign the man an unwritten right to subdue his wife as a sign of masculinity and authority. This mystification of the meaning of male-female relations, especially within traditional families, often sacrifices interpersonal normality and stifles the woman's personality within the limits of an educationally predestined social masochism (Mitrofan & Ciupercă, 1998, p. 371).

Behavioral manipulation involves influencing the target person(s) to carry out actions that are inconsistent with their own goals, without them being aware of the discrepancy between their goals and the more distant aims of the source of influence (Cojocaru, 2021, p. 155).

The victim of manipulation ends up living a life completely alien to her own aspirations, constantly preoccupied with satisfying the other, to the point where her personality fades and drifts ever further from what she wanted to become, to receive, and to experience - and when she finally realizes this, it may be too late. Isabelle Nazare-Aga (1999) argues that certain mechanisms are used in the practice of manipulation: mimicry, exploitation of traditional beliefs, and a superior attitude.

Mimicry. The manipulator deceives the victim by artificially creating behaviors and scenarios. For example, he may mimic certain emotional states and give the impression of being a caring, kind, and generous person, displaying a false persona that aligns with what he knows would earn him credibility in the eyes of his partner. He presents a misleading image with the aim of ensnaring her, so that he can later keep her captive.

Exploitation of traditional beliefs. The manipulator makes the other person believe that they themselves adhere to (often absolutist and irrational) generally accepted principles, such as: "you must know everything," "you should never show ignorance," "you must be perfect in all circumstances," "you must always keep your promises," "if someone gives you something, you absolutely have to give something in return," etc. (Nazare-Aga, 1999, pp. 54, 78, apud Cojocaru, 2021, p. 156).

Superior attitude. The manipulator takes advantage of others' ignorance to position themselves as intellectually superior so that those around them develop an inferiority complex, making them easier to dominate.

Closely connected to the mechanisms listed above are three of Robert Cialdini's principles (2004):

The principle of liking. This principle implies that the manipulator becomes likable and agreeable, knowing that people are generally more cooperative with those they like, and are more likely to say yes when they sympathize with the person. Liking is induced by several factors, such as: physical attractiveness – which is a social advantage for good-looking people; similarity – any perceived similarity can generate liking; compliments – it's hard to refuse someone who offers compliments. Liking is often paired with seduction and fascination, the manipulator being capable of charming and emotionally subjugating the victim through their ability to impress.

The principle of reciprocity. The manipulator may voluntarily offer help, knowing that such a favor can ensure that the gesture is returned. At a moment they consider opportune, they might request a favor in return, indebting the victim and taking advantage of their perceived obligation to reciprocate.

The principle of authority. This principle is based on the trust many people place in those who hold positions of power, lead others, or project a serious and imposing image through their knowledge. From a position of authority, manipulation can occur, as manipulators rely on the tendency of most people to submit to those in power.

Manipulative behavior also includes elements of non-verbal language, such as: avoiding eye contact, or adopting a dominant posture by staring; pretending to be busy or assigning the interlocutor a task to give the impression of disinterest, inducing a feeling of awkwardness; adjusting the tone of voice to the situation - either very strong or very weak; using gestures or facial expressions like hitting the table with a fist to intimidate, or exaggerated laughter at everything the partner says to suggest they're not taking the conversation seriously.

Manipulative mechanisms are not rooted in rationality, but in the emotional sphere. Resistance to manipulation requires more reason at the expense of sensitivity. However, reason alone is not enough; we must also accept that often what surrounds us - people or information - can be distorted or completely false.

A manipulator may present only the part of reality that suits them. This limitation of reason can be corrected through techniques such as: asking questions, deliberately seeking different perspectives on the same fact (Cojocaru, 2021, p. 157).

Manipulators are capable of selectively highlighting only certain aspects of reality that benefit them, ignoring or minimizing

inconvenient aspects. Passive individuals are more frequently victims of manipulation, as are those with very low self-esteem. These are people who make efforts just to leave a good impression on others, who don't know how to say no or are afraid to say no for fear of appearing rude. The inability to refuse, excessive shyness, and timid behavior represent a form of behavioral distortion.

Such cases require specialized intervention - the help of a psychologist to first increase self-confidence, but also to develop assertive communication skills and reevaluate social interactions.

Manipulators are frequently individuals with accentuated personality traits such as narcissistic, histrionic, dysthymic, or borderline types. (Cojocar, 2021, p. 157).

The woman frequently resorts to persuasive techniques, possessing a richer imagination and a much more developed intuition than the man, whereas the latter tends to manipulate in a harsher, more aggressive, and significantly more explicit and evident manner.

The overly laudatory and admiring husband, who displays demonstrative tenderness in social settings among friends, relatives, or acquaintances, may nonetheless become passive in private - at times sullen, moody, hostile, or indifferent toward his partner. Conversely, the wife who appears excessively submissive and docile toward her husband - constantly mimicking the need for and satisfaction from his emotional support and protection - often makes decisions and acts on her own, independently and with confidence, showing a tendency to minimize her husband's psychological presence and effectiveness. (Mitrofan, 1989, p. 109).

