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**LET'S HAVE A BABY! COUPLES BETWEEN ILLUSION AND
REALITY!**

Natalia Burtoiu (a)*

*Corresponding author

(a) Pitesti University, natalia.burtoiu@upit.ro

Abstract

While in many cases the decision to have a child approaches parents, in some cases it changes (at least temporarily) the relationship in harm. A couple turns into a relationship between three people and the jealousy, the changes in the sexual relationship and the stress resulting from the three factors above play a role in reducing the closeness between the couple's members. Couples differ a lot in the successful negotiation of the transition to parenthood. Many factors are involved in the production of these differences: the age and maturity of parents, their relationship with their own parents, the social support available to them, the level of marital satisfaction existing before the child appears, and any form of postnatal depression that he / a mother. Another influence that needs to be taken into consideration when adapting parents is the child himself. It is shown that when a new-born is "difficult"(either because of innate temperamental qualities, or because of prematurity, illness, or disability), parents will not only live the transition as stressful but, in the case of vulnerable relationships, they may even break apart. At the same time, parents have to evolve in their teachings that they do not have complete control over the lives of their children and that the decisions taken by their son / daughter can be very different from what they think fit.

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Keywords: Family and couple psychology, family cycles, children.



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1. Introduction

The family covers an endless variety of shapes and patterns, different from one age to another, from one culture to another, from one geographical area to another, and so on. It is almost impossible not to find similarities between rural families, for example, as it is equally difficult to overlap perfectly two families, even if they are homogeneous in terms of cultural-religious, composition and structure, economic-educational etc.

It is precisely because of this diversity that the humanities are approaching the family from a multidisciplinary perspective. The most relevant family studies cannot ignore the socio-legal framework of the family structure, the historical-anthropological approach completes the psycho-sociological image of the family.

2. Problem Statement

Systemic theory is most often understood as a method of superior knowledge of the theoretical level of objects possessing the property of completeness, of compact sets of entities that exist as one. It is not an object of systemic knowledge that is made up of random conglomerate components, but only objects composed of parts necessarily linked to each other. Usually, the system refers to the interdependence of the component elements and the property that the sum of the components is not equal to the whole.

In short, we will present a theory with a special impact among family theorists, that of family life cycles, relying on conceptual evolution of stage and systemic vision. Although its main applicability is visible in psychotherapy, it serves as an argument in the present paper in the discussion of changing roles and statuses in the post-modern family, the confusion of alternative models offered by the meta-culture of globalization. This perspective focuses on processes and particular changes in organizing internal structure and family interactions. Addressing family life cycles allows researchers a look at family life, as well as understanding and identifying specific and characteristic issues of each phase of family development.

Family Life Cycles, a concept introduced by Haley (1973) has been developed to describe some of the major changes or transitions of family life such as the birth of children, the departure of children from home or widowhood. Those cycles can be structured in several stages, or can be thought about in two periods: the family expansion period and the family recession period (as cited in Liddle, Breunlin, & Schwartz, 1988).

In the empty nest stage, parents have to cope with the adjustments and imbalances created by the children's departure. At the same time, they can be subject to simultaneous pressure from both elderly parents and young adult children, both of which need increased affective and financial support. These are both a major source of stress and an occasion for joy and spiritual fulfilment. This middle-aged life cycle is, as Ralph Waldo Emerson said, a September end that responds to that time in a man's life when he is no longer dependent on his changing circumstances, when all his experience is basked in wisdom, when every root, branch, and leaf shine from maturity. What he did and did in his spring and summer is now showing: he is born. Through their parents, they have an opening to the past, to the deep roots of their own existence, while adult children have access to change, informing them about new discoveries, opportunities, informational or educational resources and ways to improve lifestyle.

So the situation is not as dark as it seems. Once the troubled waters of inner conflicts and redefinition have passed, the parents have more time for each other, for their own interests and passions, and under the dome of wisdom that has been gained over time, the time has come for them to give themselves up, the whole of each other and, of course, their loved ones.

