

Postmodern Openings

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Gender Equity within the Couple – a Postmodern Approach

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Abstract: This paper is a book review of the volume *Bărbatul și femeia. Imaginea unei polemici cu privire la echitatea de gen* [The man and the woman. The image of a controversy over gender equity], authored by Iulian Apostu and Cristina Petrescu and published by Lumen Publishing House from Iași, Romania, in 2017. The book addresses issues like the psycho-social dynamic of the marital couple, the emancipation of women within the couple, solidarity and conflict between men and women, while placing the debates at the crossroads of modernity and postmodernity, as social paradigms marking the couple's formation, evolution and separation.

Keywords: *Man, woman, gender equity, family, couple, Iulian Apostu, Cristina Petrescu.*

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In a context in which the media coverage of the social realities that describe the relations between men and women is too often marked, in mass media and online media, by pseudo-scientific approaches, the volume *Bărbatul și femeia. Imaginea unei polemici cu privire la echitatea de gen* [The man and the woman. The image of a controversy over gender equity], authored by Iulian Apostu and Cristina Petrescu and published by Lumen Publishing House from Iași, Romania, in 2017, is a welcomed scientific approach, which establishes clear guidelines, based on a solid scientific research, on the conflict within the conjugal couple, its causes and the ways of solving it.

Iulian Apostu holds a PhD degree in sociology and is a lecturer at the Faculty of Sociology and Social Work of the University of Bucharest, where he teaches family sociology. The author is also the head researcher of the Research Laboratory on the Sociology of Family and Marital Couple within the Institute of Sociology of the Romanian Academy in Bucharest, Romania. His experience, both as a researcher and as a teacher within two of the most visible academic institutions in Romania, puts him in the position of being an informed voice in the field of the realities of the contemporary Romanian family.

His co-author, Cristina Petrescu, made her debut with this volume alongside her former professor, being a graduate of the Faculty of Sociology and Social Work at the University of Bucharest, Romania. Her research interests focus on this particular aspect of family sociology, regarding couple conflicts, status and role relationships in the modern and postmodern couple, compared to the traditional couple, and mediating conflicts in relationships between men and women.

What caught my attention especially in this volume was the extremely successful way in which the authors managed to synthesize a wide range of topics of discussion in a concentrated material, without deviations that would make it difficult to follow the essential ideas. This makes the book's message consistent and strong, given that the way in which the authors choose to analyze the topics is open to a wider audience than the one strictly specialized in the field of family sociology. Therefore, the book combines explanations of some basic concepts with a scientific discourse, of sociological finesse, but the reader is taken from simple to complex in a smooth journey, which captivates not only as a source of information, but also as a pleasure to read.

The book is structured in four chapters. The first is dedicated to the psycho-sociological dynamics of the couple. In this chapter, although the authors maintain their axiological neutrality, there is a desire to transmit

sociological wisdom to the reader, hoping to help them successfully overcome stages such as choosing a spouse, the illusions and disappointments of a love affair, problems regarding trusting one's life partner, blockages in building a lasting and authentic marital intimacy.

In the second chapter, dedicated to the differences in role and status between men and women, the authors expose the issue of solidarity and conflict in the couple, starting from the particularities of gender. To do this, however, they first initiate a journey through the history of gender issues, starting from traditional conceptions about the role of women and men in the couple. The whole discussion is subsumed by the idea of social status, considering that the content of the concept changed as society evolved from traditionalism to modernity, and then moved to postmodernity.

The third chapter captures precisely this evolution, or rather, captures the uneven evolution of the contemporary society, consisting of islands of traditionalism, islands of modernity and islands of postmodernity, which influence each other, but which sometimes also come into conflict. As the authors point out, following the social evolution of gender controversies, the simultaneous presence of traditional couple traits with modern / postmodern couple traits within the same society can lead to confusions over status and role and can deepen couple conflicts. With great courage, the authors approach the dichotomies of domination and equality, being a housewife or a career woman, giving birth to a child versus promoting a career. We say they do this with courage, because the authors do not shy away from saying things as they are, from problematizing and from highlighting the discrepancies between mentalities, perceptions, attitudes and actions.

The fourth chapter is dedicated especially to the man, as part of the conjugal couple, as well as to his perception of the effects that women's emancipation has on his image, his role and the expectations he must fulfill in contemporary society. The analysis is performed under the ruling idea of equity within the couple and in the relations between the partners, The authors conclude that "men today still maintain a traditionalist perspective on the status of women in the family and in society and find it difficult to detach from the stereotypes inherited from the past" (Apostu & Petrescu, 2017), while the modernization of the family comes from "the attitudes and concrete actions of women to stimulate equity in their own marital environment" (Apostu & Petrescu, 2017).

The volume is based on a laborious qualitative sociological research and is based on a rigorous analysis of the specialized literature in the field, being therefore a useful theoretical and practical tool. The accessible

language, the clear explanations and the optimal structure of the discourse make this book a valuable addition to the Romanian sociological landscape.

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