

# Female Tendencies to 'Adapt' the Man to Couple Life

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## Abstract

*Both the forms of family organization and the ways in which statuses and roles acquired by conjugal partners were distributed upon the formalization of marriage are topics of interest that have been developed within the content of this paper. As is well known, over time, there have been masculine tendencies toward domination within the couple and the limitation of women's rights due to perceived inferiority. These aspects marked the beginning of the feminist movement, a period during which women fought for equal rights and opportunities at the societal level. As society has evolved, the nature of the family institution has changed accordingly, and this paper presents the image of the family in the current period, also encompassing topics related to conjugal domination based on gender and techniques that can save a marriage on the verge of dissolution. In contemporary times, the structure of the family has become egalitarian, with an emphasis on the phenomenon of equity between the partners forming the marital couple and on the redistribution of conjugal responsibilities in an equivalent manner, so that neither partner feels wronged. The paper also focuses on female tendencies to adapt the man to couple life, with the goal of increasing marital well-being, analyzing in detail the absolutization of the male ideal from feminine perspectives. These social tendencies are primarily generated by women's need for validation and for adapting in a more equitable manner to the domestic space. At the same time, the image of the man in transition no longer offers security for the woman, and for her, the confirmation of full commitment guarantees the security she needs in the conjugal environment.*

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## 1. Status, Roles, and the Question of Gender

When we refer to “status” in sociological terms, it designates the position an individual holds within a social group; and when we refer to “role,” it encompasses all the responsibilities and obligations an individual must fulfill in society or in the social group to which they belong, depending on the status occupied in the social hierarchy. (Apostu, 2016a)

In the case of the family, members’ statuses can be divided into mother, father, sister, brother, wife, husband, grandfather, grandmother, and others. Based on these statuses, each person is assigned the roles that the family expects from them.

*Family (like other social groups) presents itself as a complex network of positions, statuses, and social roles (Voinea, 2005, p. 19).*

Within the family, roles can be classified into three typologies: conjugal roles, which are of the husband-wife type and concern the relationship between spouses; parental roles, which concern the relationship between parents and their children; and fraternal roles, which concern relationships with siblings.

Conjugal roles refer to the duties and responsibilities that each partner in a marital relationship has toward the other. The husband and wife are expected to support one another in achieving shared family goals, to trust and respect each other, to fulfill each other’s emotional and sexual needs, to seek harmony in their relationship, and, importantly, to contribute all available resources to ensure the proper functioning of the family. However, there is also a downside, namely that “if one of the spouses is absent from the family structure and only partially fulfills their conjugal-parental role, this may lead other family members to perceive the family as a single-parent type” (Briceag and Corcevoi, 2017, p. 336).

The exercise of these roles is nothing more than the result of a long process of social learning that originates in the education received within the family of origin. A woman who becomes a wife will often take as reference the model of her mother and the way in which she fulfilled her role as both mother and wife, projecting that model into her own behavior within the current family structure. This is precisely why family structures differ from one another, and “family roles can be expressed in a multitude of ways: one husband may be

very gentle, another very authoritarian; one father may be closely involved in his children's education, while another believes it is not a man's place to concern himself with such matters; one wife and mother may be an excellent homemaker, another may refuse to do housework; one child may be obedient, another defiant" (Mihăilescu, 2003, p. 161).

From the very beginning of life, people are born into diversity: biological diversity, differences in personality, physical or bodily appearance, as well as ethnic and cultural diversity. However, diversity should never restrict the rights and freedoms of any individual solely on the basis of difference. Even more so, the diversity between women and men should not determine the degree of dependence one individual has on the other gender, but rather encourage the acceptance of distinct characteristics.

*Even in this third millennium, in which humanity has made progress, women are still deprived of certain rights that men enjoy, being regarded as the Other, in relation to men, and not as unique, singular beings (Gheorghe, 2013, p. 74).*

Therefore, the social discrepancies between women and men have led many women to consider themselves of lesser value compared to men, to shape their existence according to male principles, to internalize a sense of inferiority, and to constantly display a sense of responsibility toward men.

Each of the two sexes participates in the processes of feminization and masculinization within society, but in different ways. Women are socialized to exhibit feminine behavior-gentle, empathetic, and nurturing-while men are taught to display masculine behavior, based on values that often contrast with those associated with women. Thus, "socialization is carried out in accordance with certain gender stereotypes: boys are dressed in blue and girls in pink; their rooms are decorated differently; their games and toys are different" (Zamfir and Vlăsceanu, 1998, p. 532).

There is a major and fundamental difference between the processes of masculinization and feminization, one which may, over time, lead to the emergence of negative stereotypes aimed at one of the sexes - most often, the female. Although the socialization of boys and girls takes place in the early stages of life, the distinction lies in the core of the educational approach. Specifically, in order to become masculine, boys are educated through a method based on denial: "boys don't cry" is something every young boy learns from the earliest

years of childhood (Pasti, 2003, pp. 84-85). They are taught not to be sensitive, to be fearless, to display an unshakable attitude, and to develop a strong personality devoid of emotional vulnerability - so that they can demonstrate masculinity, dominance, and courage.

As for girls, they come to understand the idea of femininity at an age closer to adolescence. The moment they begin to realize what it means to be feminine is when they start to feel the need to attract boys' attention to their physical or bodily beauty. Along with this stage of maturation, girls become aware of which clothing styles flatter them, begin to use makeup, observe what types of personalities are considered attractive by the boys around them, and thus the process of feminization begins. In the view of writer and activist Simone de Beauvoir, femininity is defined as a "reality in danger," highlighting the fact that women have historically been disadvantaged in certain ways (De Beauvoir, 1949, p. 10).