Most of the time, the leaving of the children is an anticipated event and, even if it requires a period of adaptation, it is usually short. The departure of children generally has a positive effect on marital satisfaction of partners, this period being compared by some with a second honeymoon. Wives enjoy greater privacy, spending more time together, are free to manifest themselves with greater spontaneity. They have fewer worries about parental responsibility, financial status, and feel that this role has largely been met, even if it continues to manifest themselves with the help they will give to children. During this time, the love of friendship, of "life companions" has a very important role.

There are also situations when the "empty nest" stage may be a critical period for the stability of the couple. If the relationship between the spouses was a conflicting, tense one, with the departure of many children, parenting ends, and the partners realize that they have changed and have much less in common than in the beginning. The time spent together is evaluated, and sometimes doubts arise as to the desire to continue the relationship, and in some cases the marital disorder may occur

A central issue for any family is how to maintain a form of identity and structure while evolving, changing and responding to external stimuli. In this regard, Duvall (1957) and Hill and Rodgers (1964), sociologists of the family of dynamic orientation have described that the family must ensure constancy and change. This aspect requires safety and predictability, but it cannot be absolute because it must allow the individual to grow and develop (as cited in Nichols & Schwartz, 2004) The family needs change because of internal factors, the individual needs of its members, as well as external factors, context events, the physical, psychosocial, and social environment. Nichols and Schwartz (2004) emphasizes the importance of recognizing that there is no fixed and standard version of the family life cycle. Not only do families have a variety of forms - one-parent families, same-sex couples, busy families - but ethnic groups, different religions, cultures can have very different rules for different stages (Dallos & Draper, 2005)..

3. Research Questions

This paper has as its starting point the idea that life in a couple involves a permanent adaptation to the partner. Starting from a broad description of the notion of couple, marriage, family, covering a series of aspects related to the dynamics of family life, the present paper aims to contribute to the identification and analysis of the particularities of the structure of the couple relationship, so how these appear in the dynamics of conjugal life. As peculiarities in the structure of the couple relationship, we focused on accommodation and domination in the couple, taking into account equally the emotional equilibrium and self-acceptance, as manifested in the partners of the conjugal dyad (Bydlowsky, 1998, p.86).

The research considered theoretical - methodological and practical - applicative objectives, whose elucidation could be beneficial in the knowledge of family phenomena. The theoretical and methodological objective of the paper lies in the knowledge of the evolutionary particularities of the marital interactional style within the Romanian family influenced by the departure of the first child.

The practical and applied objectives we have proposed were:

- identifying the differences that arise in accommodating partners in the marital relationship, during the two stages concerned (the state of the couple without children and the couple in which the first child appeared);
- highlighting existing changes in marital satisfaction at these stages;
- the measurement of the level of marital communication, at each stage of development and implicitly of the changes that occur;
- adapting a system of marital analysis methods and diagnosis, useful for assessing the aspects of marital adaptation questioned;
- to identify certain peculiarities by gender of the elements of marital adaptation referred to above.
- to establish the existence of a correlation between the marriage status and the level of marital adaptation, quantified by three parameters: level of marital interaction and the degree of satisfaction in the marital relationship.

4. Purpose of the Study

The theoretical premise of the research consisted in the idea of a difference in marital adaptation between couples belonging to distinct chronological stages of marriage (the 0 to 2 year stage - considered to be the period of couples without children, the stage of over 5 years of marriage - identified as the firstborn stage)

5. Research Methods

The survey sample comprised a total of 120 subjects (60 married couples). The sampling was based on the no-children couples criterion - the extended family. The mean age of the subjects is 25-35 years. Subjects surveyed were selected according to the "lasting" criterion of marriage.

Study samples are homogeneous. Selected subjects come from the urban environment with professional training and medium sociocultural level. It was easier to find subjects belonging to the first marital status "the couple until the appearance of the first child", this group consisting of young people, without children, friends, knowledge, relatives etc. It was somewhat difficult to administer the instruments because it was absolutely necessary for both partner partners to be together at that time. The other subjects were mostly selected in the psychological cabinet where I practiced, but also at the Pitesti paediatric hospital. I asked only the couples in which both partners accompanied the child to the doctor to complete the three instruments. The investigated couples were diagnosed as functional without visible psychopathological and psychopathic disorders without social and professional disability.

