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Self-Mediation in the Contemporary Couple

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Abstract: The traditional cultural reminiscences existing in contemporary couples often create difficulties in adapting to a common value system by the partners. The tendency to tolerate the other also seems obvious and for these reasons, marital solidarity has many functional problems. In the common culture, the conflict is equivalent to scandal, so often the tendency to avoid the conflict is a priority to mediate the conflictual situation. At the same time, in the process of self-mediation, a priority effort tends to be to look for the guilty one and, at the same time, to dominate the mediation process. And because a certain set of tips already seems socially validated ("Communicate better!"), many couples end up mediating the effects of the conflict, not the state of the conflict itself. The study aims to analyze the opinions on the strategy of self-management of the conflict within the couple, based on a qualitative research, the research tool being the semi-structured interview.

Keywords: *conflict, mediation, self-mediation, conjugal couple, communication.*

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1. Marital mediation - psycho-social dynamics

Understanding the conjugal couple as the environment of a continuous harmony is rather a utopia than a reality. Like any other social micro group, the conjugal couple presupposes a gradual passage through certain stages of development, of experiences to which each individual sometimes relates differently. This intersection between two types of opinions or attitudes is often conflicting. A very important thing is the way in which the two partners will report to these issues. Seen as a state that involves communication and negotiation, marital conflict has more chances of mediation than when it is transformed into a duel in which each tries to dominate and impose himself on the other. Hierarchical submission or mentality in the contemporary couple is much harder to accept and tolerate than in patriarchal societies in which the hierarchical system was supported by community imperatives. Today, couples are culturally designed to develop freely and the romantic fusion between partners should not influence personal autonomy. For this reason, the premises of mediation or self-mediation have even greater chances to solve the couple's problems.

Mediation can be understood either as a set of psychological and psycho-social processes based on professional intervention (couple counseling, couple therapy), or as a set of actions developed by both partners to solve their problems within marital intimacy.

The married couple reaches therapy when the two partners feel that they no longer have personal resources for self-mediation. In this sense, the roles played by a therapist are multiple. First of all, from Petre Iluț's perspective, his role is not that of an "engineer of family relations", he is "the healer of the soul and of human relations", as psychotherapy is related to affection, empathy and communication (Iluț, 2005, p.243). The therapist is not just the person who is trying to solve the couple's problem, he is trying to listen and understand both sides and bring the two partners on the same path.

Secondly, another role he acquires is that of a negotiator. The therapist will try to find out from both partners their opinions about the cause of the conflict, will discuss with each partner, and at the end of the discussion will begin negotiations to resolve the issue. The literature describes a number of risks regarding the intervention of the specialist - the therapist can get personally involved by listening to each of the parties, so that they will join one side, and eventually become part of the problem and not solution (Mitrofan, Ciupercă, 2002, p.109). For these reasons, we could

conclude that the therapeutic process is never only the merit of the specialist but also of the partners involved in the mediation process. The therapist appears as a specialist who creates and supports the mediation framework, where the partners no longer have personal skills to manage the conflict with their own resources.

Thus, negotiation is not only the role of the therapist, it also depends on the aspects of organization and implementation of therapy and the partners themselves are involved (Iluț, 2005, p.242). Negotiation must secure its resources from the primary causes of the conflict, not from their effects, because the cancellation of the effects certainly does not imply the elimination of the conflicting causes. Also, negotiation is not a single process, oriented towards a "culprit" but is a common process in which both partners must participate. The problem is not strictly one of the partners, it must be seen as belonging to both. Therefore, its solution will be done through their collaboration, through the functionality of the triangle formed by the three, the therapist and the two partners.

Appreciating the differences in specialized intervention, couple counseling has often been confused with psychotherapy. Psychotherapy, compared to couple counseling, is based more on problems that have a high psychological depth and the therapeutic process requires the specialized services of a psychologist, not a counselor. According to Iolanda Mitrofan and Adrian Nuță, psychological counseling is the way to prevent a personal problem that includes behavioral problems, emotional or cognitive, which can have individual or family impact, the purpose of counseling is to fix the problem and solve it with the participation of the individual himself and with the help of the counselor (Mitrofan, Nuță, 2011, p.10-11).

To mediate marital conflict through counseling, it all depends on the patient, the counselor being the one who will support them and help them change the things that led to the marital conflict, such as changing attitudes, behaviors and conceptions related to certain factors. If the patient is open to change, their relationship with their partner will be balanced.

Compared to counseling, psychotherapy, according to Rodica Enache, involves psychological treatment in order to reduce and treat behaviors and symptoms that affect the individual, while psychotherapists work with patients with a psychiatric diagnosis (Enache, 2011, p.155).

So, the difference between psychotherapy and counseling is the way in which the problem will be treated, in the case of counseling the problem will be solved by the two partners, everything depends on them, and in the case of psychotherapy the problem will not be solved only by the individual,

because it is also medical. In this case the psychotherapist has a very important role.

The two areas have a common purpose, for example: both aim at knowing one's own person and the best way of making decisions (Mitrofan, Nuța, 2011, p. 17-18). The two areas are not identical, but pursue the same goal, the recovery of the person.

Returning to self-mediation, its chances increase or decrease depending on how the couple was built. Habitual partners who communicate their needs, feelings, or grievances have much more open and sincere marital relationships than those who are afraid to express their feelings, needs, or who are afraid of a potential conflict if they would discuss the issues they feel in their own marital relationship. In this sense, a generous part of the reasons why partners divorce is more compatible with self-mediation or therapy than family dissolution (Apostu, 2015).