*Women were slaves to procreation, subjected to strict moral codes, isolated within female sectors." Therefore, "the reasons that could lead someone from the post-war generation to reflect and write about the women of their time are by no means a mystery (Lipovetsky, 2000, p. 7).*

It appears that gender issues have been observed long ago, and not only within Romanian culture. Disparities in gender relations have existed since the time when women were forced to submit, to endure discrimination from society, to be stigmatized and excluded from certain fields of activity, having access only to specific domains in which they could specialize. For a long period, women were dominated by patriarchy: "you must be tied to Nature, you are incapable of separating reason from passion, nor should you, nor is it healthy for the male citizen that you do so. You must remain in the private sphere, revolve around the family - and that is all" (Miroiu, 2006, p. 71). If we position ourselves temporally in the contemporary period, while acknowledging all the rights that women have gained up to the present and adding the emergence of new ideas, we can conclude that modern women are, in many respects, different from traditional women.

The profile of the modern woman (Vlad, 2017) is shaped as follows: "an increasing number of women no longer engage in marriage, with some even choosing to have children outside of it." At the same time, "women want domestic work and the role of homemaker to be considered on par with any professional social activity and to be paid accordingly." The modern woman rejects the

idea that “the traditional wife offered the man the same services previously provided by his mother,” which made the man feel “like a grown-up orphan-anxious, depressed, and confused” (Iluț, 2005, p. 122).

Some women today seek to simplify their lives and reduce to a minimum the responsibilities and obligations associated with the idea of marriage. Thus, one reason why some contemporary women refuse to become wives may be that the status of wife entails a series of duties toward the husband and the household, which many women prefer to avoid in order to lead a more manageable life. Regarding the remuneration of domestic labor, modern women aim to secure their own income from multiple sources, considering that household tasks are demanding responsibilities, equivalent to a job, and should therefore be properly compensated.

Moreover, “in addition to the considerably greater involvement of women in household tasks, we can observe, in some contemporary families, a slightly greater decision-making power held by women in managing these responsibilities. Thus, not only do women do more around the house and with regard to children, but they also have greater control over what needs to be done” (Popescu, 2010, p. 19). The contemporary woman places more emphasis on education, and within the family context, there is a growing preference for egalitarian family models.

Throughout history, family life and cohabitation have undergone a succession of social and psychological changes, resulting in the specific profile and values of the contemporary family. In traditional society, couple life was based on male dominance and patriarchy, with power relations clearly differentiated by gender, and “the inequalities were significant and unidirectional, due to the fact that the woman was submissive” (Ciupercă, 2000, p. 63). In contrast, in contemporary, developed society, the family tends to take on a more egalitarian form. Due to the effects of the feminist movement, the level of women’s integration into society has increased significantly, as seen in their involvement in multiple social spheres such as the economic, cultural, social, political, and, of course, familial spheres. Thus, the recognition of women’s values at the societal level, the rise in their level of education, independence, and access to information relative to men are the factors that contribute to the flexible nature of power relations within contemporary couples. As a result, women have been inclined toward “a family in which decisions are increasingly made jointly, in which domestic, parental, and couple

roles are negotiated-a freer family, more connected and integrated into society” (Popescu, 2010, p. 7).

Regarding marriage, the way it is understood in contemporary society is shaped differently compared to traditional society; while in traditional societies marriage was arranged by relatives rather than by the individuals themselves, in contemporary society, “the choice of spouse and the formation of the couple have become a private matter” (Apostu, Iacob, Iordache, 2017, p. 8). Thus, in the contemporary period, choosing a partner for the purpose of marriage is primarily based on love, intertwined with subjective, individual motivations; each person enjoys the freedom to choose a life partner according to personal preferences and criteria. In traditional society, marriage had a substantial character, marking the transition from adolescence to adult life, and also held significant sentimental value.

At the societal level, no other types of relationships outside of marriage were accepted, and as a result, most individuals chose to marry, even though “society was at a certain stage of development that required the man to do what he knew and to know what he was doing, so the woman tacitly accepted this order, which existed because she still did not have much room for maneuver” (Ciupercă, 2000, p. 62).

In contrast, in contemporary society, “the marriage rate has declined, because on the one hand, today’s young people are more educated and therefore marry later, and on the other hand, more couples, including those made up of partners who have already been through a divorce, choose to share their lives without getting married” (Salanki, 2011, p. 54).

We thus understand that the preference of today’s couples regarding the form of cohabitation tends to lean more toward cohabitation rather than marriage, with the latter being increasingly postponed. If we analyze the distinctions between marriage and cohabitation, we can state the following: cohabitation “can be seen as an experiment, if we treat consensual union as a preliminary stage to marriage. In other words, it is a trial. A trial with the purpose of exploring specific situations of life as a couple, through which each partner can understand the mechanisms of cohabitation within the relationship” (Prună, 2005, p. 40). Nowadays, more individuals avoid commitment, being aware that such commitments involve sacrifices made at the expense of the self and in favor of the partner.

Regarding the conjugal couple, the balance of authority and power between spouses can be highlighted by the degree of their involvement in family decision-making; a stronger decision-making

competence of one partner may be associated with a higher level of dominance within the couple. However, the contemporary conjugal couple rejects this notion, instead supporting the idea that "if one member of the couple has greater decision-making capacity than the other, this does not necessarily mean that they have increased authority over their partner" (Ciupercă, 2000, p. 105).