The investigative strategy used in the research was based on tests and evaluation scales. Three translated and adapted diagnose tools have been used that have enabled the investigation of the marital adaptation aspects envisaged by the psychological cabinet mentioned above.

For the purpose of the research, **The Marital Communication Questionnaire (P.C.I.) after H.J. Locke, F. Sabaght and Mary Thomes** was translated and adapted. The reason I considered necessary to apply the marital communication questionnaire was that it allowed the investigation of a relatively large number of subjects, the harvesting of a rich material regarding the verbal and nonverbal communication aspects of the couples, and also the data obtained at the a quantitative analysis to capture some statistical

significance. Also, the **Marital Adaptation Test (L.W.M.A.T.)** was used in this study because the test proved to be one of the short, operative measures of marital accommodation.

6. Findings

As a result of the comparative analysis of the averages, we can say that for a $t = 2,89$ the difference between the averages is significant at the probability threshold $p < 0,01$ in favour of the 0-5 years of marriage, resulting that the accommodation in the marital relationship is more good at the stage preceding the appearance of the first child compared to the second stage (after the appearance of the first child). Thus, we can conclude that the accommodation in the marital relationship decreases progressively, as it progresses during the duration of the marriage. Marital accommodation records a good frequency in the first stage, so that it falls in the second stage but remains obviously positive.

In terms of marital communication, before and after the appearance of children, the results show that the quality level of marital communication decreases and focuses predominantly on child issues by eliminating the other topics of conversation. Thus, the natural phenomenon of frustration occurs, the partner feels excluded, and communication tends to become very difficult.

As a result of gender-based analysis, the results indicate interesting aspects. In the first step we can say that for a $t = 1.31$ we have a probability threshold $p > 0.05$ and then we consider that there are no significant differences in the level of marital communication compared to women and men in the first stage of the marriage - the stage until the first child appears.

In the other step (after the appearance of the first child) at $t = 0.37$ and at a probability threshold $p > 0.05$, it is also confirmed the idea that there are no significant differences in the level of marital communication compared to women and men, considering the insignificant differences between men and women as regards the level of marital communication in each of the two stages

The results obtained confirm that the marital communication level of women correlates negatively with that of men as they age. However, I mention that the number of subjects at each age stage of marriage is relatively small; it is possible that there are no significant differences.

Regarding marital satisfaction, we can say that at the probability threshold $p < 0.01$ it is confirmed that there are significant differences between the stage of the couple without children and the couple stage with the first child regarding the level of marital satisfaction. In the second case, we can say that for a $t = 3.40$, the difference between the two averages is significant, at a probability threshold $p < 0.01$, in favour of the first step couple step. The obtained results confirm the idea that satisfaction in the marital relationship decreases progressively, as the marriage advances, judging by the data obtained on the merit scale of the marriage relationship. Marital satisfaction shows a gradual decrease as the transition from the couple-free period to the firstborn couple (after the data obtained at this scale).

In the first stage of marriage there is a higher level of satisfaction among women than men, because in the second stage the difference is favourable to men, having a higher level of satisfaction compared to that of women, from this last category. According to these data, we can conclude that marital satisfaction of women is lower than that of men, especially at the last stage of age analysed, confirmed.

In the marital satisfaction measurement test, there were a number of changes that we may consider to be characteristic of the current period in which the Romanian family operates as a social micro-group.

Unlike the predictable evolution curve, in line with the marriage cycles analysed by previous research that say that marital satisfaction decreases progressively, with the transition from the unpaired couple to the extended family, to the group we studied under the current socio-economic conditions transition), there is a reversal of the degree of satisfaction experienced within the different family of women and men.

We suppose that this interpersonal psychological reality is explicable by the effects of the increased level of social insecurity in the present Romanian society, in the sphere of interpersonal relations and of the marital satisfaction.

Analysing the results highlighted above, we can conclude that from the point of view of the "widening" family, observations have shown that among the members of the couple, between whom there is no balance due to comprehensive communication, appear low resistances to frustrations, feelings of self-pity, hostility.