2. Self-mediation - conflict resources and forms of conflict management

The analysis of opinions on the reasons for marital dysfunctions shows an increased attention to financial problems. The identified social opinions show that the limited material resources do not create the state of conflict and the form of organization of the budget and its distribution on priority categories of expenditures. Appreciating the gender dimension, the study highlights a number of elements of traditional influence, an important part of the budget being provided by men's salary, while the large share of spending is made by women. The problem identified is rather masculine: they recognize and accredit the domestic role of the woman, who assumes the inequity of role, ensuring the needs of the family from the common budget of the family. This inconsistency of expectations derives from a desire for male priority rather than an objective appreciation of the priority for material self-sufficiency. Basically, the justification of the male role derives from their quality of being the main supporter of the family budget, but, although he assigns domestic roles to his wife, he still does not recognize her right to manage the budget for the assigned role sets.

Equally, another issue reported by most respondents, regardless of gender, was that of communication deficiencies. Absolutely all respondents stated in various forms that they feel needs or desires that they cannot communicate to the other partner for fear of conflicts that may arise. Practically, communication problems are present in all conflict situations and most of the time they are based on a type of roles that partners play based

on a cultural fact, especially since we are talking about individuals with traditional influences. Many individuals form relationships in which the degree of knowledge and construction of intimacy is low. They are vulnerable to conflict because, based on poor knowledge, they do not have sufficient resources to mediate their own conflicts. Moreover, at a low level of knowledge, partners tend to play roles, waiting for the desirable in the other. Thus, the premises for increasing the level of interaction remain low, each channeling their attention on their roles rather than on a natural set of actions to help them get to know each other. For this reason, anticipating the conflict proritarily creates strategies of avoidance rather than a direct approach to marital problems. It is this attitude that maintains a low level of interaction between the two partners, which limits communication to the basic elements of fulfilling domestic roles. And also for this reason, almost half of the respondents also complain about a low quality of intimate relationships in the marital space. Sexuality is not a simple physical act but one with a strong emotional and affective load and the dysfunctions of interaction are also found in the quality of sexual relations between partners.

One of the main problems identified in the study regarding the chance or desire for self-healing was the answer, almost stereotyped "character mismatch", a form often encountered in the logic of divorce courts, especially during the Family Code that was in force until 2010- 2011. In itself, the phrase shows a low availability of mediation, the wording appearing as a kind of final evaluation rather than as a moment to stimulate mediation. The conclusion "character mismatch" can be seen as devoid of essence, but it can hide problems of role-playing, gender attitude, participation or functional co-participation, it can describe the discrepancy between desires and expectations, status issues, etc.

The analysis of the general image of the opinions identified within the couple can be highlighted by the common answer regarding conjugal harmony. It has been described by concepts such as "peace within the household" or "understanding", which show that for a certain category, their expectations do not have a well-defined outline. For these reasons, for some respondents conflicts appear as natural situations that must be accepted and tolerated to a certain intensity. They are not viewed from a potential angle for mediation, so management strategies are built to avoid or tolerate them rather than to mediate.

However, the investigation of opinions on self-mediation shows that it is positive, it is desirable, but in fact, it appears to be declarative rather than actually done. In many of the applied interviews, respondents tend to

confuse self-mediation with a type of negotiation that protects their own ideas.

On the other hand, the study also identified the reluctance to turn to a specialized person and that enough of them do not believe in this type of service. Moreover, they see the intervention of friends or close family members (Huidu, 2018; Vlad, 2017) as a state of vulnerability due to the veiling of intimacy. Or, as an extension of such mentalities, self-mediation seems to be the only resource taken into account by couples, but its complexity is often reduced to behaviors to protect personal opinions, to build arguments that dominate the other's reasoning.

The analysis of opinions on self-mediation highlights another stereotype - women are more conflicted than men. For this reason, men consider it the duty of women to do self-mediation in the couple, the orientation of this idea highlighting the confusion between mediation and the alleged duty of the culprit to assume the restoration of marital harmony.

In the general view, for half of the respondents the logic of self-mediation starts from the balanced appreciation of the advantages and disadvantages of the situation that is the subject of the conflict and for the others, the conflict is only a form of controversy in which everyone expresses their opinion, a state followed by a pause in interaction, considered to be relaxing and which subsequently no longer justifies mediation.

Regarding the power relationship in the mediation process, although most respondents talk about a balanced relationship of power in the couple, however, when describing the attitude towards conflict, the emphasis is on the protection of personal opinions.

3. Conclusions

The general image of opinions on self-mediation betrays a certain subjective attitude of actions to restore marital harmony. A first faulty attitude in the process of negotiating a conflict is the search for the one responsible. The establishment of the one responsible highlights the tendency of inequity in the process of self-mediation; it is also an action that describes the power relationship between the two partners in a duel in which the opinions of one are the priority of the other.

From another point of view, "peace within the household" or "understanding" as values or situations that describe the state of marital harmony, show rather a set of expectations that guarantee the related functions and roles, not the affective quality of marital relations. It also shows that conjugal expectations are low and that the fulfillment of

functions, the equitable assumption of roles ensure all the expected balance in a conjugal relationship. Or, all these influence the whole process of self-mediation, as the indicators with which many of the partners measure the quality of their relationship are rather functional and have to do less with the superior affective potential within the couple.

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