Decisions concerning the entire family unit appear in two forms: "democratic (collective) decisions and decisions made by dictatorial authority" (Iluț, 2005, p. 130). Collective decisions are the result of choices made together with all family members or members of the conjugal couple, where each person's opinion is taken into account, and everyone expresses their agreement or disagreement regarding the situation in question; whereas decisions made by dictatorial authority are the result of choices made exclusively by the dominant member of the conjugal couple. These latter decisions are based on the establishment of power relations between the individuals forming the couple, where clearly one of them asserts dominance over the other.

In the contemporary couple, the power held by one of the spouses - most often male power - is not at all beneficial to the functioning of the marital relationship; on the contrary, the imposition of power by one spouse can have destructive consequences for the marriage, potentially leading to family dissolution.

The husband and wife who form the contemporary marriage divide family roles in such a way as to avoid conflict, ensuring that by establishing mutually agreed-upon norms, neither of them will feel wronged or accuse the other of abusing power.

*There is no longer a single, dominant model in which the man makes decisions both regarding conjugal life and matters concerning the parental relationship. Authority and power in the modern family are in a continuous process of construction and reconstruction, depending on the negotiations that take place between partners, on their attitudes and behaviors regarding the roles they fulfill in family life (Cojocar, 2019, p. 111).*

Referring to power, it "is understood as the capacity of the agent who holds it to impose their will over the will of those who lack power, or the ability to force them to do things they do not wish to do" (Bălan, n.d., p. 2). Thus, the power relations established between two spouses acquire a negative connotation, being associated with the desire for conjugal manipulation, the attempt to highlight one spouse

in order to discredit the other, and the idea of imposing dominance within the couple.

The distribution of family roles assigned to the individuals who form the conjugal couple could be another factor on the basis of which gender inequalities might arise, thus leading to an unequal distribution of power. However, in contemporary marriage, family roles have acquired an interchangeable character. Specifically, the responsibilities of each member of the couple are divided fairly, without certain tasks being labeled as exclusively for women or exclusively for men. What was traditionally considered men's work in traditional society can now be performed equally by both men and women within the contemporary couple. Thus, "in the modern family, the husband must assume part of the obligations that traditionally belonged to the woman, and the woman's role includes some tasks that have always been considered the man's responsibility" (Craiovan, 2017, p. 93).

By consistently choosing equity, the contemporary marital couple tends to reject the idea of power and dominance within the relationship, based on the assumption that "when it comes to involvement in household tasks, they do not believe there are differences regarding leisure time" (Popescu, 2010, p. 23).

Thus, if within contemporary marriage the spouses do not wish to establish differences in terms of status and gender roles, it becomes evident that there will be no domination, and power will not be distributed unequally between them; the notion of power within the couple will be dismissed in favor of equality between partners. However, when power is applied to the conjugal couple, it becomes nothing more than a factor that, together with other destructive agents such as "abandonment, alcoholism, neglect of marital duties, infidelity, conflicts with in-laws, and conflictual relationships between neurotic or psychopathic partners" (Mitrofan, 1989, pp. 140–142), leads to the dissolution of marriage through divorce. Young people in the contemporary period are very selective when choosing a life partner for the purpose of marriage; they mainly seek personal and professional growth, and as a result, tend to exhibit a degree of individualism. They pursue "the idea of self-fulfillment, concern for oneself, the pursuit of personal pleasures, and rejection of the idea of sacrifice for others" (Găgăuz, 2012, p. 38). These individualistic behaviors, over time, contribute to family dissolution.

In the view of modern society, divorce "is no longer regarded as a failure but rather as a solution, a positive response to a critical situation" (Iluț, 2005, p. 156). Thus, within the contemporary marital

couple, individuals choose to divorce if their marital problems become irreconcilable, thereby minimizing efforts to salvage a forced marriage in which cohabitation is no longer a source of joy for either partner. Moreover, studies confirm that “year after year, the number of divorces in Romania shows an alarming growth rate” (Voiculescu, 2019, p. 17).

However, in order to prevent the dissolution of the marital couple and the termination of marriage through separation or divorce, Gary Chapman offers the secrets to maintaining a happy and successful marriage; these secrets are identified as “the five love languages: words of affirmation, quality time, receiving gifts, acts of service, and physical touch” (Chapman, 1992, pp. 31–93).

The husband and wife need words of affirmation, encouragement, and mutual validation in order to maintain harmony within the conjugal couple (Apostu, 2016b). A series of kind thoughts and compliments addressed to one’s partner, such as “you look great today!”, “I know you can do it!”, or “you’re the most beautiful!”, can boost the partner’s self-confidence, leading them to feel satisfied and happy with the marital relationship. Moreover, compliments and words of encouragement addressed to one’s partner demonstrate that they are appreciated within the conjugal relationship, offering them support, security, and confidence.