7. Conclusion

7.1. Conclusions/ Discussion

Marital accommodation records a good frequency in the first stage, so that it falls in the second stage, but remains within obviously positive limits. The comfort in the marital relationship decreases progressively as the transition from the step of the couple without children to the extended family.

However, in accordance with statistical data, in the first case we can say that there are significant differences in the communication between the stage of the family without children and the stage of the family in which the first child appeared. The overall results confirm that the quality of marital communication decreases, communication decreases and focuses predominantly on child issues by eliminating the other topics of conversation. Thus, naturally, the phenomenon of frustration occurs, the partner feels exhausted, and communication tends to become tense.

In the second stage (after the appearance of the first child), considering the differences between men and women in terms of marital communication as insignificant, in each of the two stages, the results obtained confirm the fact that the level of marital communication of women correlates negatively with that of men, as the changes occurred in family life.

Marital satisfaction shows a gradual decrease as the transition from the couple-free period to the firstborn couple (after the data obtained at this scale). In the first stage of the marriage age, there is a higher level of satisfaction among women than men, because in the second stage the difference is favorable to men, having a higher level of satisfaction compared to that of women in this last category. According to these data, we can conclude that marital satisfaction of women is lower than that of men, especially in the last stage of age analyzed (Belsky, 1985).

In the married satisfaction measurement test, there were a number of changes that we may consider to be characteristic of the current period in which the Romanian family operates as a social micro-group. Unlike the predictable evolution curve, in line with the marriage cycles analyzed by previous research that say that marital satisfaction decreases progressively, with the transition from the unpaired couple to the extended family, to the group we studied under the current socio-economic conditions transition), there is a reversal of the degree of satisfaction experienced within the different family of women and men.

We suppose that this interpersonal psychological reality is explicable by the effects of the increased level of social insecurity in the present Romanian society, in the sphere of interpersonal relations and of the marital satisfaction.

Analyzing the results highlighted above, we can conclude that from the point of view of the "widening" of the extended family, observations have shown that among the members of the couple between whom there is no balance due to comprehensive communication, resist low frustrations, feelings of self-pity, hostility. There is a re-establishment of family relationships and significant changes in lifestyle. Most parents have minor difficulties with this adaptation, however, in some cases there are stressors and, in the case of postnatal depression, for example, there may be problems not only for the mother but also for the child. Just as newborn babies need to adapt to things in the outside world, such as parents, so parents need to adapt to their newborns.

In most cases this is a period of joy, however, many couples experience different types of stress, especially when it comes to the first child. We can conclude from the analysis of the results obtained in this research that stress takes the following forms:

1. Physical demand, manifested by sleep disruption for taking care of the new dependent being, can lead to fatigue, especially when the baby's needs need to be adapted to the routine routines that parents continue to do;
2. Emotional costs. Joy and satisfaction at the arrival of the child can be superlative in the minds of parents, yet awareness that the well-being of the child and indeed his life depends on them is a more exhausting source of tension than physical demands;
3. Restricting other opportunities. Inevitably, child reliance means the adaptation of a new lifestyle that has implications for both profession and leisure. Mothers generally quit the profession, which has financial consequences for the family; both parents become less willing to engage in activities outside the home; in general, the daily lives of parents involve a smaller set of routines than they used to before;
4. Tension in the marital relationship. While in many cases the child approaches parents, in some cases it changes (at least temporarily) the relationship in harm. A couple turns into a relationship between three people and the jealousy, the changes in the sexual relationship and the stress resulting from the three factors above play a role in reducing the closeness between the couple's members;

Couples differ a lot in the successful negotiation of the transition to parenthood. Many factors are involved in the production of these differences: the age and maturity of parents, their relationship with their own parents, the social support available to them, the level of marital satisfaction existing before the child appears, and any form of postnatal depression that he / a mother. Another influence that needs to be taken into consideration when adapting parents is the child himself. When a newborn is "difficult," either because of innate temperamental qualities, or because of prematurity, illness, or disability, parents will not only live the transition as stressful but, in the case of vulnerable relationships, they may even break apart.

Therefore, the child develops harmoniously in an affective and communicative family context. The child feels what is going on with his parents, he knows if he is in a confrontational setting or affective security. That is why it is very important to partner together in raising and educating the child.

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