Based on research conducted by certain authors, we can note six fundamental obligations that may ensure the stability of the couple: 1. Honesty and demonstration of trust; 2. Fair distribution of domestic tasks, which may vary depending on the abilities and agreements within the couple; 3. Supporting the partner from the position of a friend, to provide a sense of support and empathy; 4. Communication with the partner must be oriented "toward the partner"; 5. Showing affection to the partner; 6. Acting in the partner's interest, offering help out of one's own initiative (Cojocar, 2021, p. 157).

The impact of unpredictability in the realm of marital relationships often generates significant psychological, educational, pathological, and social consequences, drawing attention to the need for

strategies that can limit such effects and promote a balanced, health-conducive family life. This requires, first and foremost, identifying the causes and factors that explain and sustain both conjugal harmony and discord, the satisfaction or dissatisfaction of the partners, and the stability or instability of a marriage - in other words, the success or failure of marital life (Mitrofan, 1989, p. 60).

The family, when founded on genuine discernment and spiritual values, becomes a source of profound joy and both emotional and physical fulfillment (Teșu, 2011, p. 34).

A person spends a significant part of their life within the family, and therefore must contribute and seek collaboration from their partner in a joint effort to transform their home into a small corner of paradise, aiming to achieve and maintain well-being on all levels.

The relationships within the family play a crucial role in the self-realization of each spouse, not in a singular, selfish, or individualistic manner, but rather in a communal sense - since the success of one partner is simultaneously the success of both and the shared joy of the entire family (Sava, Melniciuc Puică, 2011, p. 298).

Without mutual support and collaboration, the success of one spouse cannot be achieved, as the family represents both a community and a communion of love and assistance, of encouragement and reciprocal involvement.

5. Conclusions

With the advent of the modern era, the emancipation of women also took place, through a shift in social status, as they became increasingly involved in economic activity and began fulfilling various roles outside the household. This phenomenon led to a reconfiguration of the relationship between partners and required a redefinition of conjugal roles. In the contemporary couple, the order of priorities has been reversed, with personal interests coming first and couple-related interests second - unlike in the traditional family, where partners shared only common goals and clearly defined roles. This dynamic of statuses and roles within the conjugal couple formed the basis for establishing the research objectives: a gender-based analysis of opinions regarding domination within the conjugal relationship, and the identification of opinions regarding the distribution of domestic roles.

The research revealed that there are discrepancies between individuals' statements and their actual behavior when it comes to assuming conjugal roles in contemporary couples. The gender-based analysis of opinions on domination in the conjugal couple showed that both partners support an egalitarian model of cohabitation. While women showed little interest in holding a leadership position within the couple - possibly due to role overload - male responses contain hidden traditional elements that reflect the man's superior and dominant position as the "head of the family." Although male opinions seem to express care and protection toward their partner, they are underpinned by the traditional belief that only the man is capable of leading the family, due to having superior abilities. These opinions clearly indicate inequality, lack of trust in women, a tendency toward domination, and inflexibility in understanding power dynamics - making it evident that traditional views still persist among young people.

Regarding the distribution of domestic roles, both women and men, at least at the declarative level, support an equitable division of all tasks. In an attempt to move beyond the boundaries of the traditional model, partners claim to support the sharing of responsibilities based on availability and individual skills. In reality, however, men tend to resist taking on certain domestic tasks, limiting themselves to those involving physical strength - highlighting both a gender-based distinction and a traditionalist mindset. In contemporary society, traditionalism can no longer be logically justified, but persists through social stereotypes. With reference to men's physical strength, it becomes apparent that they rely on this argument to justify gender-specific roles.

The willingness of men to assume traditionally female roles is essential for supporting women's professional development. For women, a career is highly important as it offers autonomy and helps reduce inequality. Dependence on a male partner reinforces traditional behaviors, whereas having a personal income that ensures minimum autonomy and individual functionality supports women in overcoming traditional barriers and classical imperatives. The research revealed a complete lack of willingness among men to take on certain responsibilities traditionally held by women. This behavior is rooted in stereotypes acquired through flawed socialization in the male respondents' families of origin. The idea of equity is more strongly supported by women, who take on these responsibilities, while men tend to reduce their involvement in domestic roles in favor of their careers. The refusal to support their partner in developing a

professional career reflects a hindrance to her emancipation and a desire on the part of the man to retain power within the couple.

Today, in the postmodern era, the conjugal couple is - or should be - fundamentally different from the traditional family. Although a degree of progress is observable, it remains insufficient, even among younger individuals. Men's willingness to assume tasks once assigned to women remains limited, not necessarily due to objective reasons, but rather because of the preconceived idea that partners' roles are clearly defined. This belief is rooted in the traditional family model, which continues to persist today. Such a model can still be found among young men, even though they may describe themselves as modern partners at the declarative level.

The most surprising finding of this research is that nearly all male respondents provide answers aligned with the characteristics of the modern couple, yet they do not apply these principles in their own relationships, remaining anchored in rigid traditionalism and adhering to gender-based stereotypes.

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