Kind words have a very strong impact on the human psyche, generating joy, fulfillment, and gratitude. Likewise, spending time together brings marital well-being; as spouses engage in more shared activities such as going for walks, watching a movie or a play, going on vacations, and spending more quality time together, their marital relationship will flourish, and they will be more satisfied with the quality of their marriage. When the husband, for example, suggests a trip or a walk, he shows his wife that it is a pleasure for him to be in her company, that she is important to him, and that he is willing to invest his personal time in favor of the well-being of their relationship. Equally, gifts exchanged between partners are a way through which they can express gratitude toward one another. Gifts may be associated with feelings of appreciation, reassurance, or forgiveness in some cases. However, their main purpose is to convey to the partner one’s personal appreciation regarding satisfaction in the couple. Some partners establish a direct relationship between the value of the gift and the degree of importance within the conjugal couple; the more expensive the gift, the stronger the partner’s love is perceived to be. However, from the perspective of other individuals, gifts should be symbolic, carrying greater sentimental than financial

value. Acts of service are also a beneficial element for marital stability and satisfaction. When the wife, for example, notices that her husband helps a lot with housework and performs certain activities for her benefit, her level of satisfaction toward her husband will certainly be higher. When one partner performs services for the other, it shows involvement, empathy, and a desire to help. All of these values clearly lead to better functioning within the marital couple. Regarding physical touch between partners, it refers to the expression of love through tender gestures, kisses, holding hands, or hugs. These gestures are strong indicators of social status and role, meaning that two people who kiss clearly form a couple. Moreover, they serve to keep the flame of love alive and improve the emotional bond between the two partners in the marital relationship.

Ultimately, it becomes clear that the idea of one individual exercising power within contemporary marriage has been rejected in favor of equality between spouses; there is a limit to how much a partner can tolerate the other's deviations from marital responsibilities; a fine line can be observed between proper conjugal functioning and family dissolution, and it is up to each individual in the marital relationship to provide their partner with the stability they need.

## **2. Methodology**

The research method used in this paper is the sociological survey, and the instrument employed is the semi-structured interview. The paper is structured around two main objectives: I aim to identify women's perceived reasons for men's adaptation to couple life, and I also intend to analyze women's opinions regarding the image of the contemporary man.

The research sample consists of 20 women aged between 18 and 29 years. In this paper, I aim to study women's perspectives on the construction of contemporary marital relationships. For this reason, the study analyzes the opinions of unmarried individuals within the age group that falls below the nuptiality peak. According to the National Institute of Statistics (INS), based on the Tempo Online database, the nuptiality peak is defined as being between 30 and 34 years of age.

## **3. Submission, Adaptation, or Asymmetric Cooperation in the Contemporary Young Couple**

Regarding behavioral or ideological change in men, the respondents' opinions were divided. Even though most respondents believed that men can change their behavior by accepting women's

advice without considering it as conjugal manipulation, other respondents believed that people, especially men, have such strong characters and such a well-developed male ego that there is no chance they would change in any way. This aspect highlights the same tendency - the woman's desire to change the man, but against a strong background of male resistance. As for the reasons why men would still choose to change something about themselves, the most frequently mentioned reasons were the following. First, the love they feel for their partners makes men do everything possible to please their life partners and to show the best version of themselves. Then, out of fear that their life partners might leave them if they refuse to change something about themselves, men are driven to accept that it is time to make a change that may be beneficial to their relationship. It seems that the fear of abandonment in men is a stimulus that pushes them to improve their behavior and accept change in their lives as a constructive factor. Regarding the feeling of love toward their life partner, this has a considerable emotional impact on men and, as a result, makes them adjust their behavior based on the woman's preferences and desires, in order to prove their deep affection and to give her confidence that their conjugal relationship will not suffer due to inappropriate behavior on the man's part.

On the other hand, from the perspective of other respondents, men do not change on their own initiative and do not make changes to improve or develop themselves; rather, the only changes they choose to make come as a result of family or conjugal influence and are adopted solely for the purpose of saving the marriage, which has reached a critical point due to male behavior that does not align with the expectations or desires of the life partner. According to the respondents, nowadays it is very rare for women to accept continuing a relationship with a man who categorically refuses to change, considering that if he is not willing to improve certain aspects of his behavior, "he is showing that he does not care about his partner and does not want to work on himself to preserve the relationship." Some respondents also concluded that some men suppress their pride and decide to change, even if these changes are not to their liking, because they have hidden motives behind their apparent initiative; specifically, the respondents stated that "the only reasons a man has for changing are either he has a major interest, or he is a hypocrite, or he wants to take advantage of the woman."

From the majority perspective, the changes that women wish to bring about in their partners are not manipulative in nature; rather, they want to help their partners evolve and improve certain aspects of

their lives, such as: men becoming more organized and punctual, since these small flaws can have negative consequences at work; men maintaining a regular sleep schedule to avoid harming their health; men being more communicative, so that the marital relationship becomes more harmonious; and men managing their financial resources better to avoid losses. All these feminine tendencies to influence change in men would be justified in a positive way: "they are important for healthy development, both with regard to the man himself and his relationship with his partner." Therefore, in their view, it becomes clear that women are not acting out of selfishness or a desire to control men, but rather they strive to make their marriage work better and better. Nonetheless, the idea of "healthy development" - both personal and in relation to the partner - may raise debates or dilemmas, since conjugal well-being is not always the reflection of standards considered optimal by the woman, but rather the synthesis of shared and individual thoughts, ideals, and needs. Thus, the predefined strategy of change may stem from an image of the man as incomplete - someone who needs to be modified in order to become suitable for conjugal life.

Moreover, women decide it is time to suggest a series of changes to their partners as soon as they notice certain concerning signs in the relationship, such as: heated arguments arising between them without a solid foundation, lack of communication or passive responses from the men, the appearance of lies, and disrespectful or inappropriate behavior within the marital relationship. Out of the desire to ensure that the marriage endures over time without major issues, women prefer to express their concerns regarding male behavior at the right moment, with the aim of improving the quality of their couple's life.

As shown by the trajectory of the responses received, it appears that women are not seeking to manipulate men for their own benefit; rather, women's tendencies to influence change in men stem from a genuine desire to make them aware that certain habits are harmful both to their personal lives and to their conjugal, couple life. Therefore, women try to offer support to their partners through these changes, hoping to help them reach the best version of themselves as men.

Moreover, when referring strictly to couple or family life, women believe that certain behavioral changes from men are essential for the better functioning of the marriage; through change, men demonstrate that they care about their life partners and respect their suggestions, that they are willing to fight for the well-being of the

marriage and the family, that they want to avoid arguments or discomfort caused by "atypical" male behavior, and they provide women with the validation they need - namely, the guarantee of a shared future. Thus, the direction of these opinions indicates that, in the process of mutual adaptation, in the view of some respondents, the need for change primarily targets the man.

In this regard, it becomes clear that women tend to appreciate men who are open to change more than those who are unyielding and refuse any form of self-improvement or enhancement of the conjugal relationship. Women agree with the idea that "as long as the change is beneficial both for him as a person and for the relationship, I believe everything is fine." Thus, we observe the close connection established between the idea of change and that of evolution; the more open men are to making behavioral improvements to themselves, the more the couple's relationship will flourish - becoming more harmonious, more secure, and more deeply rooted in mutual trust between the two partners.

In contrast to the arguments previously presented, we also find for analysis the opinions of other selected respondents who believe that "men who change in life or in a relationship are weaklings, skirt-chasers, to put it plainly." From this perspective, the respondents refer to situations in which some women clearly intend to gain control over the relationship and manipulate the man as much as possible, according to their own wishes. Due to their intense desire to be dominant in the relationship, such women will most certainly fail to keep men by their side - men who, at some point, "deprived of the freedom to express themselves as they please, tend to break down." Thus, it becomes evident that independence within the couple is an important factor for the stability and durability of relationships in contemporary times.

In contrast, relationships in which one partner's independence is not respected - and is even overrun by the other - will not thrive in terms of harmony, continuity, understanding, and respect. For the healthy development of the conjugal relationship, it is essential that both partners move in the same direction, toward common goals, while also allowing space and time for each other's personal intimacy. Domination and the forced imposition of change upon one partner prove to be destructive elements within a marital couple.

Another opinion against men who accept being changed by women and allow themselves to be led by a dominant woman is that "the man appears to be weak and easily influenced, but he may also be lazy, preferring to do as the woman dictates rather than come up

with his own ideas.” Thus, we can observe that a connection is once again established between the dominant woman and the easily manipulated man; the more it is perceived that the woman wants to dominate the man and change his behavior, the more it suggests that he has a weak and easily influenced character, which the woman can easily maneuver. From this, we understand that women know their men very well and are aware that their manipulation will work, and as a result, they steer the relationship in the direction they prefer, without taking into account that such an approach may involve changes the man does not agree with.

As for men’s complacency in the conjugal relationship, respondents identified this behavioral aspect as a potential reason why men accept being “guided” by women; implicitly, complacency in a relationship reflects a lack of interest or involvement and reveals a passive attitude in which the partner simply accepts what is proposed without raising any objections. In this case, women are given the green light to influence men, as long as the latter do not resist - and thus, negative influences with manipulative intentions may emerge from some women.

At the social level, the typology of the weak man dominated by a woman is subject to stigmatization, due to the fact that Romanian society is a conservative one, seeking to preserve deeply rooted past preconceptions in which the family did not have an egalitarian character, but rather the man was expected to hold power within the couple and be solely responsible for making decisions on behalf of the entire family (Nistor, 2023). Moreover, the respondents’ opinions confirm this hypothesis, according to which “if we’re talking about men who are influenced by women, many people - and especially other men - will think that they are being controlled by their partner, that they lack decision-making power, and so on.” These external opinions have a negative psychological impact on dominated men, as they may feel judged and underestimated by their own friends, for example. As a result, these men subjected to female dominance may even be socially excluded from certain groups where the idea is strongly upheld that “men who accept to be changed are most likely insecure. No one should be influenced by anyone for their entire life. He should be himself.”

Transitioning toward outlining the contemporary masculine image from a feminine perspective, we discover the most compelling argument provided by respondents regarding the portrait of the ideal husband: “physical appearance is just a bonus; I care more about character and how he behaves toward me.” It seems that nowadays,

in the view of women, a man's appropriate behavior clearly outweighs his physical appearance. Many women declare themselves to be attracted to the personality of the men who enter their lives and value their maturity, respect, and level of transparency, as well as their intelligence, listening and communication skills, involvement in the conjugal relationship, and financial stability. All these traits prove to be essential when women evaluate a man's profile, although they are, of course, complemented by certain physical features women also pay attention to: "physically, I'd like him to be tall, with green eyes and well-built," or "I'd like him to be taller than me, to have a pleasant appearance, olive skin, and to be well-groomed."

When discussing the idea of perfection in relation to the profile of the contemporary man, it takes on multiple forms, representing a fusion between physical and moral traits; the ideal man for some women should not be a general one, but rather a specific, personalized image shaped by individual preferences. Thus, we observe that when it comes to men's physical appearance, women establish completely different patterns that are not at all similar to one another: some prefer men with blue eyes, while others prefer green-eyed men; some absolutely want their partners to be taller than them, while others do not place importance on height; some like bearded men, while others dislike them, considering them unkempt; some are attracted to blond-haired men, while others find brown-haired men more appealing. From the perspective of each interviewed woman, the ideal man did not resemble any other in terms of physical traits; each woman's preferences regarding physical appearance were distinct, while the most similar characteristics among responses were those concerning the emotional side of the man, his level of involvement in the relationship, his independence and stability, the support felt by the woman in the conjugal relationship, his involvement in household tasks, the psychological support he offers to the woman, and the ways in which he expresses his love toward his partner. In most cases, the women's opinions focused on emphasizing the idea that "physically, appearance doesn't matter that much; in the end, that's not what's most important - what truly matters is the moral side."

When it comes to the masculine patterns women use in choosing the man by their side, we observe that these are closely linked to family models - especially paternal ones - which women have observed in their nuclear families throughout their development. Later on, they decide whether or not they want to project these models into their personal and conjugal lives, alongside their life partner. One respondent stated, "for me, an ideal husband is

someone who can bring me peace. I realized this after many years of searching in boys for behaviors that were nothing like my father's, because I would run away from them whenever I saw those traits." Apparently, in such cases, the father's masculine influence had a negative impact on both the entire family and the marriage, causing destructive consequences within the household. As a result, the respondent - who was left with a lasting trauma caused by her father's potentially inappropriate behavior - now seeks to avoid that type of man in order to ensure that her marriage will be a happy and peaceful one, not destroyed by her husband, as her father once did. Therefore, today, women tend to value moral traits in men more than physical ones, affirming that "a real man is one who respects his family and his wife and who gives them a sense of security."

Among the respondents, there is a noticeable shift in reasoning - an evolution from adolescence or childhood to the present - in terms of the portrait of the ideal man from a feminine perspective: "I would say that the ideal husband, according to my desires when I was young, was a tall, dark-haired man with blue or green eyes, maybe with a beard, and who took care of his physical appearance"; yet the same respondent now states, "with the mindset I have today, the ideal husband for me is someone who is sincere and whom I can fully trust at any moment in life. A man with a warm and loving heart. My current partner doesn't have green or blue eyes and doesn't have a beard either, but that doesn't stop me from loving him. It doesn't even matter that he doesn't fit my old standards." Thus, the idea is reinforced that, as women grow older and their mindset changes, the physical appearance of a man becomes less important when they reflect on their ideal partner.

It can thus be concluded that the respondents included in the study sample are approaching the age of maturity, as they place the moral portrait of men in the foreground and the physical portrait in the background. Clearly, mature women are no longer easily overwhelmed by perfectly styled blond hair or an athletic, sculpted physique that is always in ideal shape. They themselves affirm: "if I go by my current mindset, and the man fulfills other, more important behavioral and emotional traits than physical ones, I accept that he may not exactly match the physical ideal I have in mind." Although they still consider a pleasant physical appearance - since physical attraction must be present - it seems that women have learned to correctly prioritize psychological and moral values in order to build a stable and successful conjugal relationship with a contemporary man.

Some of the respondents proved to be strongly focused on long-term stability alongside the man they choose to form a conjugal relationship with, stating that the ideal man "is the one with whom you can find peace and who shows that he can be the father of your children."

Thus, we once again observe that women place greater importance on a man's conduct and moral values than on his physical qualities, which will inevitably change over time, making him less physically attractive. Moreover, the respondents believe that the ideal man should not only be suitable as a husband, but also as a good parent in the event of building a family together. Therefore, it becomes clear that the masculine ideal must encompass multiple traits that demonstrate he can be both a good husband and a true father. Some of these traits include: "being respectful, fighting for his family," "being understanding and calm regardless of the situations he goes through," and "offering me the guarantee of love and a peaceful life by his side."

For some respondents, the construction of the masculine ideal includes both physical and psychological traits, and at times, the tendency to absolutize this ideal leads women to envision their future lives with their partner in advance. The feminine perspective on the ideal man overlaps with the image of conjugal life and the desired number of family members, and behind this ideal lie the respondents' dreams and wishes for a flawless conjugal relationship. Specifically, some women stated, "the physical portrait of this ideal would be someone taller than me, with wavy hair, because I would like to have two children with him and I would want them to inherit features from both parents."

Therefore, we observe that the respondents tend to accelerate the pace of the conjugal relationship in order to reach marriage as quickly as possible with the desired man, already organizing in advance the life that will follow once the relationship reaches a new social level, and planning an entire future alongside the man who will eventually become their husband.

Having reached the stage of envisioning the ideal marriage, the respondents primarily focus on aspects such as "harmony, understanding, respect, love, loyalty, empathy." From their perspective, these are the "secret ingredients" that women desire in order for the marriage to be ideal. Above all, the women state that they wish for "a long-lasting marriage with children and happiness," or "to be a family, in a warm home with our children around us." Thus, we observe that stability is a dominant value, and the maternal instinct

is frequently emphasized, with the majority of interviewed women expressing the desire to become mothers as both a personal fulfillment and a key element in completing the image of an ideal marriage.

Moreover, the respondents affirm that mutual support between partners must undoubtedly lie at the foundation of an ideal marriage, so that they can grow together and their relationship can improve with each passing day. Even if the marriage evolves and gains a solid, stable character, this should not lead the partners to give up their small personal pleasures or to display disinterest linked to a sense of routine. On the contrary, respondents believe that a beneficial way to keep the flame of love alive is for “partners not to forget the little gestures that are typical of the early stages of a relationship.” This highlights women’s desire to be constantly pleasantly surprised by their partners, in order to fondly recall the moments they lived together in the past. Furthermore, the ideal marriage is one in which monotony has no place whatsoever. To that end, respondents identified another way to ensure the marriage always remains dynamic: “the ongoing desire to do new things and to experience many things together.” It appears that untried activities also play a constructive role in developing and refining the marriage so that it may ultimately become perfect.

When it comes to women’s emotional side, compared to men, they express a strong need for men’s feelings to be verbalized; they need to hear gentle and warm words from their husbands, stating that “the ideal marriage is one in which both partners feel emotionally safe.” Thus, it becomes clear that women evaluate a man’s moral values when seeking a partner, considering these essential for “maintaining a marriage based on healthy principles.”

Women also state that, before entering into marriage, they expect their potential partner to meet most of the criteria they consider important; the man by their side should “be understanding, mature, attentive to details, intelligent, communicative, respectful, and open” in order to earn their trust and fully convince them that he possesses many of the moral qualities they value - thus proving he is indeed a suitable husband.

Nevertheless, the research tool revealed an opinion that contradicts the idealization of marriage; one respondent stated that “people can’t be perfect, so marriage can’t be either; the ideal marriage doesn’t exist, and it’s not even healthy to aspire to that.” From this perspective, we observe a correlation between human imperfection and marital imperfection. Clearly, there are no two or

more people with identical and flawless personalities; however, in a conjugal relationship, the solution to this issue is simple: as partners communicate more about their needs and desires regarding the improvement of their marriage, imperfections can be shaped in such a way that the relationship becomes acceptable from both perspectives. Even when the marital situation seems hopeless, communication between partners can restore well-being. Every stage of human life involves pleasant and unpleasant moments, fluctuations, and things will never go perfectly in every aspect. Yet, on the path to marital happiness, these behavioral differences should not be seen as barriers. On the contrary, opposites attract, and two different personalities have the potential to complement one another, forming a harmonious whole. Therefore, individuals in a marriage must strive to keep their relationship balanced, accepting both their own flaws and those of their partner, and working to improve them until they reach a mutually tolerable threshold.

Drawing a temporal parallel, the respondents concluded that “today, we are more independent and therefore we can afford to separate; whereas in the past, people stayed together more often because they couldn’t separate, mostly for emotional but also economic reasons.” Thus, we observe that in traditional society, the feeling of love was entirely genuine, and people always tried to repair marital mistakes without even considering the idea of divorce. In contrast, in contemporary society, the level of human tolerance has significantly decreased, and as a result, people are less willing to fix shortcomings or attempt to save a marriage.

It is also evident that in the contemporary period, individuals’ emotional and financial independence can be a factor contributing to family dissolution. After the first mistakes made by a partner, people tend to believe “they deserve better partners,” as they have a higher level of self-esteem. Moreover, these values are reinforced by the financial independence individuals enjoy today; educational levels have increased, jobs are better paid, and as a result, people have sufficient resources to initiate a divorce.

Focusing the essence of the topic on the theme of divorce, we observe that in the contemporary period, individuals no longer hesitate to end their marriages through divorce when they realize that certain marital problems seem unsolvable or their core principles have been violated. It thus became clear which behaviors women find completely intolerable in their partners. The most frequently mentioned responses pointed to two types of violence: physical and verbal, ranked in order of severity. Physical violence is most often

perpetrated by men within the conjugal relationship, and such delinquent behavior does nothing but instill fear in the woman toward her partner - something that clearly has no place in a marriage. On the contrary, "a relationship should be based on harmony, not on fear or insults." Moreover, the dominant feeling between partners should be love, "and love does not consist of punches, slaps, or verbal abuse."

In addition to the fact that physical violence is a form of delinquent behavior, according to the respondents' perspective, it is also pointless: "regardless of the arguments, I believe that violence solves nothing." Therefore, if a partner sees physical violence as a solution for resolving marital issues or as a punishment the woman must endure, he is mistaken; domestic violence is clearly a well-founded reason for a woman to decide to divorce.

When referring to insults, they originate from verbal violence; although they do not result in physical pain, they affect the person more on an emotional level: "emotional or verbal abuse can cause deep harm and negatively impact a partner's emotional health." As a result, the partner subjected to this type of verbal violence will not easily forget the insults directed at them, and the impact of such behavior will always be significant for the individual who endured it: "I don't want to tolerate any behavior that could humiliate or degrade me."

Aside from violence, another behavior that should not be overlooked in a marital relationship is infidelity. A healthy conjugal relationship is one in which both partners are fully committed to one another, without allowing space for other individuals to interfere in their marriage. When one of the partners "strays," the other will be deeply disappointed by this act, and their first instinct will likely be to end the marriage.

This consequence should not come as a surprise to the partner who committed the fault; in fact, he should have acted with much more rationality before throwing himself into the arms - or bed - of another person, fully aware that such behavior is unforgivable.

Infidelity often comes hand in hand with lies; for example, when a partner cheats, he tends to hide this mistake precisely because he anticipates feelings of rejection from the other. The respondents stated that "when lying occurs, no matter how small, the relationship suffers and may lead to conflicts or even dissolution." Therefore, honesty and openness between partners appear, from the respondents' perspective, to be essential elements that should be

upheld, as they are beneficial to the conjugal relationship. (Apostu, Iacob, Iordache, 2017)

Another destructive behavior for a conjugal relationship can be excessive jealousy, typically expressed by one of the partners. In most cases, this behavior is rooted in a lack of trust between partners; according to the respondents, "if there is no trust between partners, the relationship cannot work." Both individuals must provide each other with the reassurance of a healthy marital bond and mutual loyalty, so there are no doubts about potential infidelity - and thus, no justification for exaggerated jealousy. This kind of jealousy often manifests as one partner attempting to restrict the other's freedom or impose rules and boundaries. However, as the respondents affirmed, such behavior is intolerable: "I don't want the person beside me to forbid me from doing things, because I am just as human as he is. And just as I don't tell him what to do, I won't accept it from him either."

When people do not feel free within their relationship, they begin to feel pressured and overwhelmed by their partner, and the only thing they want is "to leave that toxic environment," ultimately preferring separation.

To reinforce the strongest ideas derived from the interviews, I conclude by stating that women's tendencies to guide men in adapting to couple life are beneficial as long as their intentions are not manipulative; change can improve the marital relationship. Most women seek to change their partners primarily to help them evolve on a personal level and secondarily to enhance marital functioning. Socially, men who accept change suggested by women may be stigmatized due to perceived lack of masculine authority. Women desire partners who are open to communication, who provide marital and financial stability, who show respect, and who express their love in diverse ways. They value a man's moral qualities more than his physical appearance. Women tend to envision their life with a partner all the way to marriage and building a family. They may "break free" from a marriage when they are cheated on, physically or emotionally harmed, when trust is broken, or when they are deprived of their personal freedom.

#### **4. Conclusions**

Women's desire to adapt male behavior to conjugal life aims to ensure greater role participation and emotional communication within the relationship, on the part of the man. These feminine tendencies toward adaptation have their roots in traditional society, where men

were accustomed to being dominant and holding a higher status than women within the family group. The aforementioned moral values are typically masculine elements, drawn from traditional norms, which men inherit from paternal role models. However, in the contemporary period, it is evident that modern women no longer agree with this masculine typology and wish for certain improvements. As a result, the idea of behavioral change is not one that seeks to structurally transform men, but rather one that encourages them to be more cohesive.

Moreover, the image of the “transformed man” strongly contrasts with masculine expectations from the perspective of other men; once he accepts change, he is no longer viewed positively by the male community but may be considered weak and easily manipulated. On a social level, these traits do not align with the spectrum of typically masculine qualities, and as a result, women’s tendencies to adapt men to couple life may lead to their stigmatization. Thus, we can infer that the process of masculine transformation presents a double contrast. On one hand, in relation to modern feminine expectations, men resist these tendencies of adaptation to conjugal life, considering that accepting them denotes demasculinization and provokes criticism from society. The reason men perceive adapting to couple life according to women’s suggestions as a form of demasculinization is that societal benchmarks regarding men involve a dominant attitude, an individual capacity to manage family situations, and a strong rejection of the idea of submission.

On the other hand, women’s tendencies to change men are viewed positively by some of them, being accepted and considered useful for a better conjugal and marital functioning. In this case, it becomes clear that these men lean more toward family harmony than toward achieving goals in accordance with societal principles, and thus, this type of man is certainly more appreciated and preferred by modern women, as opposed to those who display inflexible behavior. Considering that some of the principles specific to traditional families still persist today, it can be observed that in the modern family, the woman remains more responsible for household tasks than the man, while he tends to focus primarily on his job and on providing the financial resources necessary for the family’s well-being. Moreover, it is also the woman who typically spends more time with the children and invests more patience in their education, and this may also motivate the man to improve his behavior in certain areas according to the family’s needs and the woman’s preferences.

Thus, within the conjugal environment, a relationship of interdependence is established between the two partners; according to the analyzed data, a higher degree of dependence of the man on the woman can be observed, due to the fact that women are more responsible when it comes to the family roles they assume. This feminine sense of responsibility also proves to be in the benefit and favor of the man, and his dependence on the woman and on the domestic goals she achieves stimulates him to accept many of the changes the woman requests.

Taking into account the fact that, nowadays, the family tends to adopt a more egalitarian structure, women want their husbands to be at least equally involved as they are in carrying out household tasks. Consequently, this may explain the frequency of women's tendencies to encourage men to adapt to couple life. Following the analysis of the data, it became clear that this feminine desire to transform men does not have a manipulative character; on the contrary, women affirm that they want to help men evolve and make progress in order to become the best version of themselves. In most marital relationships, there is a noticeable tendency among women to assume that men's behavior consistently requires improvement, both in relation to specific contexts and as the relationship becomes more stable over time. This attitude suggests that, at the moment of partner selection, women identify a masculine potential that they aspire to shape into an ideal aligned with their own vision of conjugal life.

The more time individuals spend together and the more deeply they get to know each other, the greater their opportunity to observe one another's strengths and weaknesses. This mutual understanding can lead either to feelings of satisfaction with one's partner or to a desire to change certain aspects of the partner's behavior.

It is also observed that most men do not express a desire to change specific behavioral aspects of their partner; on the contrary, they tend to prefer women with a more straightforward personality, one that is consistent and not marked by emotional fluctuations.

The idea of transforming one's partner is not a concept that surprises contemporary society, as we are currently experiencing a transition from traditional structures (which still exhibit tendencies toward gender hierarchy and greater role assumption by women) to modern ones. This transformation is natural, considering that the evolution from traditionalism to modernity occurs gradually and unevenly. Within this process, partners tend to shape one another according to their own personal profiles and expectations